Jakob Otto Wilhelm Sparn

(Re)Imagining sustainable futures

-

A discussion between Degrowth and Buen Vivir

Belo Horizonte, MG
UFMG/Cedeplar
2019

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Tese apresentada ao curso de Doutorado em Economia do Centro de Desenvolvimento e Planejamento Regional da Faculdade de Ciências Econômicas da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, como requisito parcial à obtenção do Título de Doutor em Economia.

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Belo Horizonte, MG
Centro de Desenvolvimento e Planejamento Regional
Faculdade de Ciências Econômicas - UFMG
2019

Ficha Catalográfica

S736r
2019

Sparn, Jakob Otto Wilhelm.
(Re)imagining sustainable futures [manuscrito] : a discussion between degrowth and buen vivir / Jakob Otto Wilhelm Sparn. – 2019.
368 f. , il., tabs.

Orientador: Roberto Luís de Melo Monte-Mór.
Tese (doutorado) - Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Centro de Desenvolvimento e Planejamento Regional.
Inclui bibliografia (f. 278-323), anexos e apêndices.

1. Desenvolvimento sustentável -Teses. 2. Desenvolvimento econômico – Aspectos sociais - Teses. 3. Economia – Teses. I. Monte-Mór, Roberto Luís de Melo. II. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Centro de Desenvolvimento e Planejamento Regional. III. Título.

CDD: 331.4

Elaborada pela Biblioteca da FACE/UFMG – AKR 090/2019

I dedicate this work to my grandfather Willi (1922-2017) whose unconditional love and generosity will always be my inspiration

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has been a long process, starting over a decade ago when I decided to write my master's dissertation on sustainability. It has been an incredible opportunity of discovery and I am grateful beyond words for all the people that accompanied me on this voyage. It has been, in the amplest sense of the word, a collaborative work, guided by great thinkers and inspirations from the past and present – my thanks to all of them.

First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor, Roberto Luís de Melo Monte-Mór, for the guidance, the patience, the encouragements, and the countless advices, academic and beyond, over the years. There are really no words for my gratitude and the pleasure of being your student and friend.

I want to thank my family for all the love and support, without you nothing of this would be possible. I feel deeply blessed. To my parents, Karin and Walter, my siblings, Luisa and Max, and especially to my nephews, Joni and Leo. This work is motivated by your existence and the future I hope you will see. Living on the other side of the ocean only increased my love, respect and appreciation for you and for my roots.

Then there is my Brazilian family, who made Belo Horizonte my home from the very beginning. I am grateful beyond measures for all your support and caring. To Rosvita and Américo, on whom I could always count during this journey and, especially to Nadja, without whom I would not be where I am today. You have my profound gratitude and love.

I am very fortunate to be part of an incredible institute, the Center for Regional Development and Planning (CEDEPLAR), and my appreciation goes to all the people that make this place into what it is. Thanks to Marco Flávio and Ana Hermeto, to Eduardo Albuqerque, to Sibelle Diniz and Gustavo Brito, to Anderson Cavalcante, João Tonucci, and André Golgher. To all the staff that is the foundation of our work at the institute. But particularly, to my friends and colleagues Renan and Igor, Renata, Marco Paulo, Harley, Rodrigo, Ian, Bel, Rods, Ana Tereza, Lucão e Camila. You are amazing and the time with you has been a great gift.

I am very grateful for the support by CAPES that enabled me to write this thesis. In these difficult times for education this support feels even more precious. I also thank the Young Scholar Initiative for their support and for the amazing community that it is. May our efforts to change our discipline continue.

I feel blessed and I am deeply grateful for all the friends that accompanied and supported me on this long process here and abroad. To Bruna, Pedrinho and Theo, to Ronja, to Aninha and Gui, to Lauri and Jojo, to Natália and Alex, to Phili and Matze, to Nina and Ivan, to Lis and César, to Felipe, Bola, Theo, and Ludmila – you all were an integral part of this work and I love you.

There are so many more that deserve to be mentioned and who have my profound gratitude and appreciation. But I want to finish here by thanking all the people that I met during my field work and some of whose stories ended up in this thesis. To Eva, Gordon, Lukas, and Anke. To Olivia Nathan, Andreas Simoneit, Antonio Ribeiro and David Caicedo – thank you for being part of this. You are literally the heroes of this story.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACB – Alianza para el Cafe Justo y el Buen Vivir

BRIC – Brazil Russia India and China

BV – Buen Vivir

C2C – “Customer to customer”

CCB – Castle Community Bank

CS – Couchsurfing

DG – Degrowth

ECLAC/CEPAL – UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Eng. – English

FDI – foreign direct investments

FW – Förderverein Wachstumswende

GBL – British pound

GDP – gross domestic product

Ger. – German

GNP – gross national product

GPI – Genuine Progress Indicator

IMF – International Monetary Fund

IPCC – Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change

ISEE – International Society of Ecological Economics

ISEW – Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare

MDGs – Millennium Development Goals

MST – Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra

NEWW – Netzwerk Wachstumswende (Post-growth Network)

NGO – non-governmental organizations

ODA – official development assistance

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

P2P – “peer to peer”

PEDAL – Portobello Energy Descent Action Plan

Port. – Portuguese

RSA – Regional Studies Association

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

Spa. – Spanish

TDs – Transition discourses

TNC – transnational corporations

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

US – United States (of America)

US/USA – United States of America

USD – US Dollar

VÖÖ – Vereinigung für Ökologische Ökonomie (German Association of Ecological Economics)

WCED – World Commission on Environment and Development

WTO – World Trade Organizations

WWF – World Wildlife Fundamental

YSI – Young Scholar Initiatitve

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RESUMO

Esta tese propõe uma discussão sobre duas recentes alternativas de desenvolvimento, Decrescimento e Bem-vivir. O trabalho parte da hipótese de que a crise múltipla que enfrentamos atualmente é um resultado de nosso modelo civilizatório pouco sustentável. Esta crise é sistêmica, envolvendo assuntos econômicos, sociais, políticos e ecológicos. Já que os discursos e as práticas hegemônicas referentes à sustentabilidade têm se revelado contraditórios e insatisfatórios, o Bem-vivir e o Decrescimento propõem abordagens mais radicais para a sustentabilidade. Ambos surgerem mudanças profundas em nossas instituições e estruturas sociais, com o objetivo de alcançar uma sociedade ecologicamente sustentável e socialmente justa. Esta tese oferece uma discussão teórica sobre as instituições e as práticas do desenvolvimento e sua insustentabilidade. A crítica ao desenvolvimento nos leva a examinar o Decrescimento e o Bem-vivir, destacando as eventuais soluções propostas. Aqui, o foco das discussões, as quais também abordam uma série de assuntos interdisciplinares, está nos aspectos econômicos das propostas.

Essas discussões incluem elaborações sobre a reforma do sistema monetário e financeiro, a idéia de uma renda básica universal, a organização da economia via cooperativas e elementos para uma economia solidária. Além disso, este trabalho traz um capítulo empírico na forma de quatro ilustrações de iniciativas (baseadas em entrevistas) na Europa e na America do Sul, que trabalham rumo a práticas sociais de Decrescimento e/ou Bem-vivir. Em combinação com a discussão da literatura, essas illustrações destacam alguns dos desafios para uma ampla transição socio-ecológica em direção a uma sustentabilidade mais profunda. Especialmente, a necessidade de reconexão comunitária para a (re)localização da atividade econômica e a criação de alianças para um futuro sustentável.

Palavras-chave: decrescimento, Bem-Vivir, sustentabilidade

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a discussion about two emerging alternatives to development, Degrowth and Buen Vivir. The work departs from the assumptions that the present multiple crisis we are facing today is a result of our unsustainable model of civilization. This crisis is systemic, linking economic, social, political and ecological issues. As the mainstream discourse and practices regarding sustainability have proven contractionary and inadequate, Buen Vivir and Degrowth propose more radical approaches towards sustainability. Both suggest profound changes in our institutions and social structures with the aim of achieving an ecologically sustainable and socially just society. This thesis offers a theoretical discussion about the institutions and practices of development and their unsustainability. This critique of development leads to the exploration of Degrowth and Buen Vivir and the solutions they suggest. The focus of these discussions, which address a variety of interdisciplinary issue, is on the economic aspects of these proposals.

These discussions include elaborations on the reform of the monetary and financial systems, the idea of an universal basic income, organizing economic activity through cooperatives, and elements of a sharing economy. Additionally, this work provides an empirical chapter in the form of four illustrations of initiatives (case studies based on interviews) from Europe and South America working towards a Degrowth and/or Buen Vivir social practice. In combination with the discussion of the literature, these illustrations highlight some of the challenges for broad a socio-ecological transition towards sustainability. Particularly, the need for reconnection with community, for (re)localization of economic activity, and for creating alliances for a sustainable future.

Keywords: Degrowth, Buen Vivir, sustainability

1. Introduction

“When we try to pick out anything by itself,
we find it hitched to everything else in the universe”
(John Muir, My First Summer in the Sierra)

1.1 A crisis of civilization – some context and assumptions

Watching or listening to the news today, reporting on the status of global and local affairs can be really disheartening. There is a high chance to find one or various pieces about the economic, ecological, and social disasters around the globe. Although there might be a journalistic bias to write about and sell bad news (as “only bad news is good news”), it is hard to doubt that our situation is very serious. The severity (and probable irreversibility) of climate change is just the most discussed of the ecological crises. Although the dramatic loss of biodiversity (estimated to be between 100 and 1000 times higher than the naturally occurring extinction rate) is gaining more attention as it becomes clear that the extinction of, for example, bees endangers large portions of food crops (De Vos et al, 2014). In the financialized and highly interconnected economic sphere, there are concerns about economic instability, the next financial crisis (closely linked to the crisis of debt and with little or no ideas how to address it), and the loss or casualization of employment due to automation and decreasing profit rates (Saad-Filho, 2019). Unprecedented levels of inequality, increasing poverty, and flows of migration are creating social tensions, a disenchantment with political institutions, and a new rise of nationalism and authoritarian tendencies (Nelson, 2018). This is just to mention some of the most obvious manifestations of the current crisis.

Looking at this situation from above, trying to see to whole system Earth and its inhabitants, we must come to another understanding: these processes are all inherently connected and feed into each other. The loss of biodiversity and ecosystem collapse is directly linked to the food and water crisis. Extreme weather events are occurring due to the failure of climate change adaptation and mitigation, reinforcing food/water insecurity and raising economic/social costs. Both affecting large-scale involuntary migration (e.g. from Africa to Europe), which in turn fuels interstate conflicts and social instability. The failure of (national) governments to address the impacts of the effects above (and other such as the adverse

consequences of technology) are contributing to social instability, unemployment, and a crisis of representation, which then in turn lead to no or very little action on the ecological trends. The interconnections and interdependencies are countless. In short, we are facing a multidimensional and systemic crisis of global scale. That is a crisis of civilization. It implies that our current model of civilization is not sustainable, that it needs to change, and that it needs to become more sustainable if we want to have a chance of long-term survival and well-being (Brandt, 2009; Houtart, 2010; Clammer, 2016, Escobar, 2017)

Thus, it is not surprising that "becoming more sustainable" is a wide-spread consensus today. And that consensus alone already provides a part of the explanation why the concept of "sustainability" and "sustainable development" – as solutions to our crises – have gained so much attention in recent decades. Indeed, in the last three decades the public debate and the field of development studies seemed to have converged towards this consensus of sustainable development and sustainability as guiding principle for (human) development.[1] However, this consensus stands on fragile legs due to an appropriation of the terms "sustainable development" and "sustainability" by a wide range of actors with often plain contradictions to the initial idea of sustainability – that was formulated precisely after the environmental movements and new scientific knowledge made us aware of the ecological and social havoc that the existing development model was causing. This idea was formulated in the 1987 Brundtland-Report as an "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", establishing thereby various key elements of sustainability. On one hand, the concept of basic human needs which should be satisfied for all people both today (intra-generational equity/justice) and in the future (inter-generational equity). And on the other, the idea of limitations to development – which are imposed by the biophysical boundaries of our planet Earth, social organization

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[1] This is certainly clear in the countless declarations of commitment of the big international development actors, the UN, the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund), which all embrace sustainability and the recently formulated SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) as the solution for existing development contradictions and failures. But also, on a national, and local level government institutions, think-tanks and other development actors gather behind sustainability as a concept that cannot be left out of the development debate and practice. See, for example, UN DESA (2016)

and the state of technology – in order to safe-guard long-term ecological sustainability and human survival (WCED, 1987).

Until today, there is no real consensus – especially about its practical applications – what this “original” and very broad definition of sustainable development actually encompasses. However, a huge variety of approaches to sustainable development has been articulated (reaching from local or municipal initiatives to national and international declarations) and to some extent implemented in, mostly national or municipal, legislation and policy (Holden et al, 2014). This often almost random use and application of the concept has led to criticism from many directions. The most common being that 'sustainability' is too vague and that it became a mere buzzword that can be filed with anything, thus turning it into a tool of oppression (especially in the developing world) and special interests rather than a liberating or emancipating project. Various authors have concluded that, after being appropriated by the ruling elites and their political and economic interests, sustainable development and sustainability is nothing more than 'business as usual' combined with a supposedly green discourse (Stark, 2006; Grunwald&Kopfmueller, 2014).

The most recent attempt to appropriate sustainability in this sense is the idea of a green economy or green growth. The concept of sustainable development has been appropriated before, but this latest version of green growth has some new features. First, it has abandoned most of the – from a profit-seeking perspective, inconvenient – considerations of social and ecological issues and, instead, focusses mainly on economic growth. Closely linked to this conceptual reduction, is another critical issue. The concept suggests that sustainability is a technical problem that can be solved by increases in efficiency and technological advance towards cleaner industries/products/etc. (Dale et al, 2016). A central premise for the success of a green economy is the argument of decoupling or dematerialization, which refer to the notion that we can decouple further expansions of the economy (measured in GDP growth) from material and energy consumption. If this could be achieved – and throughout this thesis we will argue that this can hardly be possible – then a “real” green economy could be a significant step closer. A green economy also nurtures the idea that by simply adopting a green life-style and buying green products we could solve the various ecological (and even social) crises. In other words, we do

not need political action to achieve more sustainability, thus rendering the concept highly apolitical. However, the historical and empirical evidences suggest otherwise. Today, it is not even clear how the consumption of 'green' products is positively impacting sustainability – in fact, many "green" products/services seem to have a rather unsustainable impact. The green growth or green economy utopia seems to be an illusion, or worse, a myth (Rogers, 2010; Brandt, 2015; Raworth, 2017). More importantly, sustainability (as originally defined) is an inherently political concept which is going to require a political struggle and many collective efforts to achieve. That does not imply that life-style choices (consumption) are irrelevant, rather that they alone will not be enough because production and distribution play vital roles as well (Jackson, 2009; Boggs, 2012; D'Alisa et al, 2015).

That is the reason why this thesis departs from the assumption that green growth (or a green economy) is not only unfeasible within the current production/consumption patterns, but also offers no convincing solution to the problems we need to address for sustainability. Furthermore, this "official" debate[2] on sustainability leaves many questions unanswered – whether for example our economies can actually grow infinitely or whether sustainability is compatible with the organization of our societies, namely (neoliberal) capitalism and representative democracies of modern Western (and westernized) nations? These questions together with the need to recover the concept of sustainability – both from its own success and its appropriation by special interests – as an alternative development approach set the point of departure for this thesis. As a reaction (among other factors) to what we could call the "seizure of sustainability", new development theories and practices emerged around the globe. Many of them as a direct critique of the still dominant growth paradigm and with the intention of demonstrating possible exits from this path which is often argued to be without alternative.

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[2] What is called "official" idea of sustainability here refers to the concept advocated by the main development agents, World Bank, IMF and the United Nations – principally through the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The other central assumption of the thesis – very much based on debates within ecological economics[3] – is that our current development objective of economic growth not only needs to be thoroughly overthought and redefined but has also often (today perhaps in most cases) a negative net effect (Daly, 2000; Heinberg, 2011; Jackson, 2015; D'Alisa et al, 2015). Now, if we consider economic growth (as measured in GDP) as undesirable or even an obstacle for other development goals, then we should certainly come up with new development objectives. While the general development objectives seem far more evident in the ecological (securing the functioning of the biosphere as a requirement for human and non-human life) and social dimension (enabling all mankind to lead a healthy and dignified life), it is far less obvious and very controversial how our economic systems should be restructured in order to generate well-being without growth. Thus, central questions in chapters 3 and 4 are how (economic) development needs to be rethought in the context of a Degrowth and Buen Vivir economy? And, how could a shift toward a restructuring of our society begin from an economic perspective – that is, the question of how to get there?

For someone who works with ecological economics and sustainability it often seems obvious that our current development efforts are, at best, insufficient and often even contrary to our basic needs as a species and as a global society. However, it is important to elaborate some central arguments in favor of an alternative development to illustrate the general line of thought of this thesis. If one agrees with the argument of most ecological economists that sustainability must be thought and applied in a strong definition – as opposed to the weak definition which allows a substitution of virtually all resources and social relations – then the logical next step is to dismiss the objective of infinite economic growth. There are in fact various reasons why we should rethink economic growth measured in GDP growth as a desirable objective for our society and economy. The main argument for advocates of sustainability and scholars in ecological economics are the multidimensional

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[3] This hypothesis has been formulated in different varieties within the growth critique and/or steady-state economy literature which started already with the classical political economists like Adam Smith or John Stuart Mills. The resurgence of the concept in the 20th century is often awarded to the work of Nicolas Georgescu-Roegen (1971) and Herman Daly (1973, 1992, 2000).

ecological and social crises including global warming, water shortages/conflicts, loss of biodiversity and the degradation of arable land. All these phenomena are directly linked to the expansion of our economic system which requires increasing amounts of natural resources and threatens to endanger human life itself (Daly, 1991; Paech, 2012; D’Alisa et al, 2015; Jackson, 2015).

The environmental problems might be the most pressing issue, but there are very good social, political and economic arguments for more sustainability in its original meaning described above. Even within mainstream economics the use of GDP growth as an indicator for development is being questioned. The whole sustainable development debate and the efforts of the UN (and others) towards more sustainability have helped to establish the ideal of weak(!) sustainability and a broader understanding of the development process in general. And following the anti-growth debate there are other arguments to be found. Some authors argue that the period of relatively high growth rates in the last 60 years has been an absolute exception in human history and that energy and resource scarcity are going to stop this kind of growth anyway (Daly, 1991; Heinberg, 2011, Jackson, 2015). Other authors see the current crisis as a natural consequence of our current development model and as a chance to reconfigure our social and economic institutions for a more inclusive, a more connected and happier life (Eisenstein, 2011; D’Alisa et al, 2015). However, most authors agree that this adaptation to a new reality does not come on its own and that many of these transformations conflict with the political and monetary interests of the economic and political elites (D’Alisa et al, 2015; Jackson, 2015; Ekardt, 2017; Sommer&Welzer, 2017).

In this context of crises and conflicts, ideas from very different spaces emerge to address these issues. Two sets of ideas are coming from the Degrowth (DG) movement and Buen Vivir (BV) cosmovisions, which are, as this thesis argues, mostly coherent with (but often even surpassing) the concept of strong sustainability and among the most promising candidates for providing principles and practices for sustainability. They are an attempt not only to decolonize our imaginary from the narrow perspective of economic growth, but also to offer potential solutions for many of the problems our global society is facing today. And, these ideas are not limited to theoretical and academic reflections as many of them have actually already been

applied in practice and serve as an inspiration and reference for many social and ecological movements around the globe (D'Alisa et al, 2015). "Décroissance", as the French researchers and activists say, does not simply mean a reduction of material growth (which it might include in some cases, especially in the Global North) but a completely different metabolism of our economy and society. Based on a philosophy of simplicity and abundance, Degrowth aims at a down-scaling of production and consumption (especially of 'unsustainable' activities) that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions and equity around the planet. Instead of competition, Degrowth focuses on cooperation; instead of individuals, on community; instead of scarcity, on frugality; and instead of (material) superfluousness on sufficiency (Latouche, 2009). In sum, a very different vision compared to our current society and our existing development efforts.

In the Southern hemisphere, a very different, yet somehow similar, set of ideas has (re)gained visibility: Buen Vivir. Buen Vivir asks the fundamental, and far from trivial question of how we can lead a good life. Nurtured by ancient, indigenous values and cosmovisions, it proposes to work towards harmony. Not only with nature but also with ourselves and within our communities – all three (the individual, community, and nature) being inherently interconnected. It proposes to create ways of living that are based on reciprocity, relationality, complementarity and solidarity. It questions the cultural dominance of Euro-centrism and its vision of well-being. Like Degrowth, Buen Vivir arrives at the conclusion that the present way of life is deeply unsustainable and ultimately not viable. From this point of view, conventional development is a dead end that should not further be pursued, leaving, for example, the paths of industrial extractivism. Buen Vivir invites to rethink sustainability transcending an anthropocentric visions, respecting nature and other beings beyond their material and monetary value. Although it shares many docking points with Degrowth, the context and realities of BV's (re)emergence are quite different and thus lead the discourse to different foci. The level and intensity of domination and subjugation under oppressive structures is certainly not the same between the European and Latin American context. (Huanacuni Mamami, 2015; Acosta, 2017)

We agree with several other authors that a privileged theoretical view for both approaches can be found in ecological economics and in the critique of unchecked

and unlimited economic growth and accumulation (D'Alisa et al, 2015; Escobar, 2017; Beling et al, 2018). The field gained impetus with the work on bioeconomics by Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (1971) and a little later with Herman Daly's (1973) suggestions for a steady-state (or stationary) economy. Georgescu-Roegen was the first to apply the laws of thermodynamic to the economic process, arguing that material and energy growth is limited by the finite amount of natural resources and by the carrying capacity of the earth. Thus, incorporating and strengthening the notion of biophysical limits for the economy and human society as a whole. Based on this analysis some years later a student of his, Herman Daly (1973, 1992, 2000), advanced the idea of a steady-state economy which should be implemented via immediate political action. Daly argues that ultimately only a steady-state economy that considers the finite stocks and flows of natural materials and energy can be sustainable. He also takes a strong institutional view advocating basically three sets of institutions for a steady-state economy. The first institutions to be implemented would try to combat inequality via minimum and maximum incomes, wealth caps and redistributive policies. He further argues that we need institutions to stabilize the flow of resources and capital ("throughput") of our economy which could be achieved with caps and quotas. Although there have been several points of criticism towards both Georgescu-Roegen's and Daly's ideas, until today neoclassical economics has failed to provide convincing theoretical and practical solutions for the ecological and social issues addressed by these authors.

Another important theoretical mark for this analysis is the work of Karl Polanyi who famously discussed social transformations and different forms of organization of the modern capitalist society. In the Great Transformation, Polanyi (1957) discusses the inter-connection between the modern state and market economies, where the latter according to him gained a dominant (and even negative) role in the 20th century. An even deeper impact of that historical development of market dominance was the altering of human mentality which gradually adapted to a market logic, becoming more utility-maximizing. This analysis offers vital insights for any research concerned with issues of social and cultural change, specifically in the case of Degrowth and Buen Vivir which both argue for profound social transformations. Polanyi's work has also highlighted pre-market systems of production based on

redistributive elements and reciprocity – both central principles in post-growth economies such as DG and BV propose (Paech, 2012; D'Alisa et al, 2015).

1.2 Objectives and methodology

Departing from the assumption that we are indeed facing multiple crises, that are interlinked and of global scale, it follows that we need to rethink and redesign our model of development as human society/civilization. Thus, the main objective of this thesis is to contribute to the discussions about the two alternatives to development just mentioned which advocate a more radical approach towards sustainability. It is, for the most part, a theoretical and conceptual discussion trying to cover the vast literature on both topics. Considering our critical situation, the question of how to make our society and its (future) development more sustainable is not only the main motivation of this work, but also a strong legitimation for research related to sustainability. We think it is crucial to address the issues in the theoretical and concrete historical context in which they are. That is why this thesis starts with a discussion on development, ecology and the possibilities of transition in chapter 2. Then we continue with the contextualization and discussion of Degrowth and Buen Vivir, in particular their (economic) proposals for a sustainable society in chapters 3 and 4. Some of these proposals will then be highlighted in their actual implementation by a selection of case studies in chapter 5. And last, in chapter 6, we will offer some thoughts on the converging themes of the transition proposals and their importance.

Before we can try to understand alternative development approaches, it is necessary to get a critical understanding of the dominant development concept itself. Thus, a first objective of this thesis is to get a broader and critical understanding of the current development model, its underlying ideas and practices, as well as of the conditions of the globalized capitalist society in which it is inserted. That is, in a first step the thesis wants to ground the further discussions in a critical historical and conceptual context of development. As we will discuss with more depth in chapter 2, the paths of development we have taken until now have led us to a very unsustainable model of civilization – hence the title of the first part, the development of unsustainability. In the first part of the chapter we basically draw a

broad picture, a cultural and historical genealogy of what created our current crises. That chapter tries to link the several agents that are involved with modern, Post-War Development to some of the manifestations of that project, in particular inequality, an addiction to GDP growth, and the following ecological disaster. Then, we continue by discussing the contributions and basic assumptions for a different (academic) perspective on sustainability, which is provided by ecological economics, a field that is explicitly concerned with sustainability and which offers a theoretical framework for both Degrowth and Buen Vivir. Another central question for this thesis is addressed in this second part by trying to address the possibilities and obstacles towards social transitions, the question of designing a transition towards sustainability.

Then, drawing on the ideas discussed above, in chapters 3 and 4 the thesis wants to contribute to the recently emerging debates around Buen Vivir, which originated in the Global South, and the Degrowth debate from the Global North. Following an argument provided by Arturo Escobar (2015), the thesis assumes that the rather heterogeneous debate on transition discourses (including DG and BV) has several unifying elements. And secondly, that it is imperative to establish bridges between the TDs from the Global North (like Degrowth) and the Global South (like Buen Vivir) which undoubtedly have an uneven and differentiated character. Escobar (2015) argues that the emergence of multiple transition discourses over the last decade is a reaction of both the "planetary worsening ecological, social and cultural conditions and of the inability of established policy and knowledge institutions to imagine ways out of such crises". This brings Escobar already to the first common denominator of all TDs: the belief that, in order to truly envision the worlds and practices capable of creating the significant transition(s) that are considered to be needed for our society to prosper and flourish, we have to step out of our institutional and epistemic boundaries. Linked to this argument is the assumption that the ecological and social crises are inseparable from the dominant model of social and economic life of the last centuries – whether you want to call it industrialism, capitalism, modernity, anthropocentrism or rationalism. While the form of this model and the crises created by it are seen and experienced differently across different regions, the shared element in recent decades have been the pressures exerted by (neo)liberal globalization.

Departing from the shared belief that our existing, dominant institutions and practices are not capable of solving the multiple crises, most (if not all) contemporary TDs argue for a radical cultural and institutional transformation towards a very different society (D'Alisa et al, 2015; Escobar, 2015; Garcia et al, 2017). And here society is commonly understood as all of humanity. This is linked to another shared element of many TDs which is the idea that human civilization – after a rapid expansion in the modern era – is entering a planetary phase, the Anthropocene (Crutzen&Stoermer, 2000; Balter, 2013). This civilizational system has certainly profound differences across regions and groups, but its reach and many of its consequences (such as global warming or increasing inequality) are global. Most TDs also emphasize the inter-connectedness of all beings (not only humans) in a scenario of wide-spread alienation and systemic separation (Eisenstein, 2013). Thus, they see a need to reconnect with each other, our communities, and with the non-human world. And one of the major demands of many TDs is the re-localization of food and energy production, indeed of most parts of the economy, to a local or regional level with strong communal bases (Gibson-Graham et al, 2013). Linked to re-localization the need to move to post-carbon economies is often advocated as a possible solution to the addiction to fossil fuels and towards more ecological justice (Shiva, 2008).

This thesis wants to contribute to the vast field between development, ecology and sustainability by contextualizing and mapping these two new theoretical currents and their concrete implications and by pointing out possibilities and potentials for an alternative development. One of the main contributions and objectives is an emphasis on the economic institutions of DG and BV, linking them to the broader socio-ecological transition. Several authors have argued that a simple reduction of GDP growth, in a society that is utterly dependent on it, would result in economic and social disaster – in fact, we can observe manifestations of this in almost any severe recession. Therefore, a shift towards a post-growth society supposedly requires the anterior creation of institutions that make it bearable and ultimately enable it (D'Alisa et al, 2015; Jackson, 2015). Despite the importance of changes and choices on the individual level (which are also addressed here), the existence of institutions is considered to be elemental for the creation of incentives, the allocation of costs and, more generally, to make certain actions or preferences more

or less likely. Following a broad definition, institutions are understood as systems of formal and informal rules (and also measures for their enforcement) that provide exogenous incentives for human actions. This means, that institutions are either 'constraints' or 'opportunities' for agents without completely determining their actions (Edeling et al, 1999).

The DG and BV literature is full of arguments for broad reforms (or abandonment) of many institutions that are related to growth, development or capitalism. One fundamental institution – here we are already stretching the definition above – for the working of our economy and one that is frequently raised in the literature is money, meaning its nature and function but including also the issues of credit and profit. Within this literature, there is a variety of proposals on the reform of our current monetary and financial system which go far beyond the conventional monetary discussion. Some ideas have already been tested (like regional, interest-free currencies), some are being tested in very limited scale (like a universal basic income) and some that have historic origins but virtually no application today (such as public money and decaying money). The common ground between those ideas is that they are all, to some extent, proposals to create a financial and monetary regime (including non-monetary spaces) that could be more democratic, inclusive (socially and ecologically) and less profit-driven (return social value/meaning to money and credit) (Eisenstein, 2011; Heinberg, 2011; D'Alisa et al, 2015).

These monetary and financial institutions – which are arguably the most crucial constraints but also opportunities for human actions in modern capitalist societies – will be the focus of the last part of both chapter 3 and chapter 4. The issues of money, the financial system and the proposal of a universal basic income will be addressed in chapter 3 on Degrowth, where they are more present in the debate. And in chapter 4 on Buen Vivir we will address the organization of the economy in form of cooperatives and a sharing and gift economy. However, this separation is almost only a matter of didactics, because the economic elements discussed in both chapters are really complementary and we can find respective proposals for them in both Degrowth and Buen Vivir.

There already exists a huge variety of alternative approaches to development around the globe, ranging from urban permaculture projects in the abandoned

neighborhoods of Detroit to initiatives (and even the institutionalization) of solidarity economy in Brazil (Abreu Nagem et al, 2013; Hoffmann et al, 2016; Escobar, 2017). However, the vast majority of these projects is marginalized both in theory by the economic mainstream and in practice by the state and international development agencies. Yet, it is precisely here on the local level of everyday-life where conflicts appear and where potential solutions can be found.[4] Therefore, a further objective of the thesis – in dialogue with the theoretical discussion – is to analyze alternative development practices both in the Global South (Brazil and Colombia) and the North (Germany and UK). In chapter 5 we provide a contribution of qualitative research by discussing four cases of projects that are involved with the socio-economic transition towards a DG or BV society. These illustrations of sustainability are synthesized from semi-structured interviews that constitute the field work of this thesis. Out of eight interviews we selected four cases that promised to provide a broad view of the plurality of examples of concrete experiences of Degrowth and Buen Vivir. The full transcripts of the interviews can be found in the appendix.

Finally, in the conclusion of this thesis we highlight some of the potential bridges between Degrowth and Buen Vivir, their converging themes and differences. Drawing on the discussions and insights from the previous chapters and our field work, we point out some crucial elements in this regard and challenges for a transition towards a more sustainable society. In this context, we argue for a complementary view on the discourses and practices within the two paradigms. Following the argument from Beling et al. (2018) there are discursive synergies that should be used for a necessary dialogue (enabling mutual learning, better understanding, and broader alliances) between DG and BV. On one hand, the Degrowth discourse might be more comprehensive in revealing the material-structural entrenchments of our contemporary socio-economic arrangements. On the other hand, Buen Vivir offers a very interesting space for cultural alterity and a better possibility of a critique of the Euro-centric cultural constellation. While BV emphasizes the centrality of territory and more focus on production, DG focuses on

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[4] Lefebvre (2014) provides a strong argument why the production and reproduction of space occurs to a great extent within our daily life and routines, thus highlighting the importance of the local and regional dimension of our realities for development.

global relationships, exchanges, and consumption. While Degrowth views our systemic interdependencies through a more material lens, Buen Vivir's view is also including more immaterial aspects and more emphasis on the structures of power and domination. Thus, there are ample opportunities to enrich each other – something that this thesis is doing by bringing them together and discussing them in a broader economic context.

Although the discussion of sustainability, ecology and development can easily drift into very complex issues, this thesis tries to facilitate the reading experience by intentionally using rather plain, simple language and often working with footnotes (to indicate further discussions that would not easily been synthesized). This effort is not to avoid complexity – which we certainly need to address more, especially in economics – but to make the topic more accessible for people without economic or academic background. This is also something that dialogues with the transdisciplinary character of the discussions and proposals in this thesis. Especially when talking about Buen Vivir and Degrowth, it becomes clear that answers to the questions around sustainability will not come from academia alone. They will also come from practices and modes of living and doing things differently. They will come from listening carefully to non-academic voices and knowledges. And they might be in spaces very distant from the modern university campus. Contributions to sustainability can come from virtually every context (including academia, for sure) and thus it seems adequate to let our economic research be "contaminated" – in a very positive sense of gaining new elements and resilience – by other disciplines (in particular anthropology, history, sociology and political science) and by non-academic knowledge.

Such a broad discussion as proposed here is prone to criticism (e.g. leaving out important aspects or being too superficial) and even to methodological confusion. At the same time, the very nature of development and sustainability requires an inter- and transdisciplinary and rather eclectic perspective which could help to establish a critical idea about (economic) development and to explore the possibilities of an economy and society inspired by Degrowth and Buen Vivir. Hence, from a methodological point of view this thesis follows the suggestions by Paul Feyerabend (1993 [1975]) and others to incorporate more epistemological

pluralism – or anarchy as Feyerabend called it – into research. This seems adequate for two main reasons. On one hand, a monistic (as opposed to a pluralistic) approach towards an inherently complex, interdisciplinary, context-specific and ideological concept such as development (including DG and BV as alternatives) will almost certainly fail to provide an integral representation of this complexity (Huanacuni, Mamani, 2015; Raworth, 2017). On the other hand, this thesis hopes to participate in expanding and "opening-up" economic research – following the conviction that monistic approaches due to their reductionist view have often not resulted in convincing theories, models or policy suggestions.[5]

[5] This does not mean that orthodox economic theory is inherently wrong and heterodox economic theory is always right. On the contrary, also heterodox economic theory – by, for example, stating that orthodoxy is wrong – often assumes monoistic views. It means, however, that in choosing our theories and explanatory frameworks we should be more cautious regarding their range and validity. It also implies that economics as an academic discipline has 'suffered' a monoistic turn at the cost of diversity and pluralism. This discussion is extensively covered by Sent (2006).

2 Development, Ecology and Transitions

2.1 The development of unsustainability

This thesis is both a critique of the current global development model and a discussion of alternatives to this model; therefore, we will try to define better what we mean with development, and especially which part of it exactly we are criticizing. In fact, both Degrowth (DG) and Buen Vivir (BV) are attempts to deconstruct the dominant development theory, practices, and most of its underlying assumptions, such as rationality or the human as 'homo oeconomicus'. And this does not just refer to the development aid given to, or imposed on, so-called developing/underdeveloped countries, but also to what is considered as economic and social development in industrialized/developed countries. To be clear, development programs externally imposed, for example in Sudan, are certainly different in their degree of intervention and brutality compared to economic policies nationally applied, for example in Germany. Yet, they follow the same logic of what we could call and will discuss here as patriarchal capitalist modernity. The following section highlights some general issues around development which provide further context for this thesis by focusing on aspects of development that can be considered as obstacles to, or even opposites of, sustainability. Pointing out that this is not meant to be a comprehensive discussion about development, related theories, and practices – something that would require several volumes and has been done already extensively (Rist, 2008; Sachs, 2010; Desai/Potter, 2014; Peet/Hartwick, 2015; Reinert et al, 2016).

Instead, what is offered here is a rudimentary conceptual discussion about development, ecology and transitions in which emphasis is given to some critical issues concerning sustainability. In this part it will become already clear that there are some central elements of development, as we understand it, that require more attention like the notions of basic needs, autonomy and emancipation. These notions and concepts will be elaborated here and discussed further within the DG and BV discussions (chapter 3 and 4). The critical discussion of development and its limitations will also draw an image (admittedly in a rather low resolution) of what development was and still is. By doing so it will hopefully already become more

understandable what is considered as development in this thesis – basically, qualitative improvement of the human and non-human condition(s) under the constraints that sustainability (further elaborated in chapter 2.2 on ecology) imposes. In other words, development within this thesis – very contrary to the actual development practices which will be discussed in this first section – is considered an emancipatory project of inclusive, just and democratic steps towards more sustainability and quality of life.

But let us start by discussing some very basic issues around development. The concept of development is certainly not easy to grasp because it can be applied to the whole span of (human) activities. We can use a sheer endless list of additional terms to supplement it: economic development, personal development, regional development, product development, sustainable development, etc. Obviously, the term 'development' is used in multiple ways throughout a variety of fields – already an indicator for its complexity and potentially controversial meanings. Looking at the term semantically, development can be understood as something – perhaps an already existing, inner quality – that 'unfolds', a process of gradual changes towards a new, supposedly better or advanced state. Here, instead of looking at a bio-physical notion of “something evolving into something else”, we are concerned with the socially-constructed concept of development and its application. That is, what do we (as a society) understand as development and what are the strategies to achieve it. It can also be understood more passively as the process of being developed, a very critical notion if we look at the post-War project of “developing the under-developed” (Escobar, 1995; Rist, 2008). Often the term is used as a synonym for progress and societal change. Certainly, there is no universally accepted or valid definition of development and what it entails. The term 'development' has to be understood within the context it is applied and considering the values and norms that it transports. It becomes clear that what we mean by development is already part of the issues around it (Nohlen, 2005; Desai/Potter, 2014)

Methodologically, the term 'development' can be used both in a descriptive and a prescriptive way. So, it might describe the status quo (as the result of former “developments”) or a desirable state (the intended direction of present and future

developments). However, this analytical distinction is often blurred and, as soon as, we encounter prescriptive elements – which can already be implicit in the status quo description – the term gains a normative dimension that has to be taken into account (Ihne/Wilhelm, 2006). Although the term is difficult to qualify, we can find some basic agreements. For example, it is certainly true that 'development' is a multidimensional term that can relate to the systemic level (e.g. the state, the economy, our society), but also to meso and micro levels down to the individual. Or that development has to be considered in different context in which it can have rather different meanings. This can include thematic issues, like the distinction between personal spiritual development and career development. But more importantly, we must consider the different geographical, cultural and political contexts in which development is defined and development policies applied. That also implies that no concept of development can be universally valid nor free from normative issues (Nohlen, 2005).

2.1.1 Development theory and its paradigms

Let us briefly summarize what has been theorized about development, illustrating the evolution of development theory and the changing paradigms of development. Despite the dominance of economic dimensions such as “development as GDP growth” or “development through industrialization”, it is also clear that 'development' in a more comprehensive perspective encompasses a lot more than economic aspects – including among others social, political, environmental, cultural, spiritual dimensions. It is also hardly contested that 'development' has had different meanings and contents throughout different times and contexts. The conceptualization of the development agenda is certainly influenced by the dominant ideas of an era and both depend on, and are shaped by, power constellations (Koehler, 2015). Below a very rough overview of the most recent development paradigms is provided (see table 1 “Development Decades” below), just to highlight the huge scope and the often fast shifts of the concept. Here we have the decades with the arguably dominant theoretical paradigm and the main drivers and events that influenced the shifts in paradigms. These paradigms are principally referring to the international development discourse and its practices, meaning discussions and policies from the “developed” countries of how to “export development” to the “under-developed”. Thus, we have an ever-changing, dynamic

concept that is in constant interplay with the dominant (and even marginal) theoretical paradigms (Stockmann et al, 2010; Koehler, 2015; Reinert et al, 2016).

Decade	Paradigm(s)	Main drivers & events
1900-1950ies	Spreading "Progress & Civilizations"	Colonial administration for economic and political gains
1960-1970ies	Development through (GDP) growth	Decolonialization(?) "becoming like the West" state-led growth
1970-1980ies	Basic Needs Strategies	Limits to Growth oil crisis China's opening
1980-1990ies	"Lost Decade"	Washington Consensus Civil society mobilizations Post-Development(?)
1990-2000s	Sustainable Development	Collapse of Soviet Union Democratization processes UN Convention for Climate Change (Rio 92)
2000-2010	Global Human Security	Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Good governance BRIC's emergence
2010-present	Green Economy(?)	Global economic and financial crisis Ecological overshot Sustainable Development Goals

Table 1 - Development Decades (adapted from Stockmann et al, 2010 and Koehler, 2015)

Considering this rather huge variety of ideas, it comes as no surprise that also the academic field of development theory is extremely heterogeneous. For example, Peet&Hartwick (2015) distinguish between conventional theories of development – such as neoclassical economics, Keynesian economics and modernization theory - and non-conventional theories – such as Marxism, Post-colonialism, post-development theory and feminist development theory. Development thinking and theory has always been a reaction to crises of progress – or the concept of progress,

for that matter – like the social and geographical dislocations caused by industrialization. Therefore, questioning existing answers, rethinking and crisis itself are an internal part of development thinking and theory (Leys, 1996; Pieterse, 2010). These characteristics of plurality and continuous contestation within the (academic) field of development make "*theorizing about development […] therefore a never-ending task*" (Hettne, 1995, p.15). Certainly, some theories received a lot more attention than others, and hence were translated more than others into practical action and development policies. In development theory and in academic writing, the more progressive approaches to development might be more popular than neoclassical formulations. Regarding the actual development strategies and policies, however, we have seen a strong dominance since the 1980ies of the implementation of (neo)liberal ideas emphasizing liberalization of trade and repression (or often occupation) of the public sector (Potter et al, 2008).

On a more critical note we could argue that the last century (staring roughly in the 1930ies) was dominated by only two different underlying development strategies, based either on the assumptions and ideas of neo-classical or Keynesian economics. After World War II, the re-construction of the destroyed Europe with the roughly 17 billion USD (around 160 billion USD in 2010 inflation-adjusted terms) of the Marshall Plan created a strong confidence for foreign economic/development aid. The Marshall Plan was a brilliant strategic piece as it was not only designed to stimulate the US manufacturing sector (exporting to Europe), but it was also intended to keep the communist threat at bay by providing the Europeans with a more attractive alternative – capitalism and (consumer) democracy. And capitalism worked rather well in the first two to three decades after the war, as the reconstruction of Europe and the expansion into new markets ushered a Golden Age of Capitalism with high GDP growth rates and low unemployment (Marglin/Schor, 1998; Desai/Potter, 2014).

This expansion of capitalism was achieved with sets of economic policies that had been mainly developed by John Maynard Keynes during the Great Recession. One of the main ideas was that in the short-run economic output is more influenced by aggregate demand (the total demand in any economy) than by the aggregate supply

– which is the classical/neo-classical point of view. In this view the total demand is volatile and unstable and is not necessarily at the productive capacity of the economy, thus leading to inefficient outcomes when demand is too low (recession and unemployment) or too high (inflation). The solution then is to mitigate this volatility of aggregated demand through counter-cyclical economic policy response by the state. Keynes argued for both monetary policies (e.g. increasing the money supply to decrease interest rates and increase investments) and fiscal policies (e.g. public spending in infrastructure). This meant a system of a mixed (or managed) economy of free markets but with decisive government interventions if needed (Keynes, 1936; Middleton, 2006; Klein, 2007; Skidelsky, 2009)[6].

However, the evident success of Keynesian New Deal social capitalism did not ensure its survival. Already in the late 1940ies different groups of free-market advocates – who disliked large governments and leaned intellectually more towards classical and neo-classical economics – started working towards the displacement of Keynesian thinking in academia, politics, and public opinion. The most prominent members of this anti-Keynesian revolution were Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich von Hayek (both from the Austrian School) and Milton Friedman (one of the founding fathers of the Chicago School). They were united by their belief in the superiority of markets (market fundamentalism) and a limited role for government. However, it took until the oil crisis in 1973 and the experience of stagflation (both high inflation and unemployment at the same time), which led to a broader disenchantment with Keynesian thinking. In terms of government policy, Keynesian economics was completely rejected with the beginning of the Thatcher and Reagan administrations in 1979 and 1981. This era is usually labeled the Washington Consensus and was

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[6] Due to the limited space within this thesis this remains a very rudimentary description of Keynes' ideas and does not account for the depth and many insights of his work, that gave origin to concepts such as the Keynesian multiplier or the liquidity trap. In fact, the economic crisis of 2007/08 has led to a certain revival of Keynesian ideas because the bailing out of the banks and the fiscal stimuli packages where nothing else than that, applied Keynesian economics. For further reading Roberto Skidelsky (2015) offers a comprehensive discussion about the relevance of Keynesian ideas.

characterized by the rise and dominance of neo-liberalism[7]. This also constituted a shift in economic development policies towards economic liberalization, meaning reduced government spending and a more important role of the private sector in the economy and society. In practice this meant, privatization of public goods/companies, deregulation of markets (above all the financial markets), a strong commitment to free trade, and austerity politics (reducing governments budget deficits). It is only since the 2007/08 financial crisis that neo-liberal thinking has lost its credibility considerably and debate about a Post-Washington Consensus started. However, there is no coherent alternative so far and many institutions are still heavily influenced by over three decades of neo-liberal ideas. Indeed, neo-liberalism might have gotten more legitimized with the bank bailouts and the following austerity packages. Probably market fundamentalism is close to death, capitalism certainly is not (Backhouse, 2002; Crouch, 2011; Kaletsky, 2011; Stedman Jones, 2012; Conway, 2014).

Thus, the post-War period until today is shaped by the back and forth between Keynesian and neo-classical dominance in terms of economic policy for development. Yet, despite their difference, these two approaches to economic development are aiming at the same objective: more and more economic growth. And this is true for the field of development economics as well, which is basically the application of development policies in low income countries. This is reflected by the growth models of the 1950ies and 60ies: from the Keynesian Harrod-Domar model to the neo-classical Solow-Swan model. It is also reflected in the structural change approaches that argued for “pushing“ predominantly agricultural economies towards more productive industrial and services-based economies. And it did also

[7] Although we could make some slight distinctions between neo-classical economics and neo-liberalism – for example the concerns with the danger of monopolies or full employment in neo-classical economics that seem to be absent in neo-liberal thought – they are close companions in ideological terms. But, to be precise, we can argue that neo-classical economics is more about economics in a narrow sense (obviously with social and political implications), while neo-liberalism is a clear political movement and project. In this project, the state only functions as a provider of property rights and to defend the interests of capital owners. Neoclassical (macro)economics and the theory of public choice (basically applying neo-classical economics to political problems) were the meta-ideologies that provided a “scientific” allure to neo-liberalisms advance (Harvey, 2005; Bresser-Pereira, 2009)

not change with the structuralist critique of former development approaches – now, modernization and industrialization had to be achieved endogenously through import-substitution policies (Hoover, 2003; Todaro/Smith, 2006; Sachs, 2006). No matter if the causes for the lack of growth are exogenous ("requiring" foreign intervention) or endogenous (requiring institution and capacity building), the ultimate objective of economic development policy was, and still is to increase the rate of economic growth (as measured in GDP). This conviction towards ever-increasing growth is closely linked to the expansion of capitalism and (Western) modernity in general.

2.1.2 Modernity and its unfulfilled promises

Most of the more recent, and certainly the dominant ideas about development are based on the underlying assumptions of modernity, which gained significant momentum since the 18th century and the era of Enlightenment. There are some authors that argue that modernity already started earlier, already in the late 15th century with the discovery of the Americas and the expansion of the European colonization, often labeled as early modernity or early modern times (Harvey, 2010; Parker, 2010). And indeed, the complex ideas that are associated with modernity have evolved over long periods of time making it difficult to exactly define the beginning" of modernity. In the context of this thesis, a very interesting shift, however, is the perception of the relationship between nature and man. The classical philosophers regarded nature as unitary whole in which humans, animals and gods were all part of the natural order, a unified and divine whole. This organic view of nature and man gradually, over a period of centuries, started to erode. One important factor of this erosion was the emerging Judeo-Christian idea that God created the cosmos out of nothing, and thus must be separated from it. Another emerging idea that is central to modernity is the autonomy of free individuals (that is, subjects) equipped with reason. As humanity lost the organic link to nature, the world (and everything in it) became related to each subject as an object ready to be molded and dominated (Parfitt, 2002).

Regarding development, modernity is often seen as opposed to tradition, a category that is perceived as negative and 'backward' – especially if they are the traditions of

non-modern “others” - whereas modernity provides us with reason and progress (Harvey, 1990). This conviction of the absolute truth of reason deems all ideas that run counter it as obscurantist and ignorant. Thus, modernity has become a genuine criterion by which we separate true from false – potentially excluding and prejudicing everything not considered modern. At the same time, modernity amounts to processes of secularization which changed the legitimization of society. The former meta-social guarantees of society given by either god(s), ancestors or traditions lost their explanatory power and were substituted with the 'demands of reason' (Berman, 1983).

This leaves us in a quite ambiguous situation. On one hand, this demand of reason can constitute itself in an instrumental rationality, the Cartesian idea of making oneself the master of nature to satisfy infinite needs in a world of scarcity. Freed from all transcendental references, man finds himself in a utilitarian universe where everything is made, produced, bought and sold – a world of artificiality, techno-science and commodities. This mastery of the world dictated by instrumental rationality could very well mean its own destruction. It also legitimizes the exploitation of natural resources and the colonization of “traditional” (non-modern) cultures. On the other hand, modernity has also brought a form of 'critical reason'. A way that enables autonomy of subjects and democratization of societies which welcome conflicting debates, and which led to a variety of rights that were almost inconceivable before. Hence modernity constitutes two central, yet antagonistic cultural forms (Berthoud, 1990). Still, we must keep in mind that modernity is something that emanated from and within a very specific space and context, namely Western Europe. And it has been argued that modernity has never been completely fulfilled in its emancipatory promises (liberty, equality, solidarity and democracy), not even in Western Europe (Habermas, 1981). And yet other places where it has never arrived, or only in a different, often reduced, indeed deranged, form of, for example, mere market rationality without critical perspective as has been argued in specific contexts of Latin America (Beverley et al, 1995).

A certainly 'modern' conception is that of progress, of improvement, of reaching an (ideally quantifiable) objective. Representing a field of inherently normative choices

or values, there naturally will be controversy on what is considered to be a desirable goal or what paths to follow to get there. In the case of 'development' this is still intensified because the implementation of development policies and projects directly affects the lives of people. And, in general, not all people always agree that a certain development effort actually improved their life. Some authors would consider the whole concept of development as failed, saturated with Western ideology and, in fact, merely a new form of oppression. The colonization project of the Western imperial powers was, from a “moral” perspective, justified by “developing” poor, backward and traditional regions or nations. Kothari (1988, p.143) argues that “where colonialism left off, development took over.” In this sense, the birth of the development as an international political project in the Post-War period – with US President Truman's invention of “underdevelopment” (Esteva, 1992) - can be seen as an extension of the colonial and imperial culture and mechanisms even after the liberation of the former colonies. One of the central arguments to legitimize the above mentioned “development of the under-developed” was that endogenous development was virtually impossible for Third World countries. To 'develop' they would need foreign capital inflows and a variety of other dependency-creating interventions (like high-tech imports) – arguably with less military force then during colonial times but following the same ideology. (Sachs, 1992; Escobar, 1995; Esteva, 2010; Mignolo/Escobar, 2010).

2.1.3 North & South – different spaces, same logic

At this point it is important to define a bit better the different geographies we are talking about within this thesis. The term “Third World”, just mentioned above, has become less used within the academic field after the fall of the Soviet Union, the then “Second World”. After that, different expressions have been employed to describe places, regions or whole nations as 'developed', 'developing' or 'less-developed' down to the outright discriminating 'least-developed' – supposedly those needing most help and attention/intervention (Fialho, 2012). To avoid the inherent judgment of this terminology, we can often also find the expression of 'early-industrialized' and 'newly-industrialized' countries – resulting from decades of uneven economic development and globalization (Raffer/Singer, 2001). Yet another way of avoiding it, is the probably most used distinction today between Global North

and Global South – North meaning developed and South not. In this definition, the Global North today includes the former First World (the United States, Canada and Western Europe), along with the Second World (Eastern Europe, Russia), the 'developed' Asian states (Japan, South Corea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan), as well as Australia and New Zealand. This division is both historically constructed and defined by what is considered to be 'developed' – meaning mainly income as measured in GDP per capita. The Global North concentrates four-fifths of the world income with only a quarter of the world population. Additionally, around 90% of the manufacturing industry is either owned by or located in the North (Mimiko, 2012).

Another way of looking at North and South is through stability or the lack of it. In this view, there is a wealthy, politically stable (meaning liberal democracy without major coups), and (internally) peaceful North on the one side; and on the other is a South in turmoil facing poverty, war and tyranny. This argument is strengthened by the fact that intrastate warfare, that is violent conflicts within a nation, is occurring almost exclusively in the Global South (Reuveny et al, 2007). And, despite some few nations escaping the "turmoil zone" and the so-called emerging economies (mainly BRICS), there is little evidence for economic convergence and a very clear division between poor and rich states remains (Thompson/Reuveny, 2010). Undeniably, these categories are very generalizing and too broad to accurately reflect complex realities and their validity has been questioned (McFarlane, 2006; Weiss, 2009). Considering, for example, the case of Brazil, we have very wealthy, educated, and even relatively peaceful places – although only feasible through massive security measures and police repression – existing next to "turmoil zones", which can be the interior of the "favelas"[8]. The point here is that there are, at least in terms of income and access to resources, spaces with characteristics of the Global North in countries that are considered part of the Global South and vice versa. However, the proportion

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[8] This argument is mainly based on comparison of the Human Development Index (HDI), measuring income, education and life expectancy across different neighborhoods (IPEA, 2010). Admittedly, this is a very simple measure of development or quality of life, but it does give us a rough indication of the huge social inequality inside the same urban agglomeration. As will be further discussed extreme inequality, in all its dimensions, is one of the main obstacles towards inclusive and democratic processes. Although it has been mainly a characteristic of the Global South, inequalities are increasing in the Global North as well.

of poor people compared to the total population is drastically higher in the Global South. Looking at absolute poverty, the proportion of people living with under 2 USD per day, for example, is almost zero in the Global North and reaches up to 70% in some African nations (World Bank, 2017). So, perhaps it is useful to think of the "Third World" or the Global South as cultural spaces and groups that cannot be restricted to socio-economic and/or spatial aspects, but which are excluded from the project of development – or even worse are exploited and victimized in its process (Monte-Mór/Ray, 1995). The other one is that, even though they provide a useful starting point, by using these expressions our discussions necessarily suffer an over-simplification of the social reality and must be seen as such.

2.1.4 Coloniality

Within the context of this thesis we must also look at this division between North and South as a relation of colonizers and colonized. Essentially, we are talking about power relations, that permitted some nations to impose a whole economic system and social order onto other nations. The profound and violent effects of the colonial system have been exposed and extensively studied by the field of postcolonial studies. Early works include the psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon who wrote on the psychological effects on the colonized (both on an individual and collective level) leading to pervasive insecurity, feelings of inferiority, and even efforts to imitate the colonizer (Fanon, 1967 [1952]). He also contributes to the understanding that violence and dehumanizing effects are inherent not only in the colonial system and the colonization process, but also in the decolonization processes (Fanon, 1963 [1961]). Another constituting author for this field is Edward Said who, in his book "Orientalism" (1978), explored how the West created an image of the East (and other colonized regions) that serves as an instrument for imperialism and colonialism. Through critical discourse analysis of Western culture (principally literature and cinema) he laid bare the deeply rooted convictions of European superiority that legitimizes the existing power relations and the racism that fuels the oppression of the different other. Due to the institutionalized hierarchies of power and knowledge production (including above all modern, Western universities/academia) these marginalized groups or, to use Gayatri Spivak's words, the subaltern is rendered speechless. Their language and their effort to articulate

their needs are either not heard or not understood (Spivak, 1988). Without voice, their 'development' remains an externally imposed, paternalistic undergoing.

Now, decades have passed since the last colonies gained their formal independence. Why are then still talking about colonialism in the context of development? It is not only that the post-war development project can be seen as an extension of the colonial project. The fact that the Global South is a region of turmoil is not a coincidence but a manifestation of the violence and the little regard for (human) life stemming from colonialism. Of course, violence is not unique to colonial practices, but it was always embedded in the (social, legal, economic and gendered) foundations of colonial relations and central for their maintenance (Fanon, 1963 [1961]; Dwyer/Nettelbeck, 2018). Furthermore, considering the global economic participation of most former colonies, we could argue that the separation between center/core and periphery continues, albeit less apparent on the surface and supported by local elites. These nations – with some exceptions in certain sectors in Latin America, increasingly more in Asia, and almost none in Africa – continue to have the role of supplying commodities and primary goods with little participation in the global value chains. There is valid criticism towards the dependency theory as formulated within the ECLAC (CEPAL) tradition[9], and certainly its universalizing character seems rather anachronistic today. Yet, its contribution to the understanding of uneven flows from the periphery to the core of resources, and thus maintaining under-development in the peripheral regions, seems to remain quite valid. (Furtado, 1963; Cardoso/Faletto, 1970, Senghass, 1974)

Although Euro-centered colonialism – meaning a relation of direct (political, social and cultural) domination – seems defeated, this specific colonial structure of power, what we could call coloniality (Mignolo, 2011), produced specific social

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[9] Mainly its incapability to account for export-industrialization successes like South Corea or India's economic performance after opening its economy. However, there is no denying of the existence of dependency. More so, the dependency of certain individuals, groups, nations to more powerful ones. Additionally, most of this criticism is focused on economic aspects and thus leaves aside important parts of the story. A detailed discussion about this criticism is offered by Bernecker (1995).

discriminations which exist until today. Considering exploitation and social domination on a global scale, it is very overt that the large majority of the exploited, the marginalized, the discriminated against are the members of the groups, races, ethnies, or nations formerly colonized. And the relationship between European or Western culture and other cultures continues to be one of colonial domination consisting, in the first place, of a colonization of the imagination. Cultural Europeanisation became an aspiration (Quijano, 2010). This relationship includes all aspects of culture, ranging from literature – as Edward Said famously showed – to Hollywood and advertising. Thus, creating an imaginary of Western/European superiority and the dream of a supposedly free and self-determined Western(ized) life-style – with US hegemony now, the "American Dream" (Lal, 2004, Latouche, 2009). This 'internal' colonization seems far more potent than actual external political pressures, making the de-colonization of the imagination and our imaginary central conditions for real self-determined development – an argument advocated by both degrowth and Buen Vivir.

This pervasive coloniality and the political post-War development project are part of the "darker side of modernity" (Mignolo, 1995). A modernity that can be described as patriarchal and capitalist. A modernity in which beauty and harmony have been undermined, if not sacrificed, for urban comfort and efficiency. A modernity which is characterized, on one hand, by an incredible complexity of the system of global capital under corporate control, well beyond just rapacious elites. This global system is characterized by technological, market, financial and legal innovations creating "predatory formations", such as (high) finance (Sassen, 2017). Leaving human and ecological devastation in their global operating space ("geographies of destruction"), these formations perform ever more extensive resource grabs – either with or without the help of local and national governments. In contrast to this complexity, on the other hand, a modernity which is characterized by the brutal simplicity of its results condemning millions of people and species to constant destruction, displacement, incarceration and expulsion (Sassen, 2014). A modernity and a development that creates billions of victims.

This modernity and the form of development it promotes has, for the most part, excluded or treated large parts of the “developing” world in a paternalistic way. This attitude is, of course, closely linked to the broader dominance of the patriarchy. It is no coincidence that the formal market – the place were men traditionally work and in which women are discriminate until today – and the domain of economics in general take the central place in development theories and practices. Although much of the traditional “men's” work is today done by women, the informal, invisible, devalued, and poorly paid work remains “women's” work. Essentially, this is mostly the reproductive, caring work a society requires to function (as opposed to productive work linked to the male and masculinity). And the statistic on this issue are very clear, women and girls are disproportionately exposed to hardship and poverty, regardless of their geographic location. While women in poor countries suffer from malnutrition and diseases, they encounter glass ceilings and sticky floors[10] in more prosperous countries. The understanding that a market is not just a market and that prices affect not everybody equally are among the important contributions of feminist economics. Gender – just as race, ethnicity, class, nation and other markers of social location – is a crucial category for our understanding of the economy and the development process. And their inclusion in our analysis can contribute to liberate economics from its male bias (Jackson/Pearson, 2000; Barker/Feiner, 2004). Furthermore, this perspective is a natural ally for alternatives to the status quo and development. Because current cultural forms shaped by the patriarchy are unlikely to accommodate feminist's aspirations of inclusive justice. But a new synthesis of forms – that accommodate the aspirations common to all people – might be found in the diversity of cultures around the globe (Radford Ruthers, 1998).

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[10] Metaphors referring to the invisible barriers and discriminatory patterns/structures that keep a demographic (often applied to minorities, but in this case women in general) from advancing beyond a certain threshold or even start to climb within a hierarchy. While the sticky floor effect applies more significantly to formally less-educated women and women of ethnic, cultural minorities, the glass ceiling effect prevents even white, well-educated women from occupying top positions. The pervasive gender pay-gap and the disproportional number of women in leading business (e.g. less than 5% of the Fortune 500 companies have a female CEO) or government institutions are direct results of the patriarchal structures of modernity (Cotter et al, 2001; Madhulata, 2016)

2.1.5 Institutions and agents of development

According to Berry (1999) modernity has created four institutional formations of "unsustainability": the state, organized religion, university and corporations. Leaving religion aside for now– which certainly has an important role and huge cultural impact, also in formally laical countries – these institutions can also be considered the main development agents. As already indicated above, they function within a complex web of interaction, sometimes with opposing interests but more often than not in alliances. Surely, there are other agents, such as NGOs or civil society groups both of which will have to increase their role/importance if DG and BV are being taken seriously. But to better understand the unsustainability that Berry was talking about and our current predicament, we will take a closer look at the state, the university and corporations as development agents.

2.1.6 Science

The nation state as the classical, and arguably still the most important, development agent and its actions are legitimized by the knowledge production of the modern university. And, in turn, the state finances and incentives science in line with the dominant logic. Certainly, there is also a lot of 'independent' research produced within the university, but there are also tendencies to occupy its production. The most recent trend being the commodification of knowledge and the transformation of the production of "independent" universities in function of market demands. The general disdain for the social sciences and praise for courses of, for example, engineering with marketable applications being just one symptom of this trend (Mirowski/Sent, 2002; Radder, 2010). On a more general level, we could ask about the influence of ideology and values in science. Thomas Kuhn (1962) famously argued in his seminal book on the nature of scientific revolutions, that – instead of being a progression towards the truth about nature – science is more of a puzzle solving activity which operates under paradigms. These paradigms are discarded when they fail to respond to the challenge of a rival paradigm and we can observe this from economics to physics. It can hardly be denied that ideology and values influence science. The question is which values and to what degree?

First, it is important to distinguish between basic research/science and applied science. Former would include a biologist trying to better understand the inner workings of a cancer cell, while the latter could be the same biologist working on a way to influence/modify that cancer cell for medical applications. Another essential distinction is between “science as the search for truth” and “science as a search for responses to political and economic interests”. These distinctions are essential and we have to be careful because both basic research and applied research can be both of these “searches”, and are in fact usually a mixture of both (Oliveira, 2000).Although the field of economics desperately tried to be more “scientific” in the sense of being a value-free search for truth, looking at its role in development economics demonstrates how much it is in the category of “responses to political and economic interests”. But the debate about the value-free ideal in modern science might be misleading, because in the end we will always need values to evaluate “hard” evidence. It would be more important – and that is especially the case for social science such as economics and development studies – to make values explicit. That way (social) science could gain more integrity and even be democratized as value discussions could be led with the wider public (Kincaid et al, 2007; Douglas, 2009).

Undeniably, scientific knowledge production, particularly since the Enlightenment, has brought many advances, although they often stun us with their technological marvel letting us oversee their potentially negative consequences. And, to be fair, universities have always been spaces where critical thinking was possible let not actively enabled. Still, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (1995) argued, there is a structural problem with modern science because it excludes other forms of knowledge (like common sense or experience) claiming the only access to the truth and “better” knowledge through rationality and mathematical rigor. As the modern scientific rationality has become the dominant global model of knowledge production, it has totalitarian and colonizing tendencies. The knowledge of an indigenous shaman, or the common-sense of any individual citizens for that matter, are considered merely subjective, while science is objective and thus has a legitimate and privileged role in (development) decision-making. So, instead of adopting a radical post-modern view which completely rejects modern science, what

seems more promising to address these issues discussed here is a post-colonial science that does not devalue or colonize other forms of knowledge production, that avoids violence, and that tries to enhance them and learn from different knowledge systems (Seth, 2009; Harding, 2011).

Furthermore, modern science has been founded and is based in most parts until today on a mechanistic reductionism. This idea, promoted by Rene Descartes (1637) and other Enlightenment figures, assumes that we can get an adequate understanding of complex systems (like nature) by investigating the properties of its isolated parts. And science has been successful because experiments are designed carefully to observe only one variable while holding other variables and conditions constant. This design allowed us to determine many (physical, biological and chemical) mechanism underlying natural phenomena. At the same time, by eliminating effects of “confounding” variables this design necessarily ignores, or even fails to identify, other potentially important interactions within highly complex, integrated systems. Another assumption of scientific reductionism is that the physical universe is orderly and deterministic, reflecting the wide-spread religious belief of the Enlightenment period that God created a perfect cosmos. This notion of an orderly and deterministic universe has been discarded by science itself, most recently by quantum physics. Despite remaining a useful tool for some problems, in the context of complex ecological and social issues scientific reductionism tends to oversimplification. Hence, an obvious danger of this method is the creation of “half-knowledge”, meaning knowledge of very specific cause-and-effect mechanisms without understanding (or being aware) of the complex relationships within the entire system (Dupre, 1993; Pinker, 2002; Stanford, 2006).

According to Illich (1973), the modern institutionalized knowledge production also creates dependency, in the form that people now need their knowledge produced for them. The lack of confidence in their own, non-scientific knowledge and and 'over-confidence' in science leads to a paralysis of moral and political imagination. People starting to distrust their knowledge and needing experts/scientists to “tell them the truth” can quickly lose their abilities to decide for themselves. More so, this over-confidence in science's capacity to make better decisions undermines people's

belief that they actually can decide – turning them into accessories for bureaucracies without the power to contribute to the continuous renewal of society. Also, the reliance on experts creates further problems. For one, closed peer groups cannot be entrusted with self-imposing limits on their knowledge – from experiments in the Nazi concentration camps to the very recent news about human cloning trials in China to bestow babies with a “natural” resistance to the HIV virus (Gabbatiss, 2018). The scientific community and experts are also not representative for the population and unable to define what is tolerable within a society or not. That is only possible via the “informed judgement of a majority of prudent men who act on the much more complex basis of everyday evidence [to] determine how to limit individual and social goals. Science can clarify the dimension of men's realm in the universe. Only a political community can dialectically choose the dimensions of the roof under which its members will live” (Illich, 1973, p. 103).

In the highly complex context of development issues such as climate change, well-being and economic policies, there is yet another problem: uncertainty. In general, the more complex a certain issue is, the less we can assert with certain the existing knowledge about it. There could (and usually are) always be variables that are omitted or not considered. This is a real problem within our rationalistic culture in which only scientific (hardcore) knowledge is valid for policy recommendations. These issues, caught in the complexity of nature and human behavior which can hardly be completely modeled, are always a mixture of science and politics. And wide-spread scientific consensus – on the potentially disastrous effects of continued global warming, for example – does not mean that this will lead to specific policy outcomes. In other words, knowledge, and even scientific knowledge, is an enabling feature of action, but it is obtained, distributed, and ultimately acted on within social structures that constrain it (Grundman/Stehr, 2012).

2.1.6 Technology

What applies to knowledge, does similarly apply to the technology we create with it. Technology is never neutral, it can be used both for good or bad purposes, it has always positive and negative consequences, and its creation and distribution are shaped by social structures and political interests. There are many techno-optimists

out there that believe we can solve all our problems with yet to be invented technologies – often also implying that we should not put any restrictions on the process of creating new technologies. Technological optimism and faith in continued "progress" permeate modern societies, thus becoming a dogma or belief projected onto a hopeful but often illusionary future. This modern idea of progress was already very accurately described by American historian, sociologist and philosopher of technology Lewis Mumford (1934, p.182): "Man, according to philosopher and rationalists, was climbing steadily out of the mire of superstition, ignorance, savagery, into a world that was to become ever more polished, human, rational. […] In the nature of progress, the world would go on forever and forever in the same direction, become more humane, more comfortable, more peaceful, more smooth to travel in, and above all, much more rich." Considering proposal such as reversing climate change through geo-engineering or similar, it seems that this idea of progress, and more precisely progress through technology, is still very much alive. And risks are usually justified by the severity of the situation we are in or the lack of alternatives (Murraca/Neuber, 2018). Above all in the North, where the negative effects of "progress" have largely been externalized/outsourced to the South, the belief in progress through technology – in its most radical form known as eco-modernism (Grundwald, 2018) – remains strong, and often even a fetish (Illich, 1973; Samerski, 2018).

Looking at the historic evidence of technological change and its consequences, this view of "salvation through technology" seems less optimistic and more delusional. Indeed, most of the major problems humanity is facing today have been created through the application of science and technology. Let us illustrate that point with the perhaps most loved invention of recent times, the automobile. After its introduction around a century ago, it instantly appealed to people because it profoundly increased mobility and personal freedom. And perhaps these benefits could have been maintained if its use would have been limited. But the number of automobiles has grown exponentially, reaching around 530 million cars worldwide (and expected to double until 2050). This large-scale use of this technology has profound social and environmental consequences. The most obvious one – yet seldom considered as a "cost" or negative aspect – are the car-related deaths. In

the United States, for example, there is a motor-vehicle-related death every 13 minutes and an injury every ten seconds. There are significant impacts on the environment during its life-cycle – manufacturing, use and disposal. Besides the smog and air pollution it creates with its emissions, the impacts of the fuel production, mostly oil, are among the most devastating for the planet. Transportation by automobile also requires an immense and expensive network of roads, which need to be maintained and, which facilitate access to remote, formerly undisturbed areas. The private automobile changes the way we live profoundly, separating individuals into metal boxes and destroying the quality of city life – through noise, congestion, pollution and urban sprawl.[11] The initial promise of freedom and mobility is quite ridiculous today as the average speed of cars in cities has often dropped to bicycle speed. And who lives in the suburbs – those dispersed, low-density settlements only possible with the invention of cars – is completely dependent on it. Finally, as our modern societies have invested so much in the use of this technology. it is now cost-prohibitive to switch to other technologies creating a path dependency for future development. Considering all this, it becomes clear that unintended consequences of technology are inherently unavoidable, unpredictable, and sometimes irreversible (Huesemann/Huesemann, 2011).

Yet another problem with technology that is often not considered is its potential for separation, alienation and exploitation. Defining exploitation very broadly here as receiving more than the value of that what was given, thereby creating imbalances and injustice. When technology is used to control or to exploit – and the examples

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[11] The vast urban agglomerations, that some of our cities have become (e.g. Pearl River Delta agglomeration with around 70 million people), seem to be the most unsustainable spaces. They are the spaces of economic growth, material consumption, environmental degradation, waste and increasing alienation. Therefore, it seems that sustainability efforts offer both a huge potential and challenge in the 21st century cities (James, 2015). Furthermore, according to UN projections by 2050 there will be living around 70% of the world population in urban agglomerations and virtually all population growth will occur in urban areas, especially in less developed regions (UN DESA, 2012). As sustainability is closely related to consumption (of resources and spaces) and its application to local and regional development, it is the urban environment that already is and increasingly will be the space to achieve sustainability. This is especially significant for Brazil (and the Global South in general) where the urbanization rate already reached over 84% in 2010 and is estimated to reach over 90% by 2050 (IBGE, 2011a). At the same time, from a Jacobian perspective, cities are considered this dense and creative environment that breeds innovation and that has the potential of empowering human interaction (Jacobs, 1961).

of this are arguably more numerable than examples of the opposite case – then by definition, the exploited will suffer negative consequences[12]. In general, exploitation is much less likely to happen if the ones who have the power to exploit have either ethical reservations or if they identify with the exploited. Now, many modern technologies facilitate exploitation by creating a safe distance (either geographic, temporal or both) between the exploiter and the exploited. And this does not only include exploitation between people. Before the Enlightenment, virtually all people on the planet lived directly off and from the earth, meaning that there was a close relationship with their environment. This connectedness and inter-dependency with nature made a reckless exploitation of nature much less likely. Indeed, sustainable farming practice were maintained over centuries, if not millennia. However, with the conceptual separation between humans and nature, people started to objectify their environment (Roszak et al, 1995), creating this safe distance for exploitation. And many modern technologies, such as the private automobile or the internet, facilitate the creation of this distance also between people. Unfortunately, almost everything we use on a daily basis has been manufactured elsewhere by people we will never know, encouraging unethical behavior (Huesemann/Huesemann, 2011). If a Vietnamese worker or the Amazon rain forest are exploited within our global economic system most people are rarely aware of it. And even being aware does often not sufficiently concern us, because we simply cannot see and fell this exploitation directly – modern technology has often separated and alienated us from each other and our natural environment.

2.1.7 The state as development agent

Directly linked to the issue of technology and technological innovation is the role of the state. Because, contrary to the popular narrative that private companies and businesses drive innovation and technological progress, the most important agent regarding technological innovation is the state. This process starts with the basic and applied research – which is the basis for any technological innovation – that

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[12] In fact, when we think through the first law of ecology, that “everything is connected to everything”, as formulated by Barry Commoner (1971), then any technology that is used for control or exploitation will lead to negative outcomes for all parties involved.

public or publicly funded universities undertake. In fact, the most important innovations in recent decades, from the internet to nanotechnology and biotechnology, were funded by government agencies. And private companies were usually only moving into these new sectors/markets when clear returns were expected – debunking the myth of the entrepreneur as a risk taker. Instead we should think of the “entrepreneurial state” (Mazzucato, 2013) that goes far beyond only providing incentives (like subsidies, tax reductions, technical standards, etc.) for private businesses. Private entrepreneurs often just take advantage of the wave of state-led technological innovation as the case of Apple and the iPhone (or Microsoft or IBM) clearly shows. Not only did Apple (and most other Silicon Valley companies) receive government funding in its early years (through the Small Business Investment Corporation, SBIC). Virtually all the technology that make the iPhone a smartphone was funded by the state, including the internet, GPS, touchscreen display, and voice-activation. The case of Apple is cited here because it shows a lot about our culture that hails Steve Jobs as a great tech innovator, when his company actually only innovated in terms of design and user-friendliness making the product more marketable (Block/Keller, 2011; Jacobs/Mazzucato, 2016). The other question that is raised here is why public risks of investing in certain technologies should be translated into private gains and not public ones?

And this applies beyond the technology: a, if not the, central role regarding development in general in our modern world has been, and still is, played by the modern nation state and its apparatus. Most, if not all, of the policies and regulations created by the state on its different levels are affecting the development of its society in one way or another. Inner city speed limits, exclusive lanes for public transport or less public space designated for parking will probably favor the use of bicycles and public transportation. Which then should lead to more investment and innovation in those sectors and less investment in car industries – ultimately shaping the creation or destruction of whole industries. Different regulations for building codes or zoning laws will lead to very different outcomes in the shape and functioning of our dwellings and cities. And indeed, the very reason to have public policy and regulations is to influence social outcomes. As this discussion would be endless, we

will mention briefly some economic and development policies that directly influence the path we are moving on.

However, the state does not exist on its own nor within a vacuum. One of the most worrying trends in contemporary capitalism is a phenomenon called political capture. Meaning the occupation of the state and its regulatory agencies by the interest of capital owners (Oxfam, 2014). In fact, the concentration of wealth has significantly increased after the financial crisis – demonstrating that the very wealthy could effectively influence regulations and policies in their favor. Even though there is no consensus among economists how much economic inequality is still favorable for growth and progress, the levels of extreme inequality reached today are problematic for various reasons. One being its pernicious impact on equal political representation. Besides direct (legal and illegal) campaign donations to gain political favors, there is an army of corporate lobbyists in Washington and Brussels influencing policy-making rather effectively – often directly dictating the wording of regulations of their represented industry. Although not all campaigns that spend vast amounts of money are successful, the privileged access of lobbyist representing special interest to politicians and policy-makers distorts the political system significantly (Kaiser, 2010; Klüver, 2013).

2.1.8 Corporations and NGOs

Unsurprisingly, within the international sphere it was, and still is, also the national states of the industrialized countries who were the main development agents, above all the United States and the European states. The legitimization for interventions in 'less-developed' countries has mainly been the argument of poverty alleviation, the most prominent development goal (World Bank, 2017). Their actions and programs for 'developing' were supported by increasingly powerful international institutions, especially the World Bank (or International Bank for Reconstruction and Development), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and development aid programs (mainly from the OECD). The

explicit objective of IMF and World Bank (both founded in 1945)[13] is economic development of less developed member states, primarily through financial aid (usually long-term credits) and technical support. While these institutions are integral parts of the United Nations and are accessible for all member states, they are governed proportionally to the funding provided. This means that most decisions can be vetoed with an alliance between the United States and the European Union (or the former Western European nations). During the 1980ies and 90ies, those institutions were the main responsibles for implementing the Washington Consensus, the doctrine that viewed economic development as structural adjustments through market liberalization and privatization achievable through economic policies. There is some evidence that the structural adjustment programs had positive effects. However, only in specific cases and on certain variables, like the balance of payments and stabilizing the exchange rate. And these interventions are highly controversial. Not only are they a form of economic colonization and oppression, but the empiric evidence of their success – even on main variables like GDP growth – is mixed at best and rather weak (Pastor, 1987; Stein, 1992; Przeworski/Vreeland, 2000; Ahmed/Sukar, 2017).

With the new millennium, the disenchantment of the neoliberal agenda and of its measures, and the financial crises of 2008, the discourse and language of the World Bank and IMF have significantly changed. Today, reading an IMF report one can find an abundance of commitment to progressive sounding concepts like 'participation', 'partnership', 'ownership', or 'community empowerment'. The development discourse of the main agents – World Bank, IMF and OECD – have

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[13] Here is not the place to have a detailed discussion about this, but due to their central role in the development project these institutions should be explained a little more. The World Bank and IMF are also called the Bretton Woods Institutions because they were founded as the main instruments to control and implement the post-war economic and monetary order with the US Dollar as main international currency and the combination of fixed and floating exchange rates. Needless to say, that this project was and is a political one, securing the US hegemony. Despite the collapse of the Bretton-Woods-System in 1973, the IMF and World Bank continued their work, now following the neoliberal economic agenda. There is an extensive literature on the Bretton-Woods-System and the significant implications it had until today (Endres, 2010; Steil, 2013; Sciso, 2017). For our purposes here, it is important to state that the current development agenda is the evolution and somehow continuation of an international system, indeed our world order, rooted in modernity and conceived and established after and by the winners of World War II.

undoubtedly changed and have been labeled the “post-Washington Consensus” (BMZ, 2004; Krugman, 2007; Krogstad, 2007; Birdsall/Fukuyama, 2011). But does this mean a shift in the development agenda? Certainly, now there is much greater emphasis on the multiple dimensions of development, instead of merely the economic ones. Although that might lead to a more holistic understanding of the nature of development, the purpose of this new development agenda/governance continues to push for the extension of competitive markets into social life. The approach has qualitatively changed, in so far that there has been a recognition – also not spoken out loudly – that embedding and maintaining liberal markets requires more than economic reform and policies, because it is a fundamentally political project. Accordingly, the methods have been adapted as well. Formerly focused on the state, they now include the whole society and promote models of participation and partnership to mobilize constituencies of support. So, despite this qualitative shift, both in discourse and practice, the development agenda of the Post-Washington Consensus and its agents remains economistic, technocratic and colonial. It is not a new paradigm of (economic) development, but rather the political attempt to re-legitimize market-led development – the continuation of the “delusion of development” (Carroll, 2010). Thus, unsurprisingly GDP growth remains its main objective (see also section “Development as Growth”). And it fails to address crucial issues such as income distribution or gender and ecological concerns. In sum, it provides little space for meaningful and profound social transformations (Bergeron, 2003; Sehring, 2003; Onis/Sensis, 2005).

The geo-political interests of the centers of power, basically the United States of America in alliance with Europe, that have governed the World Bank and IMF policies and programs can certainly be viewed as an extension of imperialism. Controlling the economy and the access to credit of any given nation is arguably a lot more effective than actually invading it. The subjugation under the neoliberal regime has a series of implications, such as trying to enforce market and trade rules (e.g. via the WTO) to establish a stable and secure operating space for corporations. So, unsurprisingly many policies that are considered favorable for economic development are designed towards the needs of companies and corporations, arguably the most influential agents for driving “development” today. There is a long

history of companies aligning themselves with political interests in order to expand their operations – famous historic examples that were instrumental in the colonization project include the Dutch West India Company or the British Hudson Bay Company. These colonial companies operated directly under the protection and justification of the crown and had the purpose of advancing territorial claims and extracting wealth from the colonies (Bachman, 1969; Royle, 2011). While these examples were not even trying to hide their colonial ambitions, the global corporate world of the 21st century is much more complex and obscure.

The post-World War II period has been marked by the rise of corporations, more precisely transnational corporations (TNC)[14], that accumulated increasing wealth and influence. In many cases, these corporations are the main development agents as they provide huge investments for a region. This ranges from opening a foreign mining operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo to the construction of a new Amazon™ headquarters in a U.S. City. Obviously, these two examples are very different in their context and outcomes, but they both mean billions of USD of investment, the creation of new job opportunities, and potentially technology transfers. Indeed, they often create a whole new economy that has not been there before. The two examples also are two different forms of investment, one being within the same country and the other representing a case of foreign direct investment (FDI). Especially for the less developed countries (LDC) of the Global South, the role of FDI for regional economic development is often the only source of capital and thus central. However, the entrance of large corporations and their investments into a country is not always beneficial. A company might just extract resources without any knowledge/technology transfer or sustaining the jobs. The recent historic evidence suggests that a more interventionist approach towards TNCs is required for the country to benefit. Countries such as China, Korea, Singapore or Taiwan were able to incorporate TNCs into their national development

[14] Also called multinational companies, multinational enterprise, transnational enterprise, international corporation, worldwide enterprise or stateless corporation. All referring to companies or agglomerates of companies that – although they might maintain a cultural aspect of their national origin – operate internationally and globally and that are usually large in size and scope of their operations.

projects on their own terms and conditions, enabling far more technology transfer and integration into the national economy (e.g. into networks of local suppliers). The more liberal approaches, like in Mexico, Central America or Central Europe, have not resulted in these benefits and have often pushed the countries into a dependent development path. In short, countries that are managed by their FDI are less likely to benefit than countries that manage their FDI (Rugraff et al, 2009).

It is crucial to remember here that, in any case, corporations are driven by a profit motive. Which is precisely the reason why they emigrated from the early industrialized countries (where they usually originated) to low labor cost countries in the Global South. The unequal global distribution of wealth might actually be the main driver for (economic) globalization. This fact is highly favorable for TNCs which always try to increase their profits. If not through expansion or higher productivity, than through cutting costs. And here the differences in labor costs and regulations create the potential for offshoring or outsourcing production to countries with lower environmental standards and less enforced (human) rights. Of course, this process, its intensity and success depend on various factors like low trade barriers, institutional landscapes or cultural factors (Hanson, 2008). But in a globalized world and after decades of trade liberalization, the mobility and power of TNCs is unprecedented. A result is that corporations are increasingly capable of playing off workers, communities and entire nations against each other (through demanding tax, wage or regulation concessions) by threatening to move away (Crotty et al, 1998). Evidence also shows a strong correlation between FDI and, after a short time lag, rising income inequality and unemployment (Tausch/Heshmati, 2012). Additionally, the aggressive use of tax avoidance schemes (mainly through tax havens or tax dumping) leads to huge losses for the public (an estimated hundreds of billions USD annually) and unfair advantages over small and medium sized companies that operate within a nation. It also supports the tendency towards monopolies. (Contractor, 2016). In sum, corporations are a central (development) force in our contemporary global society. And the influence and power of TNCs (and sometimes even smaller national companies) is directly linked to the capture of our political system and the development policy decisions a government will take.

Finally, there are other agents that can, and have played important roles in promoting different development agendas. Especially non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society organizations have to be mentioned. These civil society organizations founded by citizens are usually non-profit and are formally independent from governments, even though some receive government funding. They are generally formed by interest groups that have some sort of humanitarian purpose (e.g. alleviate poverty, protect the environment, education, health care, combat corruption, etc.) and function without an explicit public mandate (meaning no democratic legitimization). Financed mainly through membership fees and donations, NGOs have played an increasingly important role in international development discourse and practice, especially since the 1990ies. Today, NGOs have expanded and diversified their role to influence local and global governance, acting in a variety of political, economic and socio-cultural contexts. This is also reflected in the number of an estimated 10 million NGOs worldwide; 2 million of which alone in India. Among the most visible examples of NGOs are Greenpeace and WWF (World Wildlife Fund) for environmental protection, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch for human rights, and Transparency International for combating corruption (Frantz/Martens, 2006; Werker/Ahmed, 2008).

The relationship between NGOs and the state is ambiguous and complex. In situations of unwillingness or inability of the state to foster development, NGOs were seen as the “magic bullet” for development (Fisher, 1997). Yet, despite their increased importance and some stories of success, NGOs have not provided a development alternative to neoliberalism. Certainly, this also the failure of the broader global community opposed to neoliberalism to establish a theoretical body of knowledge and an associated policy narrative that offers an alternative (Hulme, 2008). NGOs have to be careful not to get more directly drawn into politics and, above all, have to adopt a post-colonial stance (e.g. respecting, valuing and incorporating local knowledge, culture, etc.) when acting in foreign countries. On the other side, governments today, confronted with a highly complex world, are dependent on a host of monitoring activities – where NGOs have often higher credibility than governments – and humanitarian interventions that they provide (Gourevitch et al, 2012). In sum, NGOs can not only play a significant role in the

development process but could also provide alternatives to state development if they maintain their independent character.

2.1.9 Inequality

After discussing the agents and institutions of Development, we will address some further issues of unsustainability that are not limited to any of those institutions but are rather describing manifestations of their model – inequality and the objective of continuous GDP growth. The current development model and the capture of the democratic state – which hence fails to redistribute wealth – has led to unprecedented levels of inequality. Today we observe extreme economic inequality where the richest one percent of the global population owns almost half of total wealth (precisely 47% as of 2018) and the 85 richest individuals own as much as the bottom half of total population. To be fair, the global wealth measured in constant US dollar has more than doubled since 2000, but the number of millionaires and so-called ultra-high net-worth individuals (>50 million USD) has trebled and quadrupled – indicating increasing wealth concentration at the top (Credit Suisse, 2018). And similar patterns can be observed for income inequality where the top decile (10%) of the global population is benefiting over proportionally. To be clear, inequality is a multi-dimensional phenomenon which cannot be discussed in full length here. We are merely pointing out some facts about economic inequality that compounds other forms of inequality and is considered to be, at least in its current extreme form, an obstacle for development – including even the definition of development as GDP growth. Besides the erosion of democratic governance, which damages social cohesion and eradicates equal opportunities for all, extreme inequality can, and empirically does, have negative impacts on poverty reduction and contribute to environmental degradation. It creates more positional competition[15], increases the

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[15] The issue of social status or position is crucial, because all material wealth is relative. If you are living in a material affluent society where the top income households purchase yachts and private jets, even an income that more than satisfies all your needs will likely be perceived as little. Additionally, this can create another growth driver as people in such a society will often try to pursuit (by working and consuming more) the life style and consumption patterns of the higher income classes. And if a new middle class is suddenly able to buy a certain “luxury” car, then the higher income classes will try to consume something more exclusive, creating potentially an endless circle of positional consumption to do “better” than someone's peers. (Hirsch, 1977; Schneider, 2016).

gender and racial gaps (the top 1% considering individual income is almost exclusively white male individuals), and fosters corruption. In short, extreme economic inequality is toxic for our society and nature (Shapiro, 2017; Wysong/Perrucci, 2018).

This increase in inequality could be interpreted as a failure or a weakening of the state/governments and their redistribution policies. Yet, given the just discussed influence of capital on the political system, the explanation of political capture seems far more likely. Although the (neo)liberal doctrine openly advocates a minimal state with little influence in the market, the actual strategy that has been applied in recent decades is the occupation of state institutions. Certainly, there are pressures to dismantle specific functions of the state – above all the welfare systems. But the neoliberal state remains at the core of economic governance and its role has rather been strengthened than diminished (Weiss, 2012). In fact, market interventions in the interest of capital are welcome, as the swift and, in monetary terms, incredibly huge rescue of the private banks in 2008 clearly showed[16]. Additionally, it demonstrates the importance of the central banks, that is state institutions, and monetary and fiscal policy. In sum, the role of the state as economic and development agent is central, and thus the effective control over it and its apparatus. Furthermore, when we think of the state as a development agent we cannot simply assume that its role is necessarily in the best interest of the population as a whole or, for example, the majority interest of a regional population.

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[16] Admittedly, the meltdown of one, or even several, systemic banks would have created even more economic turmoil than without the government rescue. Hence, those bailouts can also be evaluated positively, and the financial system might actually only function with their existence (Posner, 2018). However, this rescue – basically the nationalization of entire banks and their debts to avoid liquidity and credit traps combined with quantitative easing (expansionary monetary policies) to stimulate the economy – had two important effects. One being the so-called “socialization of private debt/risk”, something that not only seemed highly unfair to the population but also provides an incentive for even riskier behavior in the financial markets. The other effect being that the classical monetary and fiscal instruments are now less available. For example, the target interest rates in most financially developed countries are already near, or in real terms even below, zero, rendering this instrument useless for crisis tackling and creating additional risks (Elson, 2017). As German sociologist and economist Wolfgang Streeck (2016) pointed out, the, at least in the short-term, successful “money doping” (meaning the expansionary monetary policies, above all quantitative easing) has a significant problem: nobody really knows what will happen when these policies of “cheap money” end.

2.1.10 Development as GDP growth

Returning to the conceptual discussion, another element of the "unsustainability of development"- and one that directly provides the arguments and motivation for Degrowth and Buen Vivir – is that, already during the Post-War period, the idea of development underwent a conceptual change, or rather a reduction when it became almost completely interchangeable with economic growth measured in GDP. Hence the main strategy to develop was to increase by any means possible – often with tremendous social and environmental costs – the rate of GDP growth. And countries that would not achieve this aim, were quickly stigmatized, even in the 'developed' world as the examples of Japan or Germany in the 1980ies and 90ies demonstrated[17]. The idea that development equals increased GDP has colonized the theoretical and political imaginary so profoundly that, despite wide academic acceptance of the multidimensional character of development, most of the economic discipline and politicians continue in the search for more growth. This "growthmania" (Daly, 1991) is convenient for the groups and classes in power. An increasing income, even if the gains are distributed unevenly in favor of the rich, reduces the pressure to implement income redistribution policies that might cost the political elite their financial (campaign) support. Correspondingly, in the global scenario of high income inequality, most of the newly created income will flow to the upper income classes which will in turn sponsor policies and "research" in favor of growth. Combined with an economy and consumption that is fueled through advertisement and credits (leading to indebtedness) we are left with an "addiction to growth" (Latouche, 2003, 2009; Jackson, 2015).

As both degrowth and Buen Vivir are essentially arguing against sustained GDP growth, it is important to take a little closer look at the ideas and implications behind

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[17] Due to the low (average of 0.9% in the 90ies) and even negative (-0.2% in 1998) GDP growth rates that Germany experienced during the 1990ies, it was considered the "sick man of Europe" (originally referring to the decline of the Ottoman Empire). Although this was largely caused by the cost of reuniting East and West Germany, absorbing roughly 16 million people from the former Soviet Union. After a peak in the unemployment rate in 2004 (officially 10.4%), the conditions improved significantly – especially driven by the expansion to the Eastern European and Asian markets. Leading the Financial Times to call Germany a "engine of growth" for Europe in 2017 (Romei, 2017). To point here is that no or negative GDP growth is considered something that is hardly acceptable and that has to be avoided at any cost.

growth. The underlying question here is whether GDP growth and the expansion of the economic can continue the way they did in the last 150 years, and especially in the post-War period? There are some arguments that seriously doubt that. To set the tone of this discussion we should try to recognize that the end of growth is really a big issue that is ideologically highly charged and difficult to imagine from within our decade-long experience of a high growth reality. It would essential mean the end of an era, an historical moment, something that later would probably be called a 'watershed moment'. It would mean the end of our current ways of organizing the economies, politics and our daily life. And if we actually reached (or will reach soon) the end of the era of fossil-fueled economic expansion, then the efforts of policy makers to continue their search for growth would be unrealistic, delusive and irresponsible. Such efforts would not only fail but would delay urgent reforms/changes to create institutions and mechanisms that could make life in a non-growing economy tolerable (Heinberg, 2011; Galbraith, 2014; D'Alisa et al, 2015).

Regarding the academic field of economics, it seems specifically difficult to discuss the idea of an end of growth. Most economists will quickly find arguments against this possibility instead of discussing it open-minded. This is mainly caused by two factors. The first is that most of the current economic theories were developed and advanced in a period of sustained growth – a period that seems anomalous and that might have come to an end. It is only natural that economic theories are biased by that experience and often try to project it to the future. The second reason for continued “denial” of the possibility of an end of growth is that a very big part of economic research is related to or even focused on how to create, sustain and improve economic growth. If growth would actually end, many people would have to rethink their ideas, concepts and career choices – no easy task for anybody (Heinberg, 2011).

However, if we just look a little bit back in history, we realize that economic growth is certainly a recent phenomenon. Before the late 18th century, economic growth – meaning continuing growth in output and income over (indefinitely) long periods of time – was not even really discussed. Which seems natural looking at the historical

trend of economic growth (see Figure 1 “World GDP” below) – it simply did not happen. This changed dramatically with the advent of 'classical' economics, in particular with the work of Adam Smith and Anne Robert Jaques Turgot[18]. In the 'classical' view, as described in Smith's Wealth of Nations (1776), the economy will grow over time because private, self-interested individuals seek to improve their own situation, thus saving and following investment is normal, indeed natural. If the nation enjoys a certain level of peace and security, growth would occur without any external stimulus or policy change. Not even changes in motivations or habits are required for growth and structural changes are merely the result, not the causes, of growth. This view demonstrates a quite quantitative understanding of growth, driven simply by the growing quantity of accumulated capital. For Brewer (2010), it is this view that makes Adam Smith (together with Turgot) not the father of economics, but of growth economics. After the Wealth of Nations, growth became something considered for granted. So much, that even when modern economists do not talk about growth, it almost always is in the background of their work.

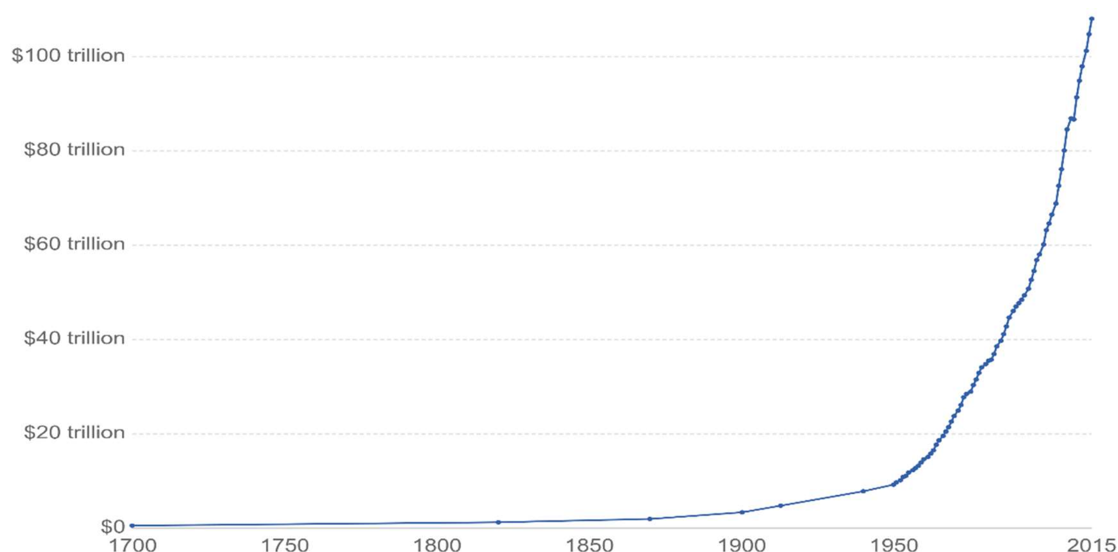

Figure 1 - World GDP (total economic output) over the last 300 years adjusted for inflation in 2011 international dollars (source: World Bank/Maddison, 2017)

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[18] Turgot is often considered a physiocrat and not a ‘classical’ economist. However, he did lay some important foundations of what later will become economic liberalism in the Smithian sense (Groenewegen, 1977).

But why are modern economists so convinced about the continuity of growth? The probably most common arguments that economists use to defend the idea of (infinitely) continued growth are generally concerned with substitution and efficiency. These concepts are deployed to argue that market economies are immune to limits that would apply to natural systems. Here just two quick remarks on substitution and efficiency in this context. First, both are undeniably effective as adaptive strategies of market economies. But can these strategies be sustained or bring the desired outcomes in the real world? We might often tend to forget that the real world is less governed by economic theory, but very much by physical laws. In our bio-physical reality, some things simply do not have a substitute, or the substitutes are too expensive or do not work as well or cannot be produced as needed. A good example might be an ecosystem like a tropical rain forest. We might be able to create technological substitutes for some of its functions (like absorbing CO2), but it seems hardly possible to substitute all its value and functions. And it is literally impossible to substitute the very specific cultural experience of indigenous people actually living in such a place (and depending on it). Or to substitute the happiness that this rain forest could provide to a biologist, or any nature lover for that matter. In many aspects, the substitutability of different elements required for production and reproduction (e.g. between ecosystem services and manufactured goods) is certainly limited (Daly, 1991; Ayres, 2007; D'Alisa et al, 2015, Drupp, 2016).

In the case of efficiency, we can observe that it follows a tendency of diminishing returns: the first gains are usually cheap and can be substantial, but every further incremental gain becomes more expensive. At some point it becomes so expensive that the search for a different approach seems more effective. We cannot outsource more than 100% of industry/manufacturing, we cannot transport or produce goods with zero energy and we cannot expect workers to buy products and services if they are not paid decent enough salaries. And while some devices, like the refrigerator or the combustion engine, have doubled their efficiency (use of energy for the same output), ultimately, efficiency has limits. Within any functioning, bounded system

growth must stop at some point[19]. And many technologies such as electric motors, hydroelectric turbines or pumps among others already operate at near perfect efficiency (often around 90%, compared to 30-40% of fossil-fuel and nuclear power plants or 15-25% of automobiles). Although some authors claim that net efficiency gains of “Factor Four” (Weizsäcker et al, 1998) or even factor ten[20] – creating the same output with 10% of the inputs (material and energy), increasing resource use efficiency tenfold – is possible, this idea of eco-efficiency depends on very optimistic assumptions of technological progress. To be clear, we definitely need to achieve much higher resource use efficiency, especially if we want to stay somewhere near the current outputs. However, resource use efficiency alone will not lead to a sustainable economy. First, we would have to replace all fossil fuels with renewable energy and all materials with renewable materials, a reality from which we are still very far away. Secondly, efficiency does not escape the laws of thermodynamic which dictate that all activity involves energy and resource degradation – both 100 percent energy conversion and recycling are an impossibility. And finally, improvements in efficiency will not guarantee a reduction in environmental impacts unless consumption and population growth are restrained (Huesemann, 2003; Alexander, 2014, Ugliati, 2015).

The argument on restraining consumption is especially important, because historic evidence suggests that improvements in efficiency do often not translate to less

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[19] This argument seems trivial, yet there are some fundamental issues involved here. Our planet is certainly a bounded system; however, it is not a closed system. Energy and matter enter from space and leave the planet. If our technology allows us, one day, to transform energy directly into matter – something just out of a Star Trek movie – then we would have a new limit for growth, namely the amount of energy we can produce. However, at the current technological possibilities that is impossible and might always be that way. In fact, we are talking about cosmic processes or particles in some billion-dollar experiment like, for example, the Large Hadron Collider (a particle accelerator) at CERN. Also, this question of turning energy into matter would first require abundant supplies of energy – which again we do not have. But more importantly, this very theoretical issue does not take into account the bounded space of our planet, the finite amount of non-renewable resources or any of the social, political and cultural issues involved. (Daly, 1991; D'Alisa et al, 2015)

[20] In fact, the factor 10 idea was already proposed over 25 years ago as a response to the dramatically increased anthropogenic material flows since the industrial revolution and the very unequal resource consumption between rich and poor countries. Both realities remain virtually unchanged. Today, the literature on eco-efficiency usually refers to “Factor X” because the necessary dematerialization of the economy varies from country to country (Angrick et al, 2014; Lehman et al, 2018).

resource use but rather more. This rebound effect is known as Jevons' Paradox. During the British industrialization, William Stanley Jevons observed that, although the coal input per unit smelted iron was steadily falling, total coal consumption was rising. Similarly, demand for labor input was increasing at the same time than labor productivity – which seems paradoxical because we would expect a unit decrease in an input/output ratio to cause a reduction of overall consumption. However, in reality there are three possible scenarios for this efficiency gain. Because both output and (energy) inputs got cheaper consumers tend to use these gains do other things (rebound consumption). This rebound effect can be lower than the efficiency savings, than we do have net savings of energy or material. The rebound effect can be exactly the same as the savings, meaning that efficiency savings do not affect input consumption. Or the rebound effect can be higher than the original savings – which was the case for Jevons' observations of coal consumption. If the rebound effect is 100% of the efficiency gains, policies that induce increased efficiency become simply ineffective (below but close to 100% they are often already cost-ineffective), above 100% such policies are counter-productive in terms of reducing resource use. Although is hard to measure indirect rebound effects (e.g. consumers buying other products from the effective income gains), the empirical evidence suggests that rebound effects are at least 100% (Alcott, 2005; Sorrell, 2009)[21].

Another argument that is often brought up to legitimize continuous economic growth is that we are able to dematerialize and to decouple economic growth from material and energy inputs[22]. In other words, we can produce more with the same or less resources used in the process. Although some countries claimed to have achieved

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[21] And even if a consumer would decide to live more sufficiently and not use the efficiency gains to consume simply more (that is a rebound effect between 0 and 99%), there is no guarantee that others will do the same. In fact, it seems more probable that the “evaporated” demand from a sufficient consumer that decreased the resource price will enable more marginal consumers to step in and consume more. This might lead to a more equitable consumption, but not to resource use conservation or reduction (Alcott, 2015).

[22] Resource decoupling refers to the reduction of resource use per unit of economic activity measured in GDP. For example, if GDP grows 2% but the resource used for this grow less than 2% we have a situation of relative decoupling; if the resource use to produce the additional output remains stable or even decreases, we would have a situation of absolute decoupling. Dematerialization as defined here would imply an absolute decoupling, an absolute reduction in material and carbon use (Lorek, 2015).

absolute decoupling (increasing GDP with stable resource use), the empirical evidence for this is missing. In fact, if the material and energy consumption is completely accounted for -including the material and energy that is embedded in products that are imported and throughout the whole production chain – we cannot find any cases of absolute decoupling so far. Although many countries show trends of relative decoupling (mainly due to increased material productivity), this implies further materialization of the global economy (Ward et al, 2016). For long-term sustainability we would need absolute decoupling and to dematerialize our global economy to such an extent that all production could eventually be achieved within the replenishing rate of renewable resources and available renewable energy. However, what we observe is a constant increase in energy and resource use globally (e.g. from 1980 to 2008 global use of biomass increased by 35%, mineral extraction by 133%, fossil fuel use by 60%, and GHG emissions by 42%). In short, dematerialization is unlikely to occur in an economy that still grows (Dittrich et al, 2012; Lorek, 2015; Magee/Devezas, 2017; Kemp-Benedict, 2018).

In sum, the mainstream economists' assumptions about the potentials of substitution and efficiency for sustaining growth seem not only too optimistic but rather unrealistic – indeed bordering on a dangerous neglect of biophysical and social realities. And there are other points of skepticism towards economic growth. For example, Richard Heinberg (2011) argues in his book “The End of Growth” that it seems very unlikely that economic growth can continue like it did during the 2nd half of the 20th century. According to him, three main factors are crucial obstacles for further economic growth. The first is the depletion of important resources such as oil or certain minerals (not just peak oil, but a “peak everything”). The second factor is the proliferation of negative environmental impacts arising from both the extraction and use of resources (including burning fossil fuel) which leads to exploding costs from these impacts and the measures to avert them – not even mentioning the potential irreversibility of those impacts. And finally, the inability of our existing monetary, banking and investment systems to consider resource scarcity and/or environmental costs as well as to handle the explosive piles of government and private debt that is crushing a enormous amount of potential investment funds.

Regarding the monetary and financial system, Heinberg (2011) argues that we created a system that requires always more growth to properly function. And indeed, as long as the economy is growing, more credit and money are available, people buy more, businesses invest more (all due to a great extent to high expectations) and the interest on pending loans can be repaid. If the economy stops growing than the opposite reactions occur: no new money is entering the system, interests cannot be repaid, as a results defaults increase, and jobs are lost, thus income falls and consumer spending contracts, leading to fewer business investments (meaning also less new loans) and even less new money in the economy. This is admittedly a very crude description, however there is very little doubt about the general tendencies of these effects. Also, this is obviously a kind of snowball system that is very difficult to stop when already in motion. In short, our existing economic systems only allows for growth or contraction, there seems to be no stable or neutral setting possible.

Another skeptic of continuing growth is James Galbraith (2017), who almost poetically describes the Four Horsemen of the End of Growth in his recent book “The End of Normal”. For Galbraith they consist of the Choke-Chain Effect, the Futility of Force, the Digital Storm and the Fallout of Financial Fraud. And all of them are directly and indirectly connected to the current approach towards development and the current economic system. Thus, we will briefly summarize them. The Choke-Chain Effect, commonly known between dog owners, is described by Galbraith (2017) as the situation where resources scarcity (especially energy) becomes acute (leading also to rapid price increases and speculation) whenever economic activity increases[23]. In this context, we should also recognize that our current energy “abundance” relies on most part on fossil fuels – and their consumption creates a series of negative effects that are still inadequately expressed in our accounting of

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[23] More precisely, Galbraith (2017) argues that this effect comes into play when two conditions are met. First, there is net scarcity of a critical resource – which today he argues is true for many critical resources of our economic activity. Net scarcity meaning here simply that total demand exceeds total supply at the habitual price. The second condition to enable the choke-chain effect is when the supply of the commodity can be manipulated by hoarding or speculation. This effect does not necessarily prevent further economic expansion. However, when the use of (energy) resources accelerates, prices rises fast and profitability falls. This dynamic curtails investment, generates doubt about the possibility to sustain the expansion, and might as well provoke a tightening of other domestic levers of policy. Then, only a recession/crisis can relief the grip on the chain that is choking the economy.

economic activity. In other words, this perceived energy “abundance” is rather treacherous, luring us into believing that it will continue. The same is true for other resources which were seemingly super abundant in the Post-War period and simply did not enter much in economic theory. In fact, concepts such as resources (and their costs), resource rents or irreversibility are rarely discussed in 'mainstream' orthodox economics – they are however central topics in various heterodox approaches.

The 'Futility of Force' refers to a situation in which military efforts/interventions (often directly connected to conflicts over resources) actually draw away more resources than are gained. This point has a close link to the increasing interconnectedness of the world economy – at the same time when regional, political and sectarian instability increases, with poor or no military solution available. In the past, the “developed” countries (above all the US and Europe) could use their military force and secret intelligence to secure their disproportionally high share of the global oil (and other resource) reserves. The long history of foreign interventions – or plain imperialism – in the 50ies and 60ies (including for example Iran, Iraq, Congo, Central America, Indonesia and Brazil) demonstrates the brutal will of the Western world to ensure the access to important resources. However, today the situation is different and recent military interventions have proven to be a lot more complicated and expensive than before. Sometimes, like in the case of Iraq, directly opposing the immediate interest of resource access[24]. In sum, the high (material) living standard in the Western world was, at least in part, enabled through imperialistic interventions and the sticky moral questions about our lifestyle were mostly ignored. In a world with new, and more, centers of power and a high interconnectedness, the imperial option becomes less and less viable (Galbraith, 2017).

The technological changes, especially in information and communication processing, is what Galbraith (2017) describes as a Digital Storm. While perhaps

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[24] Of course, we could make an argument that military intervention by itself is an objective for the West. After all there are vast numbers of jobs depending on and huge amounts of money invested in the arms industry, and other industries profiting from military conflicts.

most people would assume that technological advances are part of growth (and in many cases increasing it), the author argues that the digital revolution could actually act as a barrier to a renewal of growth or the return of high employment. Galbraith suggests that these new technologies enable, and even incentivize, firms to modify their activities in a way that uses less labor. This incentive to substitute labor with technology is especially appealing after economic recessions or downturns when companies are looking for ways to keep their operations 'leaner' in terms of labor by avoiding re-hiring. Additionally, we have to be careful when estimating the effects of technological change on growth (and society itself). The fast advances of the digital revolution in the last 40 or so years might seem more far-reaching than the advances during the industrial revolution. But there are arguments that the digital revolution (as the last wave of technological change) did not improve life as radically as the industrial revolution did – indeed that we might find ourselves in a situation where the possibilities of creating more efficiency through technological innovations are nearly exhausted (Gordon, 2012). And we must be very careful comparing two waves of technological change that occurred in very different contexts, one in an age of abundance (considering the population size and resource use on a global scale) and one in an age of scarcity.

Galbraith's (2017) last argument for an end of growth is related to our financial system. In neoclassical economic theory the financial system is supposed to be a facilitator of economic growth, mainly through providing credit (thus enabling investment) and through efficiently allocating capital resources. However, the 2007/08 crisis demonstrated that the financial institutions can also destroy economic activity. In fact, after the crisis many mainstream economists claimed that the financial system is a big part of the problem of little or no growth (Stiglitz, 2010; Rajan, 2010; Popov, 2017). But Galbraith's (2017) point is less radical. His critique is directed towards to fraudulent practices the existing financial institutions (above all private investment banks and rating agencies) have practiced for decades. He concludes that in the case of the 2008 Subprime Crisis fraud was practiced extensively. Obviously, the financial institutions are regulated by their respective governments, which – after lobbying and campaign financing from the big banks – helped loosening the regulations (e.g. abolishing the famous Glass-Steagall Act in

1999 under Bill Clinton's government). The important insight here is that – even with "bad" legislation and regulatory institutions in place – there might still be, and often is, a criminal element in the financial systems that is rarely discussed. The other important point here is that the financial system became expedient to allow fraud at a large scale because resources are becoming increasingly scarce and opportunities for large profits fewer. In such a scenario, combined with an expected rate of profits remaining high, fraud becomes one of the few (perhaps the only) option(s) to increase profitability.

So, there are many arguments that economic growth can and will not continue. Yet, another important point in this discussion is the measurement of economic growth: the gross domestic product or GDP. GDP, or formerly GNP (gross national product) is an indicator of economic activity – and only that. It is not a measure of progress or well-being, and, in fact, is not even very sophisticated in measuring activity. It counts both negative and positive activity, investment in education increase the GDP as well as the funding of a war. And on the other hand, GDP does not account for a huge variety of beneficial activities for which no money is exchanged, including household or voluntary work. A fact that especially marginalizes women (who still do most of the household work) and unpaid labor in general. Additionally, GDP does not tell us anything about the where the gains (income) of increased activity are distributed. For example, GDP per capita may rise, but the additional income could flow only to the top income groups – hence having no effect on the income or wealth of the average person and increasing inequality. As we have argued above, we are currently living in this scenario of high income and wealth inequality. Which in turn means that further material growth will not, and indeed has not solved the problem of (material) poverty. And today – in world of global financialization and an information economy – GDP even fails in just measuring what it was supposed to measure, the economic performance of a country (Constanza et al, 2009; Stiglitz et al, 2010; O'Neill, 2015, Gianetti et al, 2015).

Developed originally as GNP by Simon Kuznet in during the Great Depression to help the American government to see whether policies were having effects on the economy (production) or not. And it proved to be vital during World War II as it

allowed the government to locate unused capacities in the economy and expand production. So vital, that after the War GNP became the official economic policy of the United States and within a decade in 1953 the UN adopted the GNP system of national accounts as its standard – effectively turning Kuznet's indicator global. And economists started to believe that through detailed knowledge of economic performance (as measured by GNP) and proper fiscal management the problematic “business cycles” could be mastered ensuring continuous prosperity. But from the very beginning it was clear that GNP was not a measure of welfare as Kuznet himself state in 1934. Still, until today GDP remains the single most powerful number. Economists and policy makers both fear that insufficient growth will lead to economic instability and more unemployment, although the empiric evidence on this is weak. This could be perhaps explained if we accept that GDP is not just a number. It is directly linked to the idea that only markets produce wealth (that is why it only counts market transactions) and it organizes our society around this idea. If that is true than the quest to challenge and replace GDP means to challenge to market society, making it a fundamentally political (and not merely technical) problem (Cobb et al, 1995; Fioramonti, 2013).

Fortunately, there are alternative indicators, that could enhance and ultimately replace GDP. And although we are apparently in an age of post-truth(s) and fake news, in which it is difficult to convince anyone with numbers, we should not discard the potential and necessity of alternative indicators for our well-being and development. Despite their inherent limitations, they will be a powerful and necessary tool to monitor our efforts towards more sustainability. So, if we want to pursuit sustainable well-being instead of maximizing economic production, we need different measures, replacing GDP – which is a terrible measure for welfare or well-being – with more relevant information. To account for sustainability, we need at least two sets of indicators: one set of indicators monitoring biophysical dimensions and another one monitoring social dimensions (including economics). One of the most cited indicators is the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) which tries to take account of a broad picture of well-being of a nation. It is a set of 26 indicators that includes economic (e.g. income and inequality), environmental (e.g. cost of pollution, loss of land, CO2 emission) and social dimensions (value of unpaid work,

loss of leisure time, cost of crime/insecurity). Indicator sets such as the GPI are certainly preferable to GDP when talking about well-being and development. (O'Neill, 2012; Wilson/Tyedmers, 2013). However, they are also very centered around material aspects and have been criticized as too Euro-centric. An interesting proposal in this discussion is a proposal from Ecuador to measure Buen Vivir using time as the basic metric, the indicator of a healthy and well-lived life ("índice de vida saludable bien vivida" IVSBV). The idea is that ultimately much of our well-being depends on the time we have available to do things that are usually not accounted for (relational goods like relationships, reproductive work, or participation in civil and political life). This approach of measuring seems particularly adequate for the proposal of DG and BV to define well-being, development and progress more through immaterial objectives (Benvin et al, 2016; Burchardt, 2017). In sum, economists should no longer be satisfied with an indicator that measures so little and neither produce paper after paper on how to increase economic growth without a critically asking what kind of growth, how much, and what are the consequences.

To be clear, from the perspective of this thesis, development cannot, and indeed should not be equaled with GDP growth. Yet, economic growth (GDP) can increase the material standard of living in a situation of unfulfilled material needs and when it is not causing more negative (often delayed in time and/or dislocated in space) externalities than actual benefits. Now, the process of development (in whichever dimension) must imply an improvement of living standards, but this is a much wider concept than per capita income (GDP/capita). An increase in income per capita does not tell us anything about the conditions (the physical, social and economic environment) under which it was produced. It also tells us nothing about the composition of that growth; for example, whether more goods for consumption or public goods like health and education ("quality of growth") were produced. Furthermore, using the usual aggregate measure of GDP (or GNP) cannot indicate how that output is distributed within the population – growth can be pro-poor, pro-rich or something in between (Thirlwall, 2015). In sum, GDP growth rates (alone) cannot be taken as a measure for welfare in a society and neither as an equivalent of development. Development is instead concerned with the conditions under which production and reproduction occur and the results that are created from them. If we

define development as an improvement of living standards, then it can be a social objective by itself – at least in situations where essential needs are not met. Growth, on the other hand, both for social and environmental reasons is only justified as a mean if it produces such development: satisfying basic needs that are not met at the moment (Peet/Hartwick, 2015).

2.1.11 Basic Human Needs

By now it should have become clear that development is a highly complex concept that involves many controversies. Yet, as just argued there is a wide consensus in the development field about the (minimum) objective of development which is meeting basic human needs[25]. What that amounts to in practice is again undoubtedly controversial. Our needs are, for example, influenced by culture and social context and might vary significantly (Hofstede, 1984; Tay/Diener, 2011). Still, there are some bio-physical, social and emotional needs every human has. The traditional and most basic lists generally include food (including water), shelter and clothing. This list has then been expanded to include sanitation, healthcare and education – all widely considered essential for human life. And beyond that many immaterial needs such as love/belonging, self-actualization, identity or participation – things that have been argued to be constant throughout all cultures (Max-Neef, 1991). The basic needs approach is essentially focused on consumption and has been criticized for that (Ghai, 1978). Others have tried to redefine this consumption-oriented character of the basic needs approach towards a capacity-based view (Sen, 1999). The general assumption that (increased) consumption contributes to the well-being of the poor as it gives them more opportunities to meet their needs, however, has been refined but not abandoned (Diener et al, 1995; Guillen-Royo, 2008).

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[25] The basic needs approach emerged in the 1960ies trying to define the absolute minimum resources required for the long-term physical well-being. The fulfillment of basic human needs officially became the overriding objective of international and national development policies at the 1976 International Labor Organization's World Employment Conference (Jolly, 1976).

Although needs are often defined as a form of deprivation (‘the lack of something’), needs can – to the degree that they engage, mobilize and motivate their bearers – be a potential as well. The need to participate can be a potential for participation. An interesting categorization in this sense is offered by Max-Neef (1991) who distinguishes between four different dimensions of every need: being, having, doing and interacting. To satisfy the (most basic) need for subsistence, for example, one needs to be in good physical and mental health and be adaptable. In terms of having, one must have food, shelter and work which enables him or her to feed, procreate, rest and work (“doing”). All while interacting with the living environment and a specific social setting. The author also cites a variety of “pseudo-satisfier” and “inhibiting satisfier”, revealing the complicated and sometimes paradoxical nature of needs. For example, the exploitation of natural resources is just a pseudo-satisfier for subsistence and paternalism is an inhibiting-satisfier addressing our need for protection but inhibiting our needs for freedom, understanding and participation. While it is certainly true that there is a minimal level of satisfied needs to have a dignified life, the discussion about the maximum of, or limitation to our needs is much less developed. The question of what we consider a desirable level of need satisfaction is a much more political issue.

As mentioned above, we must be careful not to reduce development to a single dimension, like income or consumption, and to understand the concept in a more holistic way. Raising the standard of living to meet more basic needs – certainly a desirable goal, even more so when immaterial aspects are included – became in the last couple of decades a unanimous global development objective. The thoroughly application of this generally quantitative indicator, in combination with the homogenizing forces of globalized capitalism, helped obscuring different ‘modes’ of living which are now often just viewed as different ‘levels’ of income (Latouche, 2010). Another dimension of this idea that human development is solely based on consumption/income and thus synonymous with economic growth is the effort to promote policies which are meant to induce industrialization and technological advances, often labeled “modernization”. These policies were in many cases well succeeded and during the “glorious thirty years” of post-war capitalism (1945-75) the per capita income increased drastically on a global scale. And not only in the

Western world as the examples of Latin America's import-substitution strategy or China's industrialization efforts demonstrate. Development through industrialization, particularly industrial agriculture, and the existence of large industries also played a central role in the huge increase of global population and the dense urban agglomeration (Wagner, 1993). The expansion of industrial agriculture (and industrial production in general), the rise of population and fossil-fuel dependent mega-agglomerations all pose serious challenges and even threats to the natural environment and to segments of the population.

To sum up, several development decades have not fulfilled expectations – falling short of eradicating poverty, creating ecological crisis, and not meeting basic human needs – and the concept (and practice) of Development is severely questioned (Kothari, 1988; Sachs, 1992; Escobar, 1995; Daly, 2014; Redcliff/Springett, 2015). The classic aim of modernization (or catching-up with more 'advanced' countries) is no longer an obvious ambition. The promises of an emancipatory modernity are tainted by ecological problems, the (social) consequences of technological change and unsatisfying systems of political representation. This all directly related to the increasingly dominant role of the market and international institutions, which are replacing the state as development agent. Economic globalization without according political integration has put additional pressure on local populations and has lessened the nation state's importance as standard unit of development. Westernization as a cultural model has lost – or is beginning to lose – its appeal in times of cultural diversity and revaluing local culture (Pieterse, 2010, Desai/Potter, 2014).

2.1.12 Post-development?

Considering the above, it may seem that we should abandon the idea and project of "Development" all together just as some post-development authors suggested? Should we think about something entirely different, some alternative to development or something 'beyond development'? (Sachs, 1992; Escobar 1995, Rahnema, 1997). Both degrowth and Buen Vivir are considered alternatives to development and have been strongly influenced by post-development thinking. But does "going beyond development" really imply to abandon the concept (and all its foundations)

completely? And even if they came at the cost of the marginalized or future generations, what about the achievements of development? While a certain radicalism can be rather useful in breaking up encrusted (theoretical) structures and help to advance the field, an unconditional rejection of development and modernity seems unfeasible. But we can and should acknowledge the contributions of post-development theory – recognition of local culture and knowledge, a critical approach towards the scientific discourse, the promotion of pluralistic grassroots movements and views, and addressing the issue of power relations – that have enriched and expanded development theory (Kothari/Minogue, 2001; Kippler, 2010; Ziai, 2015).

Below there is a very crude overview of these changes in the development field (see table 2 "Changes in development trends") that have been mainly shape by the criticism of post-development theories, structuralism, feminism and the debates around ecology. Yet, we must keep in mind that these shifts are not absolute – some, if not most, are still very theoretical and not widely applied in practice – and that these new themes are not substitutes but rather complementing the old ones. Undoubtedly, they have left the development field today much bigger and more complex; to some extent, they have even contributed to a democratization of development politics. And the temporal lag between theory and practice is also not surprising if we consider the history of science (Pieterse, 2010).

Conventional views	Trend/shift	New themes
Grand theories	Differentiation	Mid-range theories Local knowledge
Gap between economic and social/political dimensions of development	Interdisciplinarity	Bridging approaches and themes (embeddedness, social economy, holism)
Mastery of nature & sustainable development	Environment/ Ecology	Green GDP & Political Ecology
Westernization and homogenization	Cultural turn	Diversity and cultural capital

Table 2 - Changes in development trends (source: adapted from Pieterse, 2010)

The point of this rough overview is that critical thought did have influence in development theory and has led to considerable advances in understanding. As already mentioned, these advances are still mostly theoretical and even there often still marginalized. But the fact, that the environment – even if it is only in the form of natural capital – has entered mainstream economics is encouraging. The idea of being the master of nature, for example, remains strong (as the continued adherence to extractivism shows), but it has started to erode as well. We are certainly still far from the point where the dominant culture is one of being a guardian or warden of nature (as Buen Vivir suggests). But even the idea of a green GDP or green economy reflects the beginning of a recognition of an (necessary) alliance with nature, instead of its domination. Similarly, it will be difficult today to find someone arguing that the same theory and practices that have been applied in Europe will also work in Africa – recognizing the fundamental difference of these realities. The search for universal theories and the drive towards Westernization are arguably not dead, but they have lost their former, unquestioned power (Mignolo/Escobar, 2010; Reinert et al, 2016). Thus, we should perhaps not talk about abandoning development all together, but to ensure that development actually benefits the marginalized and excluded in their specific cultures and contexts. In other words, development must be about people (and beings) and it does not happen in a vacuum (Radcliffe, 2006; Eversole, 2018). The shifts in theoretical trends in the recent decades as depicted above certainly offer interesting points of departure for a new development practice (Andrews/Bawa, 2014)

And shifting our view from theory to practice, we can observe that development in practice is also not quite dead. Despite never reaching the formerly promised levels, there continues to exist international official development assistance (ODA) in form of money transfers or credits from the North to the South. Even though it has been very controversial and criticized for being imperialistic (Hayter, 1971), for creating dependencies (Tandon, 2008) and for being utterly ineffective (Easterly, 2006; Moyo, 2009), the amount of money spend on ODA remains high – around 100 billion USD annually in the early 2010s (OECD, 2015). The pursuit of a Western life-style has definitely lost appeal, but it is certainly not dead. Especially the new emerging "middle classes" in developing countries are adopting a culture and consumption

pattern very similar to the West (Kharas, 2010; Furness et al, 2012). And even if we consider development as capitalist accumulation, something that dependency theory argued would be necessary to overcome the status of periphery in the world economy (Cardoso/Faletto, 1976; Bernecker/Fischer, 1995), we can find examples of success. First the East Asian Tiger States and then China have sustained processes of industrialization and economic growth, although they might have caused uprooting, pauperization (for segments of the population left behind), rising inequality and ecological degradation (Collins et al, 1996).

So, it would be exaggerated to claim that development as a practice is completely failed and that development theory is to be abandoned completely. If we agree with Hettne (2008, p.6) that “development in the modern sense implies intentional social change in accordance with societal objectives”, then degrowth and Buen Vivir (and most post-development theorists) are talking about development, too. Conventional development and post-development even seem to converge around the goal of empowering of the disempowered – recently with a particular emphasis on fighting global inequality and climate justice. So, there might be time for a new pragmatism and to think about theories and strategies of how to increase equality and achieve a ‘good life’ in a non-Eurocentric and non-authoritarian manner. (Bennett, 2012; Ziai, 2015, Acosta, 2018).

But even if development, both as a theory and a practice, is not dead, it has created many problems and certainly has its limitations. Some of those we already pointed out and some others – especially the ones connected to the natural environment and social relationships – are discussed within the field of ecological economics which will be reviewed in the next section. It seems almost like a natural convergence of two fields, because the environment/nature and ecological issues have become a major dimension in development thinking. From the environmental movements and the advent of sustainable development in the 1980ies to the recent debate on green growth and decarbonizing the economy – the ecological dimension is omnipresent in the development debate (Atkison et al, 2014; Desai&Potter, 2015; Redclift&Springett, 2015). The review of some basic concepts from ecological

economics will also provide the theoretical framework and some concepts that are central to the degrowth and Buen Vivir debates.

2.2 A science for sustainability – ecological economics

The title of this part "A science for sustainability" is a reference to one of the first major source/text books in ecological economics, published by Constanza et al (1991). And, as we will argue here, it is an apt title for ecological economics, in particular for the field of social ecological economics as defined below. Ecological economics is addressing the interdependence and coevolution of human economies and natural ecosystems. According to Faber (2008), ecological economics focuses on the triad of nature, justice and time – including issues as diverse as intergenerational equity, irreversibility of environmental change, uncertainty of long-term outcomes and sustainability. Latter marks also the difference to environmental economics which generally works with a weak definition of sustainability[26], whereas ecological economics rejects the idea that natural capital can be substituted by man-made capital and emphasizes its preservation. Indeed, the term natural "capital" derives from environmental and resource economics and is rejected by ecological economics who attribute an intrinsic value to nature. In ecological economics, the economy is treated as a subsystem of society which in turn is a subsystem of the global ecosystems (see figure 2 "Model of the embedded economy"). In this context, ecological economics asks what our options for action are considering the ecological limits of our planet and the carrying capacity of natural eco-systems. A central assumption is that there is a systemic relation between natural, socio-economic and

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[26] The debate on weak versus strong sustainability circles around the question which stock of capital should be left for future generations and if some forms of natural capital (e.g. fossil fuels, biodiversity or ecosystem structures and functions) can be substituted by man-made capital (e.g. infrastructure, labor or knowledge). According to weak sustainability only the overall stock of both capital forms must be constant and unconditional substitution is possible; strong sustainability, on the other hand, assumes that that both capital forms are complementary and not interchangeable. Weak sustainability has been widely criticized as an inadequate measure for sustainability as it does not account for critical natural capital – such as the ozone layer or ecosystem functions – nor for the socio-cultural value of natural environments (Cabeza Gutes, 1996; Chiesura/de Groot, 2009).

cultural development (Constanza, 1991; Common&Stagl, 2005; Daly&Farley, 2011; Constanza et al, 2014). [27]

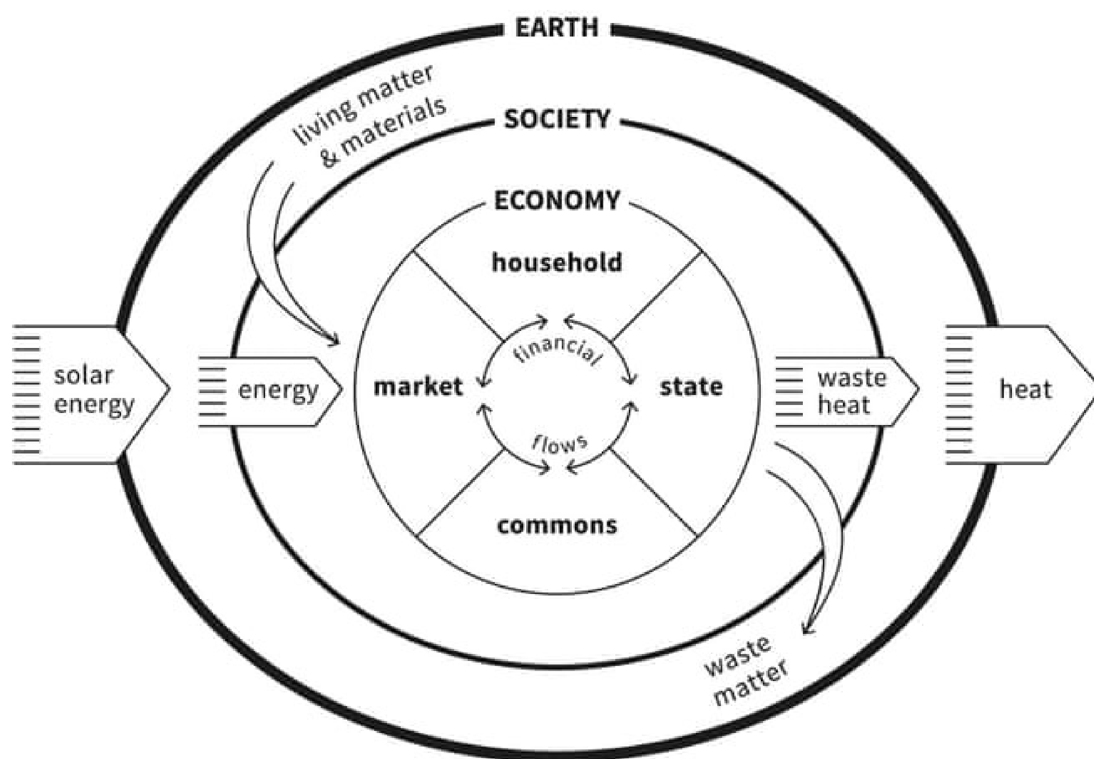

Figure 2 - Model of the embedded economy (source: Raworth, 2017)

[27] Like any (academic) field, ecological economics contains diverging opinions and not all ecological economics might consider nature valuable by itself. In fact, a significant part of the publication of the main academic journal in the field "Ecological Economics" is concerned with valuing ecosystem services, that is putting monetary value on nature. These views could be described as new environmental pragmatists ("within capitalism we have to put monetary value on things to actually value them") and sometimes even as new resource economists (who see ecological economics both theoretically and methodologically as a mere sub-field of neoclassic economics). Here, and during this thesis, we are arguing from a position of "social ecological economics" which is distinct from those views as it is placed within the context of heterodox economic thought, inherently inter- and transdisciplinary, and argues for a paradigm shift in economic theory and practice (Ilge/Schwarze, 2009; Spash, 2012, 2013). Ecological Economics might be specifically prone to this kind of segmentation or fragmentation because it embraces pluralism explicitly. However, during the last couple of conference I could attend – the Annual Meeting of the ISEE (International Society of Ecological Economics) in Puebla, Mexico, September 2018 and the Convening of the SAEE (Andean Society of Ecological Economics) in Lima, Peru, April 2019 – the issue of defining the field more clearly was always debated. Although the (academic) community is aware of this "invasion" by neoclassical economics, the principles of pluralism and inclusiveness seem more valuable so far.

2.2.1 History and ideas of Ecological Economics

Although a concern for the environment is nothing new in economics, the sub-field of ecological economics is fairly young. But all research stems from previous ideas and experiences, and so does the intellectual history of ecological economics. Most of its precursors were inspired by thermodynamics to think about natural and social processes in a new way. Research on natural resource scarcity and social energetics by Jevons or Soddy in late 19th and early 20th century, for example, are often cited as influences of modern ecological economics (Røpke, 2004; Constanza et al, 2014). In the 1960ies the emerging environmental movements drew attention to the relationship between development (economic growth) and environmental degradation. Inspired by this, Kenneth Boulding (1966) famously argued that our economic systems need to fit into the “Spaceship Earth” with its limited pool of natural resources. A couple of years later, the work of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (1971) on thermodynamics in the economics process, Herman Daly’s (1977) work on the steady-state economy, Schumacher’s (1973) ideas on how to create an ethical economics, and the “Limits to Growth” report (Meadows et al, 1972) all contributed to refine the complex picture of interactions between the social and natural world.

From there, it took another decade for ecological economics to institutionalize as an academic field. After an initial meeting of some, later influential figures (including among others Robert Constanza, Herman Daly and Howard Odum) in 1982 and a book titled ‘Ecological Economics by Joan Martinez-Alier (1987), the International Society of Ecological Economics (ISEE) was founded in 1989. (Constanza, 2003) The ISEE’s creation was motivated by the conviction that studying the economy-environment interdependence and its implications would require a new and transdisciplinary approach. Transdisciplinary because it has to cross and go beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries, it is usually issue-oriented (which often ‘transcend’ disciplines) and involves both scientists and stakeholders (going beyond academia) (Common&Stagl, 2005). It was also born from a frustration that traditional fields would not take such a perspective. Regarding these early foundations, Ropke (2005) compiled a list of core beliefs and ideas (see table 3 “Core ideas of ecological economics”) that characterize ecological economics:

Embeddedness and optimal scale	The idea of embeddedness implies that there are limits to material growth and that several environmental problems are already critical due to the scale of the economy
Pluralism	Related to the call for transdisciplinary science; mixing scientific community and society, mixing traditional methods
Basic ignorance	Related to the idea of nature as a life-support system; we must deal with uncertainty, complexity and with the fact that important relationships are unknown
System thinking	Focus on dynamic and evolutionary processes
Equity and distribution	Considering the interest of future generation and the scale of the economy dismisses the idea of more growth, thus taking care of poverty must focus on redistribution
Intrinsic value of nature	The deterioration of the environment has not only consequences for humans

Table 3 - Core ideas of ecological economics (adapted from Røpke, 2005)

One of the main strengths of ecological economics is that it tries to address the short-comings of the “quasi-scientific” models on which standard mainstream economics is based. Ecological economists have criticized the standard model of being based on 19th century models and understanding of science. Hence mainstream economics is unsuited to deal with the actual biochemical and physical dimension of development and human activity in general. It has failed to incorporate issues of energy, matter, entropy or evolution in a systemic way into its theory and models. And in doing so, it has demonstrated itself unable to halt, or even recognize, our development path towards various critical boundary conditions which are required for the flourishing of life on the planet. In many ways, standard economics has encouraged this path and been committed to it (Georgscu-Roegen, 1971; de Marchi, 1993; Nadeau, 2006).

To be fair, standard or mainstream economics has incorporated nature to some extent, leading to the emergence of the sub-field of environmental economics (and formerly also resources economics). At the core of environmental (or resource)

economics is the theory of (negative) externalities which considers environmental degradation essential as a market failure (because the natural resource is not, or underpriced). This leads to the proposition of assessing the value of nature thus and internalizing it into the market framing environmental problems as interactions between economic agents and describing nature and the environment only implicitly. Ecological economics, instead, explicitly considers people-environment (or economic-ecological) relationships considering cause-effect relationships and dynamic processes within the natural environment. While environmental economics is mainly concerned with efficiency (and sometimes just a limited version, like cost-efficiency), ecological economics main focus is distribution and equity for the evaluation of policies and changes. Contrary to the conception of environmental economists, ecological economists argue that questions of sustainability cannot be answered on the basis of a self-interest-oriented image of human nature. They would also argue that the value of intact nature cannot be expressed by approximations of monetary terms and that the expansion of private property rights to the environment cannot solve the problem of overusing it (Klaassen&Opschoor, 1991; Munda, 1997; Van der Bergh, 2000; Illge&Schwarze, 2006).

There is certainly disagreement between ecological and environmental or neoclassical economists – some very general tendencies are listed in table 4 below – on what is scarce and what not, on which mechanisms are appropriate for allocating different resources (means), and on how we rank competing ends in order of their importance. But ecological economics goes far beyond that, indeed it departs from almost opposite points in various core issues, like the notion of time. When thinking about Earth-systems we have to address geological timeframes that might range from decades to thousands of years – considering, for example, naturally occurring temperature variations or changes in the composition of the atmosphere. Or the idea of a (market) equilibrium, inspired by Newtonian physics and first developed by an engineer turned economist, Leon Walras, and which is still firmly rooted in modern macroeconomics. There is no equilibrium in ecological economics but a dynamic evolution (Constanza et al, 2014; Raworth, 2017).

But there is no dispute that ‘using means efficiently to achieve desirable ends’ is the essential subject matter of economics. ‘Using means to get to ends’ implies policy and that, in turn, means that economics is unavoidably about policies and politics. When we want to argue for or against any given policy, we need knowledge about possibility (“what means are at our disposal?”) and purpose (“what end is desirable?”). These are highly profound questions that bar any simple answers, especially the latter. In an age of pluralism there are logically many, and often conflicting ends, hence we have to prioritize and rank them. The ranking criterion is an ethical problem and gives us an approximation of the ‘ultimate’ end or values. While we should not get too dogmatic about our values, we need a real criterion of value – however vague it may be – to seriously engage with policy. That means a non-nihilistic view of the world in which exists value criterions beyond mere subjective preferences and tastes. Secondly, we must assume that the world is not totally determined and that there are real alternatives we can choose from (“non-determinism”). All policy-oriented fields, including ecological economics, should be aware that a deterministic and/or nihilistic – indeed even a radical relativistic – position renders policy debates meaningless (Daly&Farley, 2011).

	Neoclassical model	Ecological Economic model
Basic worldview	Mechanistic, static, atomistic individual tastes and preferences	Dynamic, systems, evolutionary human preferences
Time frame	Short: usually 1-4 years, maximal 50 years	Multi-scale: days to eons, multi-scale synthesis
Primary policy goal	MORE (economic growth measured in GDP will eventually dissolve all problems)	BETTER (shift from growth to 'development' = sustainable human well-being)
Primary micro focus	Maximize profits (firms) and utility (individuals)	Myopic, must be adjusted to reflect system goals
Primary measure of progress	GDP	Index of sustainable economic welfare (ISEW); Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) and others
Role of government	Minimal and ideally replaced by markets or private institutions	Central, including new roles as facilitator and broker in new common-asset institutions
Assumptions on technological progress	Very optimistic	Prudently skeptical

Table 4 - Comparison between conventional and ecological economics (adapted from Constanza et al, 2014)

Constanza et al (2014) synthesize the basic problems that ecological economics deals with to: efficient allocation, fair (meaning an acceptable degree of inequality) distribution and sustainable scale (meaning it does not erode environmental carrying capacity over time). Neoclassical economics deals extensively with allocation and a lot less extensively with distribution, but scale (the size and expansion of economic activity) is almost completely excluded. Thus, the inclusion of scale is the biggest difference between standard economics and ecological economics. Also, the order of priorities is basically inverted. We must keep in mind that these three problems are highly interrelated, yet distinct from each other. That means that they are most

effectively solved by prioritizing them and with independent policy instruments[28]. We also have to keep in mind that there is an infinite number of allocations, but only one optimal for each distribution and scale. And efficient allocation alone does not guarantee sustainability (Daly, 1992). From an ecological economist's perspective, the priorities are quite clear. First, we must understand the ecological limits for a sustainable scale and establish policies that confine the economic throughput (of matter and energy) to stay within them. Second, we have to establish a fair distribution of resources via transfers and property rights (both individual and common). Only when scale and distribution problems are solved we can use market-based mechanism to allocate resources efficiently. In this case, the market can even be extended to internalize environmental goods and services (Daly&Farley, 2011; Constanza et al, 2014)

2.2.2 Talking about scale and energy

Regarding the issue of scale, ecological economics provides with a very compelling argument why we cannot think (anymore) of the economy (and society) like Adam Smith did, and as neoclassical economists do until today. The simple reason is time and the evolution that the economic system has gone through. We have passed from a period where human-made capital was the limiting factor of economic development to an era in which the remaining natural capital (defined as the stock from where natural resources come) is the limiting factor (Daly, 2000; Constanza et al, 2014). Even until the 1950ies, we were in an empty world considering the human population and the expansion of the economy compared to the planetary scale. But that has dramatically changed – population has more than doubled since the 1960ies (from around 3 to more than 7 billion people in 2015) and the economic output has increased more than tenfold (meaning also that the planet is full of built infrastructure). In an empty world it made little sense to think about environmental

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[28] A classical question in this context is whether we should tax energy and raise its price to reduce its use (aiming at more efficiency and even a more sustainable scale) or should we subsidize energy and lower its price to help the poor (aiming at more equality/reduce poverty)? It is clear that one instrument, like here the price of energy, cannot serve two independent goals. We will need a second instrument, for example an income policy to gain more equity at the same time. As we have three distinct policy problems in ecological economics, we can already assume that we need three different policy instruments - more accurately, three sets of policy instruments (Daly&Farley, 2011).

(or social) "externalities" because nature's sinks (waste absorption capacity) and untapped resources were immense compared to human activity. Today this has changed dramatically and not just in terms of population and real GDP. A number of 'uses' and 'consumptions' have multiplied (sometimes exponentially) since the 1950ies: water, fertilizer, foreign direct investment (FDI), number of motor vehicles, McDonalds restaurants or number of international tourists. After this "great acceleration" (Steffen et al, 2004; 2015), the dimensions of scale and distribution gain increasing relevance.

Although it is difficult to tell how "full' the world really is, considering the extraction and consumption rates of various central economic inputs (oil, water, minerals, etc.) and outputs (emissions, pollutants, etc.) it appears that we are in a full world where a continued expansion of the economy would impose huge, perhaps unacceptable costs. While many people might be more worried about resource depletion – perhaps because natural resources tend to be more privately owned – the waste absorption capacity of the environment might be the most limiting constraint on further economic growth. This full world economy also implies that investment and technology should focus on preserving and restoring natural resources, that population growth must be reduced (in the case of high growth rates) or constrained, and that per capita resource use in developed countries must be constraint or even reduced to open up space for resource use in developing countries (Daly, 1992, Daly&Farley, 2011, Shmelev, 2012; Constanza et al, 2014).

We already mentioned the crucial role of energy for development and its absence in our dominant development models. Ultimately, all human activity depends on the input of energy – either directly in form of food calories or indirectly to power our machines and infrastructure. Thus, our transition towards a sustainable economy/society largely depends on whether we will be able to produce emission and waste-free energy from renewable sources. And the scale of this future society, in terms of production and reproduction, will be given by the amount of energy we can produce sustainably. To get to the right scale we must respect the biophysical limits of our planet, most of which we still do not fully understand. Although system thinking and considering interconnectedness help us to see a more holistic picture,

the fact that we are still ignorant about many complex processes (combined with inherent uncertainty) requires us to always act with precaution. This often cited 'precautionary principles' is essential for long-term sustainability and, for example, one of the main justifications for combating climate change – we simply do not fully know what processes will be triggered by an increase of 3-4 degrees Celsius of the average global temperature. This principle also implies that when setting boundaries such as "not more than 2 degrees Celsius" – which is obviously a political process – we should adhere to a conservative approach (Garver/Goldberg, 2015).

Considering interconnectedness and the discussion above, we cannot talk about energy without mentioning the water-energy-food (WEF) nexus. These three sectors are not only essential for human well-being and development but also very much linked to each other through numerous interactions. Water, for example, is needed in virtually all steps of fossil fuel energy production (mining, processing, refining) and to grow feedstock for biofuels. Here, the water intensity varies quite a lot, and the new non-conventional sources of oil and gas, meaning hydraulic fracking and tar (bitumen) sands, are especially water-intensive. Conversely, energy is needed for extracting, transporting, and treating water. Again, varying in intensity from collecting surface water to reclaiming waste water of desalinating sea water. And food production is not only responsible for around 70% on average of fresh water consumption but also has impacts on the water sector through land degradation, groundwater contamination, and others. Mechanization, fertilizers, and transport of food demand roughly 30% of the global energy production. The nexus relates directly to the very long, global supply chains in which energy and water is embedded. Although the WEF nexus is promoted as a technical approach in the discourses about security and valuing resources, it also provides a perspective on the interrelated dynamics between human populations and the natural environment. Thus, it contributes to addressing complexity and might serve as a bridging element between technical and more holistic approaches (Allan et al, 2015; Swatuk/Cash, 2018).

And addressing complexity will be a main challenge for economics in the 21st century. Because we must get within the biophysical limits of our planet for

ecological sustainability. But that does not mean that this will be socially sustainable or just, which leaves us with the other central dimension of sustainability. Thus, our development has upper boundaries/limits biophysical terms and lower boundaries in social terms. The way to best envision this by thinking of a doughnut – simply, yet highly complex. This approach of visualizing sustainability was recently suggested by ecological economist Kate Raworth (2017) in her book "Doughnut Economic: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st Century Economist". These seven ways will help us to enter in the sweet spot of sustainability within the doughnut (see figure 3 below). The doughnuts social foundations, comprised in 12 dimensions, are actually derived from the UN Sustainable Development Goals, crucially leaving out the goal of economic growth. And the 9 dimensions of the doughnut's ecological ceiling are based on the research on planetary boundaries done by Earth-system scientists. It is worth noting that both for air and chemical pollution we do not even have global control variables yet (Steffen et al, 2015; Raworth, 2017)

This new economics, Raworth (2017) argues, must abandon GDP as goal and adopt indicators that measure our progress towards entering the doughnut. Ultimately, we should be agnostic about (GDP) growth, which implies ending our structural and cultural growth addiction. It would help if economists stop assuming that we are a 'homo oeconomicus' and start nurturing the socially adaptable nature of human beings.[29] Economists must start addressing the 'big picture' of an embedded economy (very much in the Polanyian sense) and stop concerning about self-contained markets (which do not exist). That includes system thinking, letting go of mechanical equilibrium ideas, and instead embracing dynamic complexity considering stocks and flows, reinforcing or balancing feedback loops, and delays. Finally, we must think about re-designing our economy to (re)distributive (regarding wealth and income) and regenerative (regarding nature) – designs that we will explore further in chapter 3 and 4 by mapping Degrowth and Buen Vivir. And

[29] It is crucial to establish a new idea about human nature and behavior in economics, because the way we picture ourselves clearly influences who we become. This new picture of ourselves is definitely more complex than the economic man. Certainly, we are self-interested, but we are also social and reciprocating. We do not have fixed preferences, but fluid values. We are not isolated, but interdependent and instead of calculating we usually approximate. And instead of having dominion of nature, we are deeply embedded in a web of life.

“doughnut” thinking can be applied on all levels. We can start by asking ourselves: how does the way I shop, eat, travel, earn a living, bank, vote and volunteer affect my personal impact on the social and ecological boundaries? And then by asking as society (eventually as global community): what do we depend upon to provision for our needs, or better to flourish and thrive? Well, a fundamental insight of Raworth’s work (and ecological economics in general) is that human thriving – that is, well-being and beyond – depends upon planetary thriving.

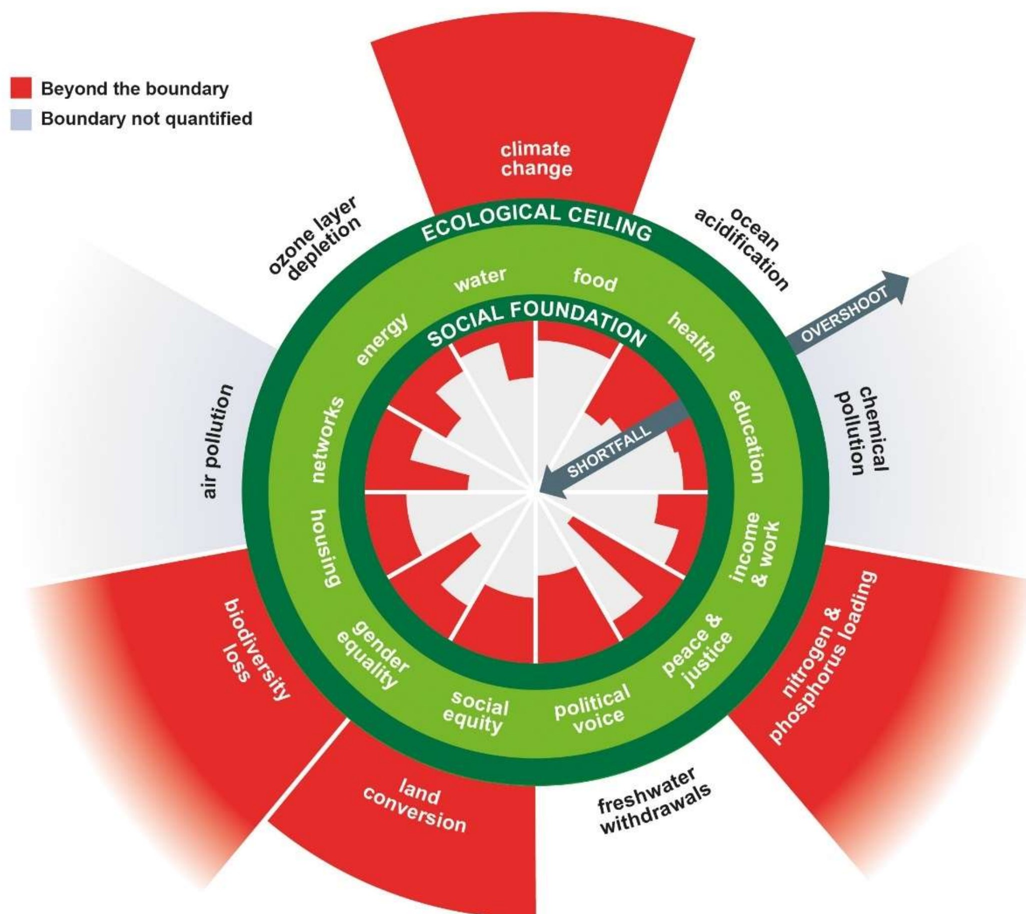

Figure 3 - The doughnut of sustainability (source: Raworth, 2017)

Clearly visible in the doughnut, a direct consequence our full-world scenario combined with the current, energy and resource-intensive development model is a

human ecological footprint that is far from sustainable[30]. Obviously, this refers to resource and energy-intensive consumption patterns and not to the huge part of the global population that is still living within a just ecological footprint. Our efforts to 'develop' have imposed severe costs on society and environment. Historically, environmental protect has been defective and insufficient at best. Indeed, more recent warnings, such as the Stern report (2007) or the IPCC (Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change) reports (2013, 2018) show that ecological overshoot and collapse from climate disruption are very probably the most pressing problems of our times. The scenarios painted by ecological economics analysis can appear rather dire. So, what can be done to change our path? What are the conditions for a transition towards a more sustainable society – or to use Raworth's metaphor "to move into the doughnut"? Both degrowth and Buen Vivir offer concrete proposals – which will be discussed in chapter 3 and 4 – on how to achieve a transition towards such a sustainable and just future. They are departing to a large extent from the same assumptions as ecological economics and can be seen as natural extensions of the field. Before starting that discussion, let us first to look at some general issues and assumptions about (social) transitions.

2.2.3 On Transitions

This thesis wants to discuss strategies and principles for a socio-ecological transition (or transitions) towards a sustainable civilization. Thus, a bit more must be said about transition itself. Transitions and social change in general, might be difficult to steer in a certain direction, are often spontaneous, and are certainly a result of a complex multitude and interaction of factors. Still, change is not only

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[30] The Ecological Footprint is an indicator for the human demand of biotic resources, meaning those formed by the sun's energy through photosynthesis. The indicator was developed to track changes in human consumption and the earth's ability to supply these demands. Considering a variety of variables (like CO2 emissions, water consumption, non-renewable resource use, etc.), the indicator calculates how much land is necessary to sustain the standard of living of a given individual. It enables us to say that an average German requires 5,46 hectares to sustain his or her standard of living – which is way beyond the roughly 1,80 hectares that everyone would have if Earth's biocapacity was distributed equally. The ecological footprint clearly shows that the global human population – albeit with tremendous variations in different countries and income classes – has been using more resources than the planet can renewably produce at least since the mid 1970ies. Although its success in influencing policy has been limited so far, it is widely acclaimed for the easy communication of ecological limits, equitable resource distribution and interconnectedness across scales. (Collins/Flynn, 2015; McBain et al, 2017)

possible but is, historically speaking, despite long periods of little or no changes, undoubtedly a constant of both nature and human civilization (Segall et al, 1990; Goodwin, 2009). On the other hand, there are also things that are rather difficult to change. For example, the fact that humans are governed by emotions – a lot more than by rationality as economists are beginning to understand – and that a basic human emotional structure (like joy, fear, surprise or sadness) is an inherent element in any culture. Or the tendency of humans to act, not exclusively but more often than not, with a certain selfishness. Moral values and the social imaginary of what is considered to be normal are a lot more flexible and, in turn, can even influence what is seen to be selfish[31]. Although some structures (like basic emotions) are derived from evolutionary history, in many of these elements (like values or the imaginary) is a huge part defined by culture. Therefore, significant or even profound changes in societies are usually accompanied by changes in the dominant culture (Ekardt, 2017).

Change can happen in multiple domains and with different speeds. We can talk about change on the individual level or about transformations in the global economic system. Although they seem far away, these domains are not separated from each other but rather interconnected through a complex web of interactions and interdependencies of agents, institutions, and whole systems. Generally, there are several factors that have to be taken into account when we talk about social change, and, in particular, changes towards more sustainability. Change and transformation require knowledge that can be activated. Although we have gathered huge amounts of data on socio-ecological issues, this knowledge is often disregarded in the political discourse or outright discredited by opposing interests (such as "research" financed by the oil and gas industry). Here, more transparency and access to information and knowledge is required by the public sphere, as well as the

[31] It somehow remains an open question to what extent our selfish behavior is induced and rewarded by the existing social environment, that is industrial (or post-industrial), neo-liberal capitalism, and which part is given by our natural evolution as species. As this thesis adopts a viewpoint of interconnectedness and considers the importance of social contexts, the influence of the current social environment cannot be understated. Indeed, economists do usually firmly believe in the power of incentives – thus, a system/context that is designed to induce unsustainable or egoistic behavior can be redesigned to just do the opposite (Eisenstein, 2011)

willingness of citizens to inform themselves about complex topics. The global and collective character of sustainability issues also requires binding juridical frameworks on a global level to incentivize cooperation and reciprocity. This could reduce the current, unsustainable path-dependency of our civilization. If, for example, we stop issuing new licenses for coal power plants, then we create powerful incentives to not invest in these technologies anymore. And if we stop heavily subsidizing gasoline or meat and dairy products, then we also contribute to creating new imaginaries of what is normal and incentivize people to try new practices (like riding the bike or eating meat only once or twice a week). Key here is that existing unsustainable practices and path-dependencies – both on the individual and on the collective level – are recognized and actively addressed (Ekardt, 2017).

Now, a crucial question is whether, and to what extent, we can organize these transitions? Due to our unsustainable civilizational model and social metabolism our global society will transform, at some point anyway, the question is whether '*by design or by disaster?*' (Paech, 2012; Jackson, 2009; Heinberg, 2011). Unsurprisingly, the proposals discussed in this thesis argue for a transformation by design. Also, because a transformation by design might, and indeed should aim at allowing us to maintain several "successes" of the modern era (such as universal human rights or innumerous health achievements). It is not about a return to some romantized pre-modern time, but about "an organization of reduction in the context of modern societies" (Sommer/Welzer, 2017, p.27)– fully acknowledging that many of these "successes" are still not shared with a significant part of mankind.

It becomes very quickly clear that such a transition is not simply a task of creating more awareness or consciousness, although the creation of new imaginaries and narratives is certainly an important and necessary step towards new 'development' paths. But, using Polanyi's (1967) word, a "great transformation" of deep cultural and social changes does also requires actual changes in our everyday life praxis and experience. Education for sustainability (in its broadest possible meaning) is certainly important and should become integral part of our formal educational system, but it is paramount that these rather mental processes are accompanied by

changes in our everyday activities and practices. Otherwise, educational efforts that blatantly contradict our social, unsustainable praxis might create cognitive dissonances[32], especially in children, and probably lead to a problematic acceptance of those contradictions (Sommer/Welzer, 2017). This emphasis on "change by doing" - getting involved in new, different activities – is also a central argument of the DG and BV approaches. Doing, and not only thinking/rationalizing things differently, is a main contribution to transforming our social reality (more on this in chapter 3 and 4).

Regarding the psychological aspects of social change, German sociologist Norbert Elias explored the interdependence of social and psychological structures. He argues that the structures of our psyche and our society are two aspects of the same historic process, in fact, they are complementary phenomena. That means that the practices and norms of any given type of society also influence the inner life of its people; in other words, capitalism creates the "homo oeconomicus" and a multiplicity of conceptions connected to this idea of a human being. Among others, conceptions of time are tied to synchronization necessities of transnational mobility, conceptions of performance are linked to principles of international competition and conceptions of relationships are influenced by demands of modern economic production. Social norms and values in that society are bound to categories like development, progress, availability and limitlessness. Strategies for resolving problems are expansive (e.g. ever more technology to solve problems created by technology) and the production of desire and dreams is expansive as well. In sum, the contemporary growth economy and its specific relations of power and dominance (both over

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[32] In psychology, the theory of cognitive dissonance describes the mental discomfort (psychological stress, which then can have various physical manifestations) that a person with two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values experiences when these beliefs clash. This theory is based on the assumption that human beings tend to strive for internal psychological consistency to function mentally in the real word. Inconsistency will lead to discomfort and people are motivated to either add new elements to the cognition (which involves actual learning) or avoid circumstances and information that contribute to the dissonance – latter being unfortunately often being the easier way (Festinger, 1957; Aronson et al, 2008)

humans and nature), does have a significant impact on the level of individual, mental structures (Elias, 1994).

Thus, socio-economic transformations cannot stop with the transformation of the external conditions of human existence and need to address the psychological structures (including perceptive and interpretative patterns, self-perception, emotions and habitus). However, the transformation of those “mental infrastructures” (Welzer, 2011) is only to a small part achievable to cognitive work, because most of these processes are running unconsciously. Leaving behind the behavioral path of consumerism can, therefore, not simply be postulated or demanded through moral appeals, it can only become a reality in connection with the creation of new social (infra)structure. It is crucial that social transformations are lived and experienced, and not only pondered about (Sommer/Welzer, 2017).

Now, the establishment of (new) modes of living is very likely to create conflicts – indeed it would be utterly unrealistic to assume that there are only winners in the transformation towards a more sustainable civilization. To achieve the “two degree” goal of the Paris Agreement, for example, around eighty percent of only the known fossil fuel reserves, which are an estimated 20 trillion US dollar in monetary value, would have to be left in the ground. The oil companies, already in possession of the exploration rights to these reserves, would lose a huge part of their wealth (McKibben, 2012; McGlade/Ekins, 2015). And it is not only business models that are unfit for a sustainable future, but also the lifestyle of most people in the so-called early-industrialized countries – including factors such as extensive, low-cost air travel or excessive consumption of highly subsidized, industrial meat and dairy products. Obviously, many people will not accept to voluntarily limited their lifestyle to a sustainable scale, even when there is hard empiric evidence that they are actively endangering the future of their own children and grandchildren. Although there are certain mid and long-term benefits for themselves, at first sight, those people will probably not view self-limitation as a win situation.

On the other hand, top-down and often authoritative transformations have a very bad track history and forcing people to abandon certain lifestyles (to save the planet)

is only advocated by rather marginal groups of mainly right-wing authors (Olsen, 1999) or 'mystical' deep ecologists (Bookchin, 1987). So, here is one of the great challenges of the current transformation: it requires a disposition from significant parts of the materially affluent citizens (especially in the Global North) for self-limitation and giving up parts of the privileges. And these tensions between groups with shifting (power) positions and with conflicting objectives will not simply disappear. On the contrary, they are a centerpiece of a transformation from an expansive to a reductive 'development' path (Sommer/Welzer, 2017). Hence, highlighting conflicts within the transformation processes has to be a central feature of any critical analysis.

2.2.4 Design for transformations[33]

“We encounter the deep question of design when we recognize that in designing tools we are designing ways of being”
(Terry Winograd & Fernando Flores, 1986)

One possible answer to the above presented challenge lies in the role and function of design. And here, we are obviously not talking about conventional design which provides, indeed imposes, pre-configurated answers to what we shall eat, dress, drive, in short, consume. This permanent access to answers is very convenient for the consumer because it skips the whole process of asking for which purpose we consume and because it offers immediate (consumption) solutions. Thus, conventional design usually affirms and reinforces the existing, dominant ideology. On the other hand, design that is oriented towards transformation – or what Sommer & Welzer (2017, especially chapter 6) call *transformation design* – considers the questions of which goal to achieve, critically reviewing that goal, and which means are required and adequate to get there as its foundation. Hence, such design does not start with the solution but with the definition of the question which arises in the

[33] To not confuse the reader, we should be explicit about the difference between transitions and transformations. Transformation simply refers to change or changes within an element. For example, we can change/transform our eating habits from a meat-based diet to a vegetarian diet. Transition refers to the process or movement that is created by these transformations. For example, if we transform/change different tax laws/regulations within our tax system with the purpose of getting a more progressive taxation, then these transformations are part of the transition towards a more progressive tax system.

social praxis. It is less concerned with products – which are the focus of industrial, conventional design – and more with cultural production and reproduction. It is concerned with the transformation of cultural practices of using energy, matter and products and includes social categories such as communication, trade, consumption and provision (Sommer/Welzer, 2017).

In the context of the Anthropocene, where human activities have reached geological dimensions, the separation between nature and culture can hardly be sustained anymore. Anthropogenic climate change, for example, is a cultural transformation of the natural conditions of our existence (Crutzen/Stroemer, 2000; Crutzen, 2002). Considering that unsustainable societies will – either voluntarily by design or forced by disaster – inevitably change, transformation design can also be understood as research on and creation of resilience, as a mean to recover and sustain our capacity of subsistence and resistance. This is a movement away from “cultures of external supply” (ger. Fremdversorgung) which tend to expand the supply of new products through the creation of new desires. Such cultures of external supply (or provision), as opposed to subsistence or local/regional supply, do not only increase the consumption of energy and matter but they reduce, at the same time, our resilience leaving us vulnerable and dominated by their products. Contrary to that, a transformative and sustainable design would increase our autonomy and reduce the required material and energy consumption as much as possible. Therefore, Sommer/Welzer (2017) argue that transformation design has a civilizational task, indeed very much in the sense of the Enlightenment ideas, to enable social maturity and responsibility. It is an emancipative design.

German economist and activist Christian Felber (2012) defines transformation design as “any conceptional, creating, planning or practical contributions to the 'Great Transition', which is currently starting or has already started. This second great transformation (referring to Polanyi's work) can be understood as the re-embedding of the economy into a) the ethics of human communities and societies, b) into democracy via the expansion of components of direct and global democracy and, c) into the ecological space and scale of planet Earth” (Sommer/Welzer, 2017, p.190, author's own translation and emphasis). He further points out that this re-

embedding is not a 're-transformation' but an integration: more conscious, more global, more democratic and based on global solidarity and interconnectedness. And there are many valid contributions to this transformation, which are also often complementary, hence creating a “mosaic of futures” (p.191) of sustainability and welfare.

Another crucial argument brought up by Felber (2012) is that, ultimately, there is no apolitical transformation design. At least since the feminist movements we are aware that 'the private is political' even if it has no articulated intention to be so. And more so if private actions already have the intention to transform something. Obviously, there are different degrees of involvement, what Felber calls the “matrix of change” (ger. “Matrix des Wandels”), starting with inner, personal processes, then articulation of those, creating pilot projects, establishing networks, rhizomes and systems. An example for a starting point could be the practice of yoga – often seen as something apolitical and selfish – sensiblizing and mobilizing empathy and, thus the social and solidary potential. On the other side of this matrix would be new, different economic models and designs, such as a democratic money regime (see more on this part 3 and 4).

Following Sommer&Welzer's (2011) argument, transformation design is a reductive form of design. Instead of designing new (adding) or re-designing old products, services or cities, transformation designs aims at reducing the number of things we do not actually need, and which are unsustainable. It would not be designing a new bottle for drinking water, but rather the sign towards, and eventually the whole infrastructure for the next public water fountain. The development of transformation design(s) is thus a social and cultural task – not simply the product or service should be sustainable, but also the social practices. Primarily, it is the task of deciding democratically what a good life is and how to achieve it. From that definition, transformative design would then make conclusions. The expansive culture of consumerist modernity defines a good life as the continuous accumulation of products and the infinite expansion of our comfort zone, hence its design task is to create always “new” products for infinite desires. From the definition of a good life within a reductive culture follows a quite opposite design task: re-design of the

existing, disappearance of the unnecessary, avoidance of effort and luxuriousness, and the reduction of energy and material use.[34]

Another way to think about design for sustainability has very recently been discussed by Colombian-American anthropologist Arturo Escobar. In his book “Design for a Pluriverse - Interdependence, Autonomy and the Making of Worlds” Arturo Escobar’s (2018) argument is fourfold. First, he acknowledges that the current crises are the result of our ways of being, knowing and doing. And to reclaim design for the creation of other worlds - which are indeed possible as the degrowth and Buen Vivir practices/activities discussed in this thesis will demonstrate (see chapter 3 and 4) - requires an awareness of design’s embeddedness in history. Thus, Escobar offers an analysis of the historical and cultural background from within which design practice enfolds; that is, a contribution to the cultural studies of design. Second, he claims that the most appropriate mode of access to the question concerning design is ontological. Taking this approach requires understanding both the dualist ontology of separation, control and appropriation that has become dominant in patriarchal capitalist modernity and potential rationalities and modes of being that emphasize the profound relationality and interconnectedness of all that is (linked to rather matriachistic ontologies). Third, the contemporary ecological and social devastation invokes critical thought to actively think about significant cultural transitions. Here, two forms of transition thinking (within design theory and practice) are arising: design for transitions (“civilizational” or “the great transition”) and design for autonomy (centered around the struggle of communities and social movements

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[34] In this context, Sommer/Welzer (2011) discuss an interesting example of how design can both contribute and hamper resilience. Until the 2nd World War, public water fountains in German cities and urban agglomerations were equipped with manually-activated pumps, remnants from a time when private urban households rarely had their own water supply. In the ruins of the German cities after the war, these public water pumps offered an infrastructure and access to water that does not exist anymore. Assuming – arguably without any evidence – that there are no more situations of emergency in the 21st century, the resilience (here in the form of necessary access to drinking water) of German urban dwellers has been reduced. This example clearly shows how, in various cases, issues of use and access are literally more vital than issues of property. Public access to essential goods does not only offer a huge potential for reduced resource use, but also opens up the possibility for self-supply. Certainly, a centralized, high-tech, energy and resource intensive water and waste water system has some advantages, too. But particularly in cases of emergencies (which probably will increase with climate change) and in terms of resilience and sustainability such infrastructures are badly designed.

to defend their territories and worlds). Fourth, his arguments are elaborated from a Latin American cultural background/perspective and in a context in which designers are rediscovering people's ability to shape their own worlds through relational and collaborative tools and solutions. Escobar's work is part of a long tradition of conversations in modern philosophy (and beyond) about relationality and the limitations of binary thinking - starting at least with Kant's humanism and Hegelian and Marxist dialectics. Yet, the recent thinking on relationality not only demonstrates the insufficiencies of previous approaches to escaping dualism, but also a genuine new emphasis: the concern with the agency of nonhumans and a renewed attention to materiality. Escobar believes that relationality involves more than nondualism and that re-imagining the human needs to go beyond the deconstruction of humanism. We need to have awareness of how we live in a world (or worlds) of our own making, but also have a sharper consciousness of how those worlds make us.

According to Escobar (2018) a way of achieving more of this awareness and creating new forms of being is through a new approach to design thinking – what he calls *ontological design*. He illustrates the issue by using the example of technology, and in particular, digital communication devices such as smartphones. And to be clear, he emphasizes that this is not a question of being against or for technology (or a battle of tradition versus modernity), but of raising awareness of the diversity of existential options for human life, of the multiple ways of being in space and time, and of the impact of technology on ourselves, the Earth and our communities. In the case of smartphones, common understanding is that these increasingly ubiquitous digital devices revolutionized our communication, information and interactivity. Understanding these three concepts already involves fundamental assumptions about the nature of language, the individual, progress, and life itself. Here we could talk about the Cartesian/Euclidean idea of independent entities that preexist any interaction, about information as discrete and truthful accounts of an objectively existing reality, or about rules of logic and forms of rationality which are benignly intended to make the world a decent and livable place.

Furthermore, the existence and functioning of these devices depend on a variety of materials (such as gold, cobalt, palladium, tantalum, niobium, etc.) that are bits of

Africa, sometimes South America, and usually so-called 'conflict materials'; their steady supply creating wars, eviction, ecological degradation and uncountable amounts of toxic waste[35]. And all these minerals are housed in geological strata, in a 'metallic materiality', that global corporations are now exploiting to an increasing degree. In other words, we have come to accept that the geological time of our planet, embedded in the layers of rock beneath us, can be disturbed and bended in service of our machines and, perhaps more importantly, the huge profits they represent. Escobar (2018) argues that this means imposing “the Judeo-Christian linear time (of salvation and progress) on allegedly inert geological strata, which perhaps explains why the Earth is screaming, as Brazilian liberation theologist Leonardo Boff has been telling us for decades” (p.108). Personally, through these technologies we are alienated from place and trapped in the utopia of the annihilation of duration/time trying to do as many things as possible at the same time and all the time. Leading even lovers of technology like Paul Virilio (1993, p.37) to ask, “how we can live if there is no more here and everything is now”?

Combining the above discussed “deterritorialization of our bodies” (Escobar, 2018) with a global environment of fear (e.g. the terrorist or natural disasters) which is propagated by real-time media, our emotions get occupied as well. One could argue that this colonization – mainly because it is not mere occupation, but an agenda – on all levels is nothing to worry about. Yet we should still ask the question whether the gains from techno-cultural changes outnumber the losses. And again, asking for the ontological implications of new technologies does not imply their total rejection, but rather a redirection of the cultural tradition on which they are based. Also – as this thesis argues – a critical analysis of such changes is a fundamental task for the social sciences (including economics). More so, a decolonization of our minds and

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[35] It is remarkable that the production of an ecologically and socially sustainable smartphone is literally impossible today. The Dutch social enterprise company Fairphone has the mission of bring a 'fair smartphone on the market – designed and produced with minimal harm to people and planet'. That includes long-lasting and DIY repairable design, avoiding conflicts materials, good working conditions and reuse and recycling options. These are all vital and promising efforts to change global supplies chains and the ethics of a whole industry, which comes at a price of around 500 Euros. However, the company itself acknowledges that producing a 100% fair phone is not yet possible and changed their ads to 'a fairer phone' (Fairphone, 2018).

bodies would be a first and crucial step towards more autonomy and emancipation, both necessary for a transition towards more sustainability.

So, what is then ontological design? Escobar (2018) claims – based on earlier work by Winograd & Flores (1986) – that design is ontological because it is a conversation about possibilities. Obviously, digital technologies are an extreme case of radical innovation that led to unprecedented possibilities (such as printing, the automobile or television before). These technologies transformed entire sets of daily practices. Hence, all tools or technologies are ontological in the sense that they inaugurate new rituals, ways of doing and modes of being; they contribute to shaping what it is to be human. A second notion in which design is ontological is that we (humans), in designing tools/technologies, we design the conditions of our own existence and, in turn, the conditions of our designing. In other words, the tools and worlds we design design us back. This applies to literally everything, from objects and tools to institutions and discourses. Consider the seemingly neutral space of habitation. Whether one lives in an Amazonian 'maloca' (indigenous longhouse that are used and inhabited collectively) or in a suburban nuclear-family house in the United States will have profound difference in his or her mode of being and structures of possibilities. The maloca favors, and indeed creates, a relational world including interdependent and integral relations between humans and non-humans, whereas the nuclear-family home contributes to de-communalized individuals who are separated from the natural world.

According to Winograd & Flores (1986) the main reason why our imagination is trapped (here, for example, regarding technology) is the rationalistic tradition and its use of constraining metaphors such as that of 'computers as brains'. Thus, limiting our possibilities to envision and design new technologies that better serve human purposes. In order to redirect this tradition substantially, the authors advocate “to develop a new ground for rationality – one that is as rigorous as the rationalistic tradition but that does not share the presuppositions behind it” (ibd., p.8). This would also imply to advance beyond the body-mind dualism, and dualism per se, that posits the existence of two separate domains, the objective physical reality and the individual subjective mental world. Against this dualism, Winograd & Flores (1986)

argue for a (design) framework that rests on three pillars: the fundamental unity of being-in-the-world, the primacy of practical understanding, and the idea of cognition as enaction. Latter is based on the understanding that the observer is not separate from the world but rather creates the phenomenal spaces within which she or he acts.

A central feature for Winograd & Flores framework – and, as we will discuss later, for most transition discourses – is the occurrence of 'breakdowns'. Such moments or situations that are negative, but at the same time provide the space of possibility for action, for creating spaces where new conversations and connections can happen. The ecological crisis happening right now are the most obvious example of breakdowns. What they potentially offer is the creation of a systematic domain where definitions and rules can be re/defined, and which, for example, then make visible the inherent interdependencies and the lack of (political) commitments. This creation of spaces of possibilities is the goal of ontological design. It "[…] constitutes an intervention in the background of our heritage, growing out of our already-existent ways of being in the world, and deeply affecting the kinds of being that we are. In creating new artifacts, equipment, buildings, and organizational structures, it attempts to specify in advance how and where breakdowns will show up in our everyday practices and in the tools we use, opening up new spaces in which we can work and play. Ontologically oriented design is therefore necessarily both reflective and political, looking back to the traditions that have formed us but also forwards to as-yet-uncreated transformations of our lives together. […] The designing process is part of this "dance" in which our structure of possibilities is generated" (Winograd/Flores, 1986, p.163).

Another contribution towards ontological design is offered by Tony Fry (2011; 2015) who links design and post-humanism. According to the author, we humans are the result of three great forces: natural selection, self-organization and design. Adopting this evolutionary view Fry depicts the uniqueness of our steps towards unsustainability entailed by modernity. And hence, argues for a post-human notion of the human that systematically deals with the consequences of life under structured unsustainability as a civilizational condition. Furthermore, he argues, we

need to imagine beyond modernity decolonially. That implies, on one hand, recognizing the systematic suppression or often annihilation (literally taking their future away, or "defuturing") of non-modern worlds, and, on the other hand, a notion that "*while the planet is singular, world is plural* – for it is formed and seen in difference- as are we" (Fry, 2015, p.21, italics added). Therefore, what needs to be sustained is the pluriverse. For this to happen, we must stop this "defuturing" effects of modernity – primarily the unquestioned attachment to economic growth – and move from an era of Enlightenment to one of "Sustainment". This transition, like the one from the ancient to the modern era, "challenges us moderns to secure futures for the kinds of relational forms of being capable of countering the still-pervasive conditions of defuturing and unsustainability" (Escobar, 2018, p.118).

Within this thesis we cannot discuss all the issues related to this emerging field of ontological design, but rather try to summarize its main concerns. Following Escobar (2018) ontological design is a strategy for transition from Enlightenment (unsustainability, defuturing, destruction) to Sustainment (futuring, creation), thus it avoids defuturing and promotes futuring processes/initiatives. It recognizes that all design creates a 'world-within-the-world' and that we are all designers and being designed at the same time. It always entails reconnection: with non-humans, with Earth, with spirit, and of course, with humans in their radical alterity. It considers retrieving forms of making (and being) from an entire range of traditions, and that are not merely technological. It creates domains for conversation for action, promotes convivial and communal tools, and is deeply practice oriented. It is not about an expansion of choices as postulated by liberal freedom, but rather tries to transform the kinds of beings we desire to be. Hence, it is potentially post-capitalist and post-liberal (or perhaps recovering an earlier meaning of liberalism that relates to responsibility and interconnectedness). Ontological design, at its best, opens paths towards more mindfulness and enables ontologies of compassion and care.

This above descripted design task might at first seem enormous. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the structural non-sustainability of our society is a modern phenomenon and, on a global scale, only a few decades old. That also means that there are many examples of sustainable practices from our immediate

past. An inquiry into such practices could then inform, even guide, our discourses on sustainability and transformations. In the next two chapters of this thesis a set of such sustainable practice is mapped and discussed. This thesis follows Escobar's (2015, 2018) argument that both Degrowth and Buen Vivir, two alternatives to development within the wider transition discourses, offer not only promising, systemic strategies towards sustainability (or Sustainment) but also contribute to creating emerging spaces for ontological design in this direction. By discussing degrowth and Buen Vivir not only as theoretical concepts (in chapter 3 and 4) but also as lived experiences and practices of sustainability (some of which are illustrated in chapter 5), the next three chapters of this thesis hope to provide an imaginary of possible futures.

3 Mapping Degrowth

“The decadent international but individualistic capitalism, in the hand of which we found ourselves after the war, is not a success. It is not intelligent, it is not beautiful, it is not just, it is not virtuous – and it does not deliver the goods. In short, we dislike it and beginning to despise it. But when we wonder what to put in its place, we are perplexed”
(John Maynard Keynes, 1933, On National Self-Sufficiency)

3.1 A brief history of degrowth

Let us start by some very general remarks before reconstructing the history and influences that led to the emergence of degrowth in the early 2000s. First, we must emphasize that the term degrowth is intended to be a political catch-word (ger. “Kampfbegriff”, literally a term/word used to fight), a deliberately subversive slogan. It is intended to highlight the necessity to abandon GDP growth as an objective for our societies, indeed to the absurdity of this endeavor. And the societies in question are especially the industrialized nations of the Global North[36]. In this sense we have to be careful not to confuse degrowth with zero-growth or negative GDP growth – both words that are themselves offspring of the growth ideology or “growth-mania” as Herman Daly (1974) calls it. Being a catch-word or slogan also results, in this case, in a certain logical incoherence. We will later see, that degrowth can actually lead to more growth in certain areas and that another terminology could be more accurate. Latouche (2008), for example, argues that the term “a-growth” - like in atheism, a rejection of the faith-like acceptance of the growth paradigm – would be more adequate. However, the initial objective of the term 'degrowth' was not to be complete accurate, but to be subversive and provocative for political purposes (Swyngedouw, 2015). Furthermore, after being established once and having gained

[36] However, we will discuss later that the degrowth ideas might also very well apply to “pockets” of material wealth and affluence in the 'less-developed' countries of the Global South. Especially in case with high (economic) inequality, there are often segments of the population to whom those critiques could be addressed as well.

a certain visibility, there is now a need to occupy this terminology and fight for the associations people are connecting with it.[37]

Using the term degrowth in the singular is also rather incoherent, because degrowth refers to a wide variety of heterogeneous thinking and actions. Degrowth is a banner under which actors and movements from ecological economics to green theology – among various others – gather. Thus, talking about “degrowth is...” or “degrowers agree on...” we have to be conscious that there is no single voice of degrowth but a plurality of voices (Paulson, 2017). What critics might call a “internal” theoretical vagueness is, however, both a strength and weakness – strength because it allows diversity, debate and creativity, weakness because it becomes a lot harder to formulate policy, mobilize people or get more academic attention. To some extent this plurality is also given by the fact that degrowth is a critique of the growth and current development paradigm, meaning that it necessarily includes a wide variety of subjects and fields and thus actors and opinions from many different approaches. This plurality also becomes apparent by looking at the range of topics and actors at the Degrowth conferences, starting in 2008 in Paris (Degrowth, 2008) and held biannually until the latest gatherings 2018 in Malmö and Mexico City.

It is crucial to mention, at the beginning, that the ideas around degrowth developed mainly in the European context (especially those ideas concerning the downsizing of the economic metabolism) and its criticism is primarily directed towards the (materially) rich nations. Just to clarify that degrowth, by no means, is demanding less material growth for nations, regions or localities where people do not have access to the basic material goods required for a healthy and dignified human life. In fact, degrowth in the Global North (like abandoning fossil fuels) would provide 'ecological' space for growth in the Global South. In many cases, the poverty and exploitation in the South is a direct result from growth pressures conceded in the North. Of course, the hope is that the Southern nations do not follow the same,

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[37] This need arises because popular catch-words are generally very prone to be occupied by agents that are not necessarily interested in the initial proposal of the term. This has been clearly the case, for example, with the term 'sustainable development' which, after becoming popular, has been casually used, over-used and distorted to a degree where it is almost impossible to use it in a precise manner.

destructive path of the North. And there are actually many examples of alternatives to development that have to develop in the South despite persistent poverty and material deprivation. One example that will be discuss at length here is the cosmovision of Buen Vivir that has been formulated and implemented (at least to some extent) in Ecuador ("Sumak Kawsay") and Bolivia. Other examples include Ubuntu from South Africa or the Gandhian Economy of Permanence in India. A common demand of these concepts is the idea of global ecological and social justice – something that, from a degrowth perspective, requires a change of the growth imaginary originated in the North.

Obviously, these basic material conditions we just mentioned are subject to debate – and might change rather drastically within different cultures and times. And even in the context of the "rich" nations, degrowth does not mean to simply shrink the economic output (although it implies this in certain contexts), but to rethink and create a different economy, society and social relations. In the definition of ecological economists like Schneider et al (2010, p.512), degrowth is "*as an equitable downscaling of production and consumption that will reduce societies' throughput of energy and raw materials*". So, degrowth means a society with a 'smaller' metabolism, but more importantly, with a 'different' metabolism. The objective is not doing less of the same but rather to have new structures, activities and institutions – such as different forms and uses of energy, different gender roles/social relations or different allocation of time between paid and non-paid work.

According to D'Alisa et al (2014), degrowth can, very broadly, be defined as a political, social and economic movement based on a variety of influences, the most cited ones being ecological economics, anti-capitalism and anti-consumerism. It is, first and foremost, a critique of growth – meaning primarily, but not only, an expansion of the economic base measured in GDP growth – and ultimately of capitalism itself. It is also a criticism of commodification, considered a direct manifestation of the expansion of capitalism. In a second step, degrowth also refers to the project of (re)thinking our society towards significations of 'sharing', 'simplicity', 'conviviality', 'care' and the 'commons'. Thus, degrowth is not limited to criticism but tires to develop, experiment and implement ideas and practices that could help in the transition to a post-growth society. In this attempt degrowth

connects very diverse ideas, concepts and proposals – ranging from eco-communities and cooperatives to work-sharing and basic/maximum income. This is illustrated by figure 4 below which depicts the frequency (the higher the bigger) of keywords within the degrowth debate.

Figure 4 - Degrowth keywords/themes (sources: D'Alisa et al, 2014)

Thus, degrowth is more than a (political) movement, it is a socioeconomic project towards a new society. New both in the way it is organized (politically, economically, socially, culturally, etc.) and new in its proposal concerning our social relations (including those towards non-human beings). Degrowth wants to offer an alternative perspective on what “leading a good life” could look like, a new perspective on how to develop our global society – it is, in a nutshell, an alternative to the current development model which degrowers consider unsustainable and unjust. Muraca (2017) argues that degrowth is more than a radical critique against the over-sized, exaggerated material dimension of the early-industrialized nations, whose (material) expansion around the globe threatens the possibility our survival. Perhaps above all, degrowth is about (re)taking the right and the power to decide – collectively, democratically, and based on solidarity – about the way we live our life. In this sense, it is a direct attack on the TINA (“There is no alternative”) narratives which are so often activated in discussions today, especially by economists.

By proposing an alternative to the current development model, degrowth offers – what the German philosopher Ernst Bloch (1985 [1918]) called – a concrete utopia.

Developed as a reaction to the Marxian critique of utopia[38], Bloch envisioned processes and/or states that would actually enable real social change. A concrete utopia is the process of realization/implementation in which the conditions of a potential future – that are already perceptible, yet often overshadowed, in the present – are being experimented and tested. A concrete utopia requires, according to Bloch, militant optimism. Contrary to a naive optimism, which only hopes, and which is blind to the realities of dominance and oppression, a militant optimism identifies the hidden potentials and tendencies in order to act as an amplifier for them and ultimately helps activating them. The degrowth literature picks up this idea and argues that, because our minds are deeply colonized by the logic and pressures of growth, we need such spaces of active, social laboratories – it is an attempt to decolonize our imaginary.

According to Latouche (2015), the idea to decolonize the imaginary, meaning our mental frameworks and beliefs, has two theoretical foundations. On the one side is the anthropological critique of imperialism and on the other is the philosophy of Cornelius Castoriadis – which form together with the ecological critique the main theoretical origins of degrowth. For the latter, our social reality is the implementation of "imaginary significations", in other words, representations which mobilize feelings. If 'progress' is such a signification, then 'growth' and 'development' are mere beliefs and to go beyond them would require a change in the imaginary[39]. This would be one of the main achievements of a degrowth society. However, he argues, this is a profound challenge:

"[W]hat is required is a new imaginary creation of a size unparalleled in the past, a creation that would put at the center of human life other significations than the

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[38] Engels (1882), for example, argued that socialism could only offer an abstract utopia ("turn the world upside-down") but could not put the world on its feet again. Social progress would not simply be gained through the understanding that the existence of classes is a contradiction towards justice and equity and that classes should be abolished, but it could be gained through certain new economic conditions.

[39] In this view, the crisis of development is a crisis of the corresponding imaginary significations; in particular, of progress. Castoriadis (2010) argues that nobody believes in progress anymore, but he admits that growth is still an existing imaginary, indeed the only imaginary that subsists in the Western world.

expansion of production and consumption, that would lay down different objectives for life, ones that might be recognized by human beings as worth pursuing…Such is the immense difficulty to which we have to face up. We ought to want a society in which economic values have ceased to be central (or unique), in which the economy is put back in its place as a mere means for human life and not as its ultimate end, in which one therefore renounces this mad race toward ever increasing consumption. That is necessary not only in order to avoid the definitive destruction of the terrestrial environment but also and especially in order to escape from the psychical and moral poverty of contemporary human beings." (Castoriadis 1996, pp. 143-4)

For Castoriadis, leaving our modern society focused on consumption is not only required to avoid ecological disaster, but also desirable from a psychological and moral standpoint. A line of arguments that can often be found in the degrowth literature (Latouche, 2009; D'Alisa et al, 2014). Today, 'growth' and 'development' have become beliefs of an ideological and quasi-religious nature and play a powerful role in the conversion of mentalities. The colonization of the imaginary, speaking here mainly for the Global North, is a mental invasion in which we are both the agents and the victims. In large parts we exercise some kind of "voluntary" self-colonization induced by a culture based on consumerism and the above-mentioned beliefs. Hence, decolonization of the imaginary is first and foremost a cultural revolution or paradigm shift. More than that, it is also about exiting the economy, changing values and de-Westernization. Exiting a dominant imaginary is no easy task, because we cannot "decide" to change it and even less convince others to do so. This is especially the case in a society that is addicted to growth. Here, education – meaning particularly the education of the citizen (gr. paideia), plays a central role; as well as resistance against advertisement – a central ingredient for the creation of 'needs' in consumer society – and its aggressions (Latouche, 2015).

Coined for the first time in 1972 by the French philosopher Andre Gorz, one of the central questions of the degrowth debate remains whether the "[...] earth's balance, for which no-growth – or even degrowth – of material production is a necessary condition, [is] compatible with the survival of the capitalist system?" (Gorz, 1972: iv). Gorz also agreed with the hypothesis of another theoretical pioneer of degrowth,

Nicolas Georgescu-Roegen, that, even at zero-growth, the consumption of scarce resources will inevitably lead to their complete exhaustion and that, if we do not consume less and less of them, it is impossible to conserve scare, non-renewable resources for future generations. With his work Gorz (1980 [1977]) became one of the main contributors of political ecology, that is the academic current/school of thought concerned with the interaction between ecological systems (and their change) and human society. For Gorz, the lack of (ecological) realism meant imagining that unlimited economic growth is physically possible and is increasing human welfare. That is why (political) ecology has to debate and engage with radical political transformation – and argument that can also be found in the work of Murray Bookchin (1982) who distilled the concept of social ecology.

A little earlier than Gorz, Nicolas Georgescu-Roegen (1971) had already pioneered the field of ecological economics or bioeconomics as he himself titled in his main book “The Entropy Law and the Economic Process”. He was among the first economists who thought about the limited amount of Earth's mineral resources and their eventual exhaustion through economic activity. This inclusion of resource and energy flows into economic analysis and modeling was one of the main contributions to establish ecological economics as an independent sub-discipline in the 1980ies. (Røpke, 2005). One of the main arguments in Georgescu-Roegen's book is that thermodynamics is of crucial importance for economics because men cannot create nor destroy matter or energy (1st Law of Thermodynamics), but only transform it. And secondly, that energy tends to be degraded to poorer qualities (2nd Law of Thermodynamics, known as Entropy Law). For human economic activity there are two main sources of low entropy energy: the stock of mineral resources in the earth's crust and the flow of radiation from the sun. The main problem here is that the former is finite and will eventually exhaust. While Georgescu-Roegen accounts for the potential of recycling, he also is aware that recycling requires energy and is often prone to losses. (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971)

Interestingly, Georgescu-Roegen (1971) argues that this natural asymmetry between a finite, and thus scarcer, stock of mineral resources and the virtually infinite flow of the sun's radiation is reflected in the historical contrast between urban and rural life – including the historical subjugation of the latter by the former. The

busy urban life that includes industry is largely depended on the extraction of minerals (at a rate we choose) and, we might add, the food inputs from the rural areas. The rural life and its agriculture, on the other hand, was, and largely still is, depending on the “slower” rhythm of the sun's radiation. He then explains that the rise of modern mechanized agriculture meant the substitution of more abundant resource (the sun's radiation) with scarcer resources (earth's minerals). Additionally, this kind of 'accelerated' agriculture tends to create higher rates of population growth, simply through the increased supply of available food. These observations seem to be the pillars of his rather pessimistic outlook as they led him to concluded that the carrying capacity of the Earth will decline – which it has in fact continuously simply due to increases in population (the same stock of resources divided by a larger number).[40]

Unfortunately for his arguments, Georgescu-Roegen did not completely understand the physics of thermodynamics, which helped discrediting his argumentation. For example, the degradation of material resources cannot be explained by the Entropy Law as he tried to argue. Also, the argument of absolute mineral resource scarcity might be too strict not considering technological change (Young, 1991). However, physical degradation does exist, happens all the time and is often irreversible or only with great amounts of energy. Fortunately, his mistakes led to a lively debate between physicists and economists which concluded that, despite his limited understanding of thermodynamics and apart from the committed mistakes, his work is still compliant with the Laws of Thermodynamic and that his arguments on mineral resource scarcity and, most importantly, declining carrying capacity remain valid. Still, there is not sufficient understanding in economics (including ecological

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[40] In the context of population and population growth, it is interesting to point out the perhaps most significant invention of the last century: the process of synthetically fixing nitrogen. What is today known as the Haber-Bosch process emerged from the work of the German Jewish chemist Fritz Haber who figured out how to reproduce the process that before only was done by bacteria living on the roots of leguminous plants – taking nitrogen from the atmosphere and fixing it into the soil and thus creating more fertile soil. Before that process the amount of nitrogen, which is the most important fertilizer, was fixed by the number of plants/bacteria, and so was the human population whose energy input (food) and growth depended on the soil fertility. Without synthetic fertilizer around forty percent of the population today would not exist. Yet, today we are facing the consequences of this invention and have to figure out ways how to provide food in a sustainable way for a world population that was grown with a very unsustainable technology (Pollan, 2006).

economics) about the physical dimension of the economic process – a critique already formulated by Georgescu-Roegen himself. (Kåberger/Måsson, 2001; Iglesias, 2009; Hammond/Winnet, 2009)

This first debate in the 1970ies and 80ies about degrowth Economics was mainly focused on the earth's resource limits, like the emblematic “Limits to Growth” report by Meadows et al (1971). The report based on extensive simulations concluded that the continued growth scenario (carrying on with ‘business as usual’) would lead to serious population decline and potentially catastrophic socioeconomic conditions on a global scale. In the context of the 1972 oil crisis and the increasing struggle to produce more economic growth in various regions of the world, the report gained wide-spread attention and opened the debate for a wider audience. The report has been updated 30 years later and there have been several adjustments to the trends projected in 1971. However, the update (Meadows et al, 2005) did not come to a completely different conclusion, only the timeline of the events that might potentially occur has shifted a little more towards the future. This means, that the disastrous effects of unlimited growth would simply occur a little later than estimated in 1971. Obviously, simulations are prone to a variety of short-comings and can, at best, only provide probabilities and potentials. However, the update “Limits to Growth” report is considered a rather comprehensive and detailed work – suggesting that its conclusion should not be discarded easily.

It might seem that the debate should have advanced a lot since its beginnings, but the end of the oil crisis and the intensifying structural reforms in the 1980ies – above all a global trend towards more economic deregulation, which initially led to more GDP growth – were conducive to the submersion of the degrowth debate. Not considering some few exceptions (like Jaques Grinevald's contribution), it took until the turn of the Millennium that the debate gained new momentum through a series of initiatives and projects starting in France. According to D'Alisa et al (2014), an important moment was the publication of a special issue of Silence magazine in 2002 that was dedicated to Georgescu-Roegen's work and which reached more people (5000 copies and 2 reprints). Another one was the 2002 conference “Défaire le développement, Refaire le monde” (eng. Undo development, remake the world) organized by an alliance between environmental activists and the post-development

academic community. Additionally, in the same year, the Institute for Economic and Social Studies on Sustainable Degrowth was founded in Lyon. Now, in the second phase and in contrast to the 70ies, the debate was mainly driven by criticism of the hegemonic idea/ideology of sustainable development; a concept that had reached, at that moment, an almost law-like character and very high rates of approval both from public opinion and policy makers.

By now it should have become already clear, that the society that degrowth proponents are envisioning would be radically different in a variety of aspects. Some basic principles that should guide the 'development' of such society include: sharing and cooperation instead of exclusive use and competition; simplicity (especially in material terms) instead of unnecessary complexity and affluence; conviviality instead of exaggerated individualism; caring instead of commodification; common property instead of private property. Obviously, these are opposites with a broad spectrum of possible coexistence in between. In the next two sections we will first explore underlying theoretical currents and then the just mentioned principles and their implications further. These principles are opposed to the dominant logic/dynamics we are experiencing in contemporary capitalism. And their adaption, or the struggle towards them, should not be understood as simply substituting one paradigm – e.g. the one of infinite economic growth – with another. The idea of degrowth (and other alternatives to development) is not to directly abolish, for example, private property (arguably one of the central institutions of capitalism) but rather to create complementary institutions/mechanisms/values that allow for a certain liberation and emancipation from the dominant ideology. And, eventually, help to establish a plurality of worldviews in which, returning to the example, private property might have a very different and probably less dominant role.

3.2 Theoretical influences and general lines of thought

According to D'Alisa et al (2014) there are several theoretical schools or lines of thought that have influenced the debate around degrowth. They list anti-utilitarianism, bioeconomics, critiques of Development, environmental justice, some currents of environmentalism, the idea of a societal metabolism, political ecology and steady-state economics. There certainly could be made an argument for other

additional influences, but this list is rather broad and offers a great starting point for our discussion of the ideas and concepts related to degrowth. Therefore, the following section will provide a brief summary of the theoretical origins just mentioned above, link them to the historical origins discussed in the last section and provide some additional elements. We should mention that several of these theoretical origins have some intersections or even direct links with each other.

The critique of utilitarianism, and more specifically its dominance in social science, is **anti-utilitarianism**. From the anti-utilitarian perspective, the idea that every human action is a strategy of egoistical calculations has become quasi-hegemonic in the humanities through the influence of modern main-stream economics. Furthermore, it drastically reduces human beings and their motivation. The problem is, according to Caille (1989, p.4-5), that: *"[…] utilitarianism is not a philosophical system or a component among others of the dominant ideology in modern societies. Rather it has become that ideology; to the point that, for modern people, it is largely incomprehensible and unacceptable that what cannot be translated in terms of usefulness and instrumental effectiveness.*" Certainly, there are other motivations and goals the egoistical self-interest. There is pleasure – which utilitarians would define as interest as well – and there is also duty and service. Especially the two latter are link to the logic of the gift. A gift can act as connection between individuals and groups creating – on a micro-sociological level, but extendable – a logic of triple obligation: to give, to receive, to return. In fact, the vision of a gift economy as a complementary circle to other forms of economy is a proposal that has gained attention within the degrowth debate (Eisenstein, 2011; Romano, 2014)

The field of **bioeconomics** is closely related to the work of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (1971) already discussed in the last section. As a field of studies bioeconomics is almost identical with ecological economics. The term was coined by Jiri Zeman in the 1960s who meant to describe a new form of economics, one that takes into account the biological substance of the economic process. According to Bonaiuti (2011) Georgescu-Roegen later adopted the term to summarize the most important conclusions of his research. The first main insight here is that the economic process cannot ignore the bio-physical limits of our planet, meaning that unlimited growth of production and consumption, both based on finite sources of

energy and matter, is not compatible with the laws of physics. This first insight, widely accepted within ecological economics, leads to a second, methodological conclusion: that the circular, reversible and apparently indefinitely itself reproducing presentations of the economic processes must be replaced by an evolutionary representation. This new representation necessarily includes an interaction with the bio-physical roots of the production/consumption process, on one side, and with values and institutional frames on the other. In the latter aspect, Georgescu-Reogen's bioeconomics also differs from Daly's steady-state economics (see below) in questioning the anthropological and institutional foundations of the capitalist economy. In other words, for Georgescu-Roegen the “ecological unsustainability was only the final consequence of the cultural and institutional premises that characterize growth economies” (Bonaiuti, 2014, p.75)

Another recent debate that is fundamental to degrowth is the one on **environmental justice**. This debate started in the late 1970ies in the Global North, particularly in the US where first mobilization campaigns were addressing environmental contamination and its impacts on human health, effectively creating a civil rights discourse. Interestingly, a case in Warren County, NC in 1982 already incorporated a racial dimension as the affected African American residents and their resistance shed light on the disproportionate harm that marginalized groups often suffer – thus, showing the close relationship between environmental inequalities environmental discrimination and environmental racism (Anguelovski, 2014). From these social movements in the 1970ies and 80ies sprung an extensive, interdisciplinary body of research around the topic, ranging from sociology, political ecology, environmental policy and health to environmental law and governance for sustainability. In its essence, environmental justice is about addressing environmental inequalities; about an equitable distribution of environmental risks and benefits; about participation in environmental decision-making (regardless one's race, gender, income, etc.); about recognizing different cultures and ways of life within the natural environment (Schlosberg, 2007).

Environmental justice is thus about one's right to remain in a place and environment and being protected from uncontrolled pollution, land grabbing, speculation/investment and abandonment. But it has more than this local dimension,

because much of the toxic waste from industry, agriculture and consumer electronics is being exported to poorer nations to be dismantled or simply dumped in landfills; or entire “dirty' industries (e.g. coal power plants and mining) are being transferred to developing nations. Here the international dimension of environmental justice is clearly demonstrated (Carmin/Agyeman, 2011). Furthermore, there is a temporal dimension which is especially concerned with the next and future generations. If human rights – including the right to life and health which require a rather intact environment – are thought consequently to the end, then many argue that we have a responsibility to ensure them for unborn generations as well (Westra, 2006). Inequalities also exist regarding the allocation of environmental goods and services, something that is quite apparent in cities. Deprived minority communities often lack access to green spaces, waste collection or just street cleaning. In the US, for example, we observe decaying inner cities contrasting green suburbs; in India unauthorized slums in contrast to secluded gated communities which benefit from environmental amenities (Anguelovski, 2014).

While the term originated in the North, it quickly spread to the Global South where it has been linked to environmentalism and the conflicts that were already taking place around land struggles and environmental disasters. Over the years, the environmental justice agenda has thus expanded and become more multi-faceted, including both the poor rural farmer who resists land grabbing from multinational companies (“environmentalism of the poor”) and the well-off urban middle-class demanding clean transit-systems, green spaces or healthy and affordable food and housing (Agyeman et al, 2003). The environmental justice debate clearly shows that land is a matter of private – yet often with involvement of the government apparatus, legal frameworks and so on – appropriation, speculation and exploitation; in rural areas as well as in cities, in the North as well as in the South. This fight against an uneven spatial development is a defense of the right to place, which explains why many environmental activists today are also involved in struggles connected to the right to the city. Lefevbre's ideas on controlling the spaces of production, using and shaping the city are also widely used within the degrowth discourses. Combining the environmental justice demands with degrowth means that “consuming and producing less is not enough per se. The 'less' needs to be distributed more equally,

with people controlling production processes so that cities and rural spaces become more equal.” (Anguelovski, 2014, p.87)

The whole debate on environmental justice is one of the main currents within the larger discourse of environmentalism. According to Martinez-Alier (2014), the two other cold be labeled as the 'Cult of Wilderness' and the 'Gospel of Eco-efficieny'. The former's main concern, inspired by naturalist such as John Muir and his efforts to create national parks, is the preservation of pristine nature and the protection of wildlife for its ecological and aesthetic value. However, the conservation movement – or at least its main actors – has been drawn to an economic language. Following official United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) discourse, which claims: to raise visibility to biodiversity loss, we need to focus on ecosystems (not on single species), then on ecosystem's services for humans, and finally on giving economic value to those services because it is the only way to steer politicians and businesses towards conservation. This approach of “putting a price tag on nature” would certainly not comply with the ethics of the old naturalists.

The third main current of environmentalism is the debate on Eco-efficiency. This branch of environmentalism might be to most powerful today, mainly because it promises, quite intriguingly, to overcome the ecological degradation created by industrialization and economic growth. The idea is simply to produce more goods and services while using less resources and creating less waste and pollution. Eco-efficiency is closely linked to the discourses of ecological modernization and sustainable development, all expressing the belief that ecology and economy can be favorably combined. Hence, the idea is not about respecting pristine nature but rather about optimal rates of resource extraction (e.g. tradable fishing quotas) , the substitution of lost natural capital with manufactured capital, payment for ecosystem services or carbon trading. Unsurprisingly, eco-efficiency has become widely known through a publication of the World Business Counsel for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and has been accepted by global business as a key strategy towards sustainable development. Even though more eco-efficient choices are generally better for the natural environment than less efficient ones, that can hardly be seen as the solution to unsustainability. The gains in eco-efficiency, which have lagged

behind expectations, could be easily offset by larger increases in total output, thus further decreasing the earth's carrying capacity (Ehrenfeld, 2005).

Besides those main currents, many other aspects might be gathered under the term environmentalism. For some it implies some form of activism like supporting pressure groups. For others, mainly voices from the Global South, environmentalism is a meaningless concept because in their world view people are not distinguishable from nature. Many green parties in Europe that had their origins in environmental movements are occupying formerly “red” or center-left positions in the political spectrum. In sum, environmentalism is a very diverse and heterogeneous field and often contains contradicting views – a connecting theme, however, are varying concepts of justice (Jamieson, 2007). Within the degrowth debate there is huge skepticism about the benefits of eco-efficiency which, from this perspective, are mostly nullified by rebound effects. But we can certainly find overlapping discourses between degrowth and the conservation movement and, even more, with the environmental justice movement and the environmentalism of the poor. The two latter often consist of local resistance movements that address livelihood, social, cultural, economic and environmental aspects – a nexus of issues that is very similar to degrowth. In all three discourses we can find, for example, demands for “resource caps”, also campaigns such as “leaving the oil in the soil” are neatly aligned to degrowth ideas. Another common denominator is the attempt to downgrade the social relevance of the market by arguing that many people around the globe organize their livelihood through communal management (Martinez-Alier, 2012).

Another current of thought that reverberates in the degrowth debate is the one on **social or societal metabolism**. The idea of metabolism can be traced back to the 19th century where it was already used to denote an exchange of energy and substances between organisms (like a biological cell or a whole state) and the environment. Marx and Engels picked up the concept in their discussion on the dynamics of socio-environmental change and evolution. According to Foster (2000) the concept of metabolism is used by Marx in his analysis of the alienation of nature, what he calls 'metabolic rift'. Foster also claims that this critique of environmental degradation is evidence of Marx's ecological perspective (already anticipating later ecological thought). The appropriation and control of energy and material flows are

a natural feature of every human societies, but their magnitude and diversity vary largely between cultures and 'metabolic regimes'.[41] And today there are several different perceptions of the term. For example, in the use of material and energy flow analysis (MEFA) of economies, mostly concerned with the quantities of such flows, advocated by the Vienna school of social metabolism (Fischer-Kowalski/Steinberger, 2011). Or in the field of political ecology, where metabolism invokes a notion of the separation between humans and nature in capitalism, the social power relations that affect the energy-material flows. Also, the increase in those flows (created by continuing growth) will very probably lead to distributional conflicts, especially along the commodity frontiers (Molina/Toledo, 2014; Muradian et al, 2012).

The term societal metabolism is an expansion of social metabolism and has been introduced by Giampietro et al (2012). The focus is not only on the quantity of flows but to connect those flows with the agents (often referred to as 'funds' following Georgescu-Roegen's nomenclature) that transform input flows into outflows. Then, metabolic indicators (e.g. energy input per hour of labor) are established to describe the characteristics of a system. Thus, this kind of integrated analysis (considering multiple dimensions and scales) links the economic process to the biophysical transformations caused by the production of goods and services. Through the metabolic indicators – referring either to socio-economic aspects, ecological aspects or both – a “benchmark” can be established to assess to biophysical and economic performance of a system. The societal metabolism of, for example, an industry sector can vary significantly even between apparently similar countries due to different biophysical and social constraints.[42]

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[41] Hunter-gatherer societies, for example, were within a solar metabolic regime, using merely the energy and material provided for by the sun. In contrast, industrial societies are in a fossil fueled socio-metabolic regime. Obviously, fossil fuels were created by the sun as well. However, we can think of them as energy stocks (and not flows), in the sense that their creation required millions of years.

[42] Giampietro et al (2012) offer a comparison of different energy-intensive industry (mining, energy, manufacturing and construction) in various European countries and show that the energy throughput per hour can vary from 130 to 1,000 MJ/hour. Likewise, labor productivity can range from 10 to 50Euro/hour.

According to Şorman/Giampietro (2013), the analysis of societal metabolism could be a useful approach for degrowth proponents to evaluate the feasibility and desirability of alternative modes of development from an energetic and material perspective. However, this perspective brings some challenges to the degrowth proposals with it. The current metabolic patterns are based on the exploitation of fossil fuels, a source with a high output yield and quality. And the use of fossil fuels has drastically reduced the amount of inputs (energy, labor, technical capital, etc.) that are required for the production of useful energy itself. Reaching 'peak oil' might very probably imply that we have to switch to lower quality energy alternatives, which in turn implies an increase in the amount of inputs diverted to energy production. So, in order to maintain the metabolic patterns of today's Global North and assuming a future energy scarcity, this means that people would have to work more. A clear contradiction to the degrowth proposal of reducing working hours or work sharing.[43] In sum, degrowth strategies based on (voluntary) reduction of the societal metabolism might not be enough on their own (Şorman, 2014).

Another influence and a field that is closely related to the degrowth ideas is **political ecology**. This field studies the complex interactions and relationships between political, economic and social factors, on one hand, and environmental issues, on the other. In contrast to 'apolitical' science, political ecology is specifically concerned with politicizing environmental aspects, including analysis of power relations between groups with differing access to resources. In short, it is an approach that combines ecology with political economy. It is also a rather heterodox (academic) community concerned with greater social and ecological justice, a community that advocates a plurality of knowledge and a diversity of actions (Robbins, 2011).

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[43] We should add here that these assumptions of future energy scarcity are based on a variety of other assumptions that might not prove valid. For example, the already on-going transition to renewable energies might result in technological advances that improve their energy quality and efficiency. More importantly, the degrowth proposals also advocate a “reduced metabolism” and not maintaining its current patterns. Yet, this criticism should not be dismissed because the potential of energy scarcity without having established a slimmer metabolism first does certainly exist. Additionally, energy and material reductions in on part of the world could be outpaced by population growth or increased demands in other regions. And finally, as discussed in chapter 2 (on development and technology), we tend to have too much optimism regarding technology.

In academia, political ecologists are drawn from various disciplines, including among others geography, anthropology, development studies, political science and sociology. This interdisciplinary nature and its broad scope led to multiple understandings of the term. According to Bryant/Bailey (1997), however, there are three central assumptions that most, if not all, political ecologist share. First, political ecologists assume that social, economic and political difference lead to an uneven distribution of (environmental) costs and benefits. In other words, societies are not affected homogeneously by changes in the environment. Then, those changes will influence the political and economic status-quo. And third, both just mentioned dynamics will have impact the existing power relations.

The last theoretical influence we will discuss here is the concept of a **steady-state economy**. This idea, mainly associated with the work of Herman Daly (1991; 1993), is closely linked to the concept of bioeconomics and metabolism. A steady-state economy would be characterized by a stable human population and a constant rate of throughput, meaning the extraction of raw materials from nature and their return in form of waste into nature's sinks. Daly argues that "a steady-state economy is a necessary and desirable future state and its attainment requires quite major changes in values, as well as radical, but non-revolutionary, institutional reform. Once we have replaced the basic premise of "more is better" with the much sounder axiom of "enough is best", the social and technical problems of moving to a steady state become solvable, perhaps even trivial." (Daly, 1991, p.2) So, here is a clear argument that technical solutions alone will not suffice and that in the transition to a supposedly more sustainable future (the steady-state economy) we must deal with problems of political economy which will require normative, moral and ethical solutions.

Daly, however, was not the first to think a about a steady state. In fact, several of the classical political economists, including Adam Smith, David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill, developed ideas on 'stationary' states of the economy. For many classical economists the general development of society seemed like contrast of scarce arable land on one hand, and the growth of population and capital on the other. For Smith, for example, every country that had reach its potential in terms of land/territory, population and capital would eventually reach a stationary state of

constant population and capital. For Smith this also implies that, in this development process of growing material wealth, the opportunities for profits would continuously decline (until reaching zero in the stationary state), thus investment opportunities would diminish, the society could not further advance and both wages and profits would be at a minimum – a rather negative outlook. Contrary to this view, John Stuart Mill envisioned the stationary state as something desirable, an improvement and even the fulfillment of (his) liberal ideals. (Blaug, 1985)

Returning to Daly's vision, the steady-state economy must follow five rules or principles in order to function. First, the extraction of renewable resources cannot exceed the regeneration rate, otherwise those resource stocks would decline. Second, the amount of waste that we create cannot exceed the waste absorption capacity without creating increasing harm to the environment. Third, we must acknowledge that within our current system we are utterly dependent on fossil fuels, meaning that it would be unlikely to meet the needs of the current population without the use of some non-renewable resources (mainly oil). Thus, the rate of extraction of these non-renewables cannot exceed the rate at which society creates renewable substitutes for them. Fourth, the functioning of the earth's ecosystems is essential for human survival, therefore resources extraction and waste emission cannot harm them. And fifth, we have to reach a point at which human population is stable (Daly, 1991). Specifically, the last rule is rather controversial leading some steady-state proponents to praise, for example, the 'one child' policy in China. Regarding the first four rules, the most obvious solution would be to limit our throughput, possible either through taxes or legal restrictions.

The concept of a steady-state economic, as presented here, also includes some distributional issues. If implemented, the main beneficiaries of a steady-state economy would be future generations who would probably have sufficient resources to meet their needs.[44] That does not imply that we should ignore the unmet needs of today's generations. According to estimates, roughly one billion people are

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[44] We used the word “probably” in this phrase because there is no way of telling what the needs and preferences of future generations will be. We might assume that they have the same, or at least similar, bio-physical need, but even that might prove wrong if those generations find different ways of nurturing themselves.

experiencing some kind of poverty or deprivation and with little or no chance to escape those conditions (Collier, 2007; Sachs, 2005, World Bank, 2016).[45] So, the limitation of our throughput implies also a discussion about who is entitled to it – the ethical debate on this should start with an equal distribution of our common inheritance. And practically it seems very unlikely that the people who are already struggling to achieve their material needs would reduce their present consumption on favor of future generations. Thus, we find ourselves in a situation where degrowth is necessary for our planet, but many people are still unable to meet their basic human needs. If you are living in conditions of poverty, the marginal benefits of economic growth are huge. In the conditions of, for example, Western Europe, more growth has very little, arguably even negative, effects on well-being. Reducing consumption in the wealthy nations (and groups) without reducing quality of life would offer more available resources for meeting basic human needs in the poorest nations. A transition towards a steady-state economy would therefore need a process of degrowth in the Global North (and possible some growth in the South) that is both environmentally sustainable and socially equitable (Farley, 2015).

3.3 Principles and Concepts around degrowth

A compilation of principles directly linked to the degrowth imaginary is provided by Serge Latouche, a decade-long, prolific researcher in the field (see Latouche, 1993; 2003; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2015). He cites eight principles for a degrowth society: re-evaluate, re-conceptualize, restructure, redistribute, re-localize, reduce, re-use and recycle (Latouche, 2009, p.33). Although this list could be expanded – radicalize, relax, re-invent, re-size, etc. – Latouche argues that all further extensions are, to some extent, implicit in his eight. In the pursuit of an autonomous degrowth society these interdependent principles create a self-reinforcing virtuous cycle that could

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[45] This number of one billion should not be viewed as something very accurate. Indeed, it is not easy to measure a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon like poverty. The sources cited here are both using the one Dollar a day (or 1.25 in the World Bank Report) – measured in 2005 purchasing power parity – definition of poverty. The argument here is not about how many people are living under conditions of poverty but that it is a significant part of the global population and, that even more than half a century of growth did not end this situation.

trigger a degrowth process that would be serene, convivial and sustainable. Let us briefly summarize these principles, some apparently self-explaining, to get a better notion of them.

When Latouche (2009) talks about re-evaluation he refers to the underlying cultural values of our society. He criticizes that the bourgeois values of modernity – honor, public service, "a good job well done", etc. – have been replaced by the obsessive drive to accumulate more money and the search for personal fame/importance. There are some obvious values that should be promoted over others, such as altruism instead of egoism, cooperation instead of unbridled competition, the local over the global, the importance of social life instead endless consumerism. Most importantly, we have to abandon "*the belief that we must dominate nature and try to live in harmony with it. […] [T]o replace the attitude of the predator with the that of the gardener*" (ibid. p.35). A change of values allows us the see/perceive the world from a new perspective which, in turn, enables us to re-conceptualize (or redefine/resize) our (development) concepts. From a degrowth perspective, one of the most important concepts to be redefined are wealth and poverty. Both are often reduced to quantitative, monetary dimensions – not coincidentally the most common definition for poverty is the access to a certain amount of money per day (e.g. 2US Dollars). The re-conceptualization of wealth and poverty is closely linked to the economic imaginary of scarcity and abundance.

Ivan Illich (1973; 2013) offers a straight-forward argument that our capitalist economy appropriates and commodities nature, thus transforming natural abundance into scarcity through the creation of artificial needs and shortages to increase demand and profits. Recent examples of this expansive dynamic is the privatization of water or living organism themselves (GMO patents) – both in benefit of powerful economic interests and with disadvantageous effects for the local population. By expansion of the market and commodification of nature, the mainstream assumptions about scarcity become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In fact, the discussion about what we think is wealth and prosperity is a central topic in the degrowth debate. Tim Jackson (2009) elaborated extensively on this in his book "Prosperity without Growth – Economics for a Finite Planet". Jackson develops a vision of prosperity that resonates a lot with the degrowth ideas. Jackson

acknowledges that the current vision of prosperity as an ever-expanding economy might have worked in a less populated world (see "full world economics"), but that this vision is not adequate for our reality. Hence, he tries to establish a concept of prosperity that does not rely on default assumptions about consumption growth. In his words, a vision of prosperity "in which it is possible for human beings to flourish, to achieve greater social cohesion, to find higher levels of well-being and yet still to reduce their material impact on the environment" (ibid. p.35).

Latouche (2009) goes on with the principle of restructuring which refers to the adaption of the productive apparatus and of social relations to changing values. If the systemic set of dominant values is becoming less stable, these restructurings/adaptions could and should be rather radical – like shifting from conventional, industrial agriculture to permaculture approaches. This requires a little further explanation, because permaculture might be one of the central elements of a socio-ecological transition. Permaculture has its focus on, but is not limited to food production. As Veteto/Lockyer (2008) point out form an anthropological perspective, achieving sustainability will require actions that is grounded in extensive knowledge about the local ecological, political-economic, and socio-cultural systems – additionally to global awareness and scientific acumen. In this context, the permaculture principles offer a practical foundation for a holistic and sustainable life. Following the Permaculture Activist's definition, they define permaculture as "*a holistic system of DESIGN, based on direct observation of nature, learning from traditional knowledge and the findings of modern science. Embodying a philosophy of positive action and grassroot education, Permaculture aims to restructure society by returning control of resources of living: food, water, shelter and the means of livelihood, to ordinary people in their communities, as the only antidote to centralized power*" (ibid., p. 48).

Returning to Latouche (2009), the author recommends aiming high here, because this restructuring is essentially about finding the way to a degrowth society. A restructuring of social relations effectively leads to the next principle of redistribution meaning the distribution of wealth and access to natural patrimony (between North and South, between and within societies, classes, generations and individuals). There are various negative effects associated with economic inequalities - such as

asymmetric political influence (and instability), increased crime and violence (often racially biased), decreases in health and education or even financial crises (Stolzenberg et al, 2006; Stiglitz, 2012; Piketty, 2015) – and redistribution certainly could offer a counter-balance to those effects. Redistribution could also have positive effects on the reduction of consumption. On one hand, it would reduce to power and monetary wealth of the 'world consumer class' (essentially the top 20-30% of the global income pyramid) and curb the power of the 'big predators' (corporations, hedge fonds, super-rich, etc.). On the other hand, it could have an indirect effect by removing the incentives for conspicuous consumption. Following Veblen's (1994 [1899]) classic work, this refers to the desire to consume not out of need but out of another desire, to assert social status and imitate the peers directly above us in the social hierarchy.

The principle of re-localization is a central element in the process of restructuring the productive apparatus, meaning simply to produce as much as possible on a local basis. The “global division of labor” is often hailed as one of the pinnacles of modern capitalist economy without considering the enormous environmental and social costs involved. Thus, a degrowth demand is that most of the products needed to satisfy the population's needs should be produced in local factories and financed on a local basis by collective savings. Here, a concrete degrowth policy is the restriction of commodity and capital flows – something that also other heterodox schools of thought, like the Keynesians, advocate (Gallagher, 2011). The demand to re-localize is not only in the economic sphere, indeed it means that politics, culture and the very meaning of life must rediscover their local roots. This also implies that all decision in these areas that can be made on the local level must be made at the local level.

The principle of reducing primarily refers to the impact we are having on the biosphere. The obvious starting points are our habitual over-consumption and the unbelievable amount of waste we produce. Some studies estimate that up to 80% of the goods in the market are only used once and then thrown directly into the trash (Hulot, 2006). And we can also observe huge loses in the food production system where a significant amount of the harvest is often lost on its way to the customer (Hodges et al, 2011). The production of waste is another clear indicator of ecological injustice considering that a US household is producing around 760kg of domestic

waste each year while a comparable household in most Southern countries produces only around 200kg/year (Paquot, 2007). Understanding our Earth and its ecosystems as a sink for our waste products we have to admit that each individual, collective or nations has only a right to a limited amount of waste and pollution.

Finally, long-distance mass tourism is another field that needs to be dis-encouraged in the process of creating a degrowth society. Even more orthodox views come easily to the conclusion that tourism in its conventional form already is one of the main environmental threats today (Tomkins, 2006). The main environmental problem here is the completely unsustainable form of transportation, air travel. But of course, there are important other 'unsustainable' factors at work. For instance, very little of the money/resources that we spend on holidays in other countries is actually benefiting the local people there. And there are certainly many cases where tourism has encouraged social and environmental degradation for the local/regional space – widely discussed examples are the tourist invasion of Venice or Barcelona and the resistance of the locals to regain their city (García-Hernández et al, 2017). Besides this European context, there are, obviously, far more examples in the Global South were tourism activities have expelled local populations in some form and heavily impacted on local environments. For instance, African safaris threatening endangered wildlife, mass tourism destroying culture heritage in Cambodia or, the perhaps most unsustainable form of leisure travel, cruise ships unloading thousands of consumer tourists (Becker, 2013).

This rejection of unsustainable tourism does not mean to reject the desire to travel and to experience adventures, both arguably important elements of human nature. This form of enrichment should be encouraged, but not at the cost of the 'target' countries. The tourism industry has, quite effectively, transformed our curiosity for the new into an obsession with traveling (always further, faster and more often) that is based on the idea of a 'supermodern life of a travelite', an artificially created need. The degrowth view on traveling would be to enjoy its slowness and to appreciate our local territories. Slow travel here is not only referring to using your own feet, a bicycle or public transportation, but, more generally, to the attitude of the traveler. There is, unsurprisingly, a strong link to the 'slow food' movement, which is not simply about eating slower but about a permanent lifestyle redesign. Both concepts

unite people with pro-environmental attitudes who want more freedom from expectations, consumerism and the contemporary fast-pace living in order to really appreciate travel experience and respect the local space, people, food, etc. (Dickison and Lumsdon, 2010; Smith, 2012). Although slow travel or slow tourism is certainly marginal in the global tourist market, it demonstrates alternatives for sustainable tourism which converge with many, if not most, degrowth principles (Andriotis, 2014).

The last principles Latouche (2009) formulates are re-use and recycle, both directly addressing the problem of conspicuous consumption. This includes the fight against planned obsolescence of appliances and, ultimately, the rejection of marketing merely for the creation of artificial needs and further corporate profits. Waste that cannot be reused directly has to be recycled. Here, the possibilities seem endless and many have already been tested in practice at a small scale. We can think of products made of naturally degradable materials that simply decompose after the product's life cycle, of course, without any extra energy investment needed. Or of products designed in a way that allow for maximal re-use of their components. An early example of such design are the photocopy machines from Xerox which are designed to be returned to the company after their useful life for maximal reuse of the materials they are made from (Bevilacqua, 2006). However, the voluntary initiatives of single firms are not enough. What is missing are incentives that stimulate both producers and consumers to re-use and recycle more; what is missing is political will. Considering that both re-using and recycling are opposed to creating more and new goods (meaning profit opportunities), the resistance of special interests against such initiatives should be significant.

3.4 Degrowth and autonomy

It might seem that degrowth is just a reaction -and the intended adaption to the biophysical limits of our planet. That, however, would reduce the concept absurdly. The whole idea behind degrowth is to transcend mere criticism and propose constructive alternatives that are established in a positive way. In this sense, one of the main objectives of degrowth proposals is to increase autonomy, both individual and collective. We could of course agree that this means reducing our dependency

from certain things and that is certainly also the point. Still, 'degrowers' would generally prefer to discuss how to achieve more autonomy instead of the “negative” version of how to reduce dependency. This makes not only sense from a psychological and educational point of view but also expresses the philosophical attitude of how to approach any given issue. The same way that self-imposed limitations (especially concerning material issues) are not primarily demand because their positive implications for the ecological overshoot we are experiencing at the moment. Voluntary and intentional (indeed conscious) decision on how to consume (and thus produce) less are rather conceived as a 'good life' and valuable for their own sake.

The idea of a simply life as basis for happiness is ancient and can be found throughout various religious and spiritual thoughts, ranging from Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian to Buddhist and Confucian traditions. More recently, individuals such as Mahatma Gandhi or Albert Schweizer advocated simplicity by emphasizing self-sufficiency and disengagement of possessions (Shi, 2001; Alexander, 2014). A central reference on this topic for the degrowth debate is Ernst Schumacher's (1973) work “Small is beautiful: a study of economics as if people mattered”. Schumacher who came to Oxford due to John Maynard Keynes – indeed even helped him with his 'Plan of an International Clearing Union' – developed a philosophy of 'enoughness' which he later called, inspired by his trips as economic consultant to Zambia and Burma, Buddhist Economics.[46] One of the main pillars of his theory is the proposal for human-scale, decentralized and appropriate (or 'intermediate') technologies. Examples of such a technology are a hand-powered water pump or a passive solar house design – people-centered and self-powered equipment that allows energy-efficient (with none or low fossil fuel use), labor-intensive, low cost, environmentally sound and locally autonomous activities. Such technologies would

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[46] Buddhist Economics has, since then, become its own sub-field of study concerned with the psychology and emotions that influence economic activity. Using a more philosophical and spiritual approach to economics, Buddhist economics wants to inquire which of human activities are harmful or beneficial. So, economic performance is evaluated based on how much quality of life it delivers while also being in harmony with nature. This corresponds to what Buddhists call “the Middle Way' – a balance between worldly indulgence and asceticism through meditative self-discipline. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index is an example of the direct policy application of Buddhist economics (Payutto, 1992).

be compatible with a 'simple' life and reduce political and economic vulnerability – therefore, increase autonomy and resilience (Schumacher, 2011).

In short, voluntary simplicity can be seen as a way of life that involves consciously minimizing resource-intensive and wasteful consumption, on one side, and progressively allocating more time and energy in non-materialistic sources of meaning and happiness. According to Alexander and Ussher (2012), voluntary simplicity assumes that humans can live a free, happy, meaningful, and diverse lives without consuming more than an equitable share of nature. It also assumes that embracing a live style of sufficiency enables individuals to pursue non-materialistic objectives which require very little or no money such as social engagements, spending more time with the family, artistic or Do-it-yourself projects, more fulfilling employment, political participation and so on. The most recent manifestations of the simplicity movements include, for example, Transition Towns, permaculture projects or Eco-Villages, all advocating an anti-consumerist and environmentally sustainable life style. Even though these initiatives are marginal in our society, they are building alternatives by living them – a powerful demonstration of feasibility. While some of those movements might prefer to act less political – at least in the conventional sense of institutionalized politics – and have been criticized of 'escapism', in order to change marco-economic and political structures these movements should seek to radically transform the current system. And, adopting a simpler life style might be a trigger for the cultural change required in, or even before, a degrowth transition (Alexander, 2012).

Three authors that have extensively discussed autonomy in their work and who are often cited in the degrowth literature are Ivan Illich, Andre Gorz and Cornelius Castoriadis. D'Alisa et al (2015) briefly summarize their work arguing that each of them had a slightly different meaning of autonomy. Ivan Illich, for example, thought autonomy as freedom from large high-tech infrastructures and the often highly centralized (public and private) bureaucracies that are required to establish, manage and maintain them. Gorz, on the other hand, imagined autonomy as freedom from wage-labor, above all the alienating kind. Autonomy thus springs from the sphere of non-paid work in which individuals and collectives produce for their own use (instead of producing for money) and even enjoy leisure. In Castoriadis' perspective

autonomy mainly refers to the ability of a group/collective/society to make decisions about their future in common. According to him our processes of decision-making is heavily influenced by external imperatives, created, for example, by religion ("the law of God") or economics ("the laws of the economy"). To free ourselves – perhaps never completely, but at least to some extent – from those givens, a first step is to recognize that these are our own social constructions. Then we can begin to understand how and why we created them and whether they still serve our objectives. All three authors greatly inspired the degrowth debate.

What has the degrowth movement absorb of these ideas proposed by Illich? One direct consequence of thinking autonomy this way is that an inevitable event such as "peak oil"[47] is not only considered disadvantageous because of the biophysical effects that will (and already are) resulting from consuming it. Following Illich's vision, the access and use of high amounts of energy supports complex technological systems that would hardly be possible without that amount of energy. And complex systems in turn require highly specialized experts and bureaucracies to manage them. This creates cause and effect chain inevitably leads to undemocratic and non-egalitarian hierarchies (D'Alisa et al, 2015). So, even if we can find a completely renewable, clean and sustainable energy source that would deliver energy in abundance[48], we would have just found a solution to the technological problem of energy creation. We would, however, not have dealt with the social problems that this technology can – and in the contexts of contemporary capitalism most probably will – create. This demonstrates clearly that the focus on technological fixes to sustainability issues can never be sufficient.

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[47] Meaning simply the end of petrol as a finite resource in the chambers of our earth's crust. Peak oil does not imply that we might not be able to find artificial or even natural substitutes for the oil we are so dependent on.

[48] The issue of access and use of energy is obviously a central topic in this discussion and here it seemed adequate to mention that energy experts hail nuclear fusion as such a technology. It is certainly not completely renewable, nor completely clean, nor completely waste-less; however, it seems to get close to all these goals. But then, we must consider the enormous amount of resources that are invested, for example, in establishing this technology and the pressure of economic interests to commercialize at some point.

A central influence of the degrowth debate is French philosopher Andre Gorz. Already in the 1980ies he argued that the overshoot dilemma could not be solved by avoiding more consumption. He wrote, that “even at zero growth, the continued consumption of scarce resources will inevitably result in exhausting them completely. The point is not to refrain from consuming more and more, but to consume less and less – there is no other way of conserving the available reserves for future generations” (Gorz, 1980, p.13). This thinking is based on, among others, the assumption that it is impossible to know future needs with certainty. Thus, if we do not want to diminish the chances of our children to live a 'good life' in their own design we should apply what is called the precautionary principle. The idea behind this principle is rather simple. In a context of inherent uncertainty and lack of (sufficient) knowledge – for example on environmental tipping points – it declares that we have a social responsibility to try to prevent harm and future risks even if it implies costs whose benefits are uncertain (Gollier et al, 2000).

Considering all these ideas on autonomy from a degrowth perspective, it becomes clear that autonomy requires convivial tools – meaning tools that are understandable, manageable and controllable by their users. In this sense, an urban gardening project creates more autonomy than an industrialized weed-resistant GMO field, a bicycle more than a high-speed train and a DIY adobe house more than an energy-efficient smart building. High-tech projects proposed for ecological modernization and “green growth” are seen as problematic not only because they often turn out to be unsustainable (Rogers, 2014), but also because the reduce our autonomy. On the other hand, a project thought within the degrowth imaginary, that is shaped directly by its participants and that often involves voluntary work, is convivial (D'Alisa et al, 2015).

According to Deriu (2015) the concept of conviviality that Illich developed is beyond the importance of a social bond (as in the commonly used sense of the word) or joyfulness. He refers to a society where modern tools are used by everyone (or at a minimum the individuals/groups that will benefit from their use) in an integrated and shared manner. As discussed above, the necessity of a vast body of specialists to control these tools would reduce our autonomy and render these tools non-convivial. Conviviality in Illich's (1973) definition is the opposite of 'industrial productivity'

because industrially produced devices limits the human abilities – virtually taking away the freedom to produce their own goods or share/exchange what they need outside the market. This is based on the awareness that certain 'thresholds' of well-being cannot be crossed. If our needs are transformed in commodities than new commodities can also create new needs. That means, in turn, that our well-being (as in fulfilling our needs) cannot, at some point, be increased by the production of commodities.

Some tools are easily defined as convivial, such as a sewing machine or a telephone, or non-convivial, such as aircrafts or offshore mining. But there are tools that are less evidently falling into these categories, such as a computer or the internet. We can certainly observe an almost terrifying dependency of our civilization on computational power and intelligence and a certain alienation from the physical world that the virtual one creates. On the other hand, a computer connected to other computers opens up the possibility of social relationships and learning beyond the traditional tools. Besides, this categorization is not the crucial part of Illich's (1973) argument. He points out that technical tools are always embedded within in a network of social relations, where the structure of the tool can affect the structure of the social relations and vice versa. Implying also that the structure of social relations and the structure of tools/instruments are co-determined and always develop in a circular and non-unidirectional way. A second crucial aspect is that some tools – here we could think of the internet – are in a certain gray area and, depending on the context, can be tilted more towards their use value or their exchange value. Meaning that if the structure of social relations changes, so too can the structure (either less or more convivial) of some instruments/tools.

3.5 Degrowth as repoliticization

As mentioned at the beginning of Chapter III, degrowth is explicitly used as a political 'buzz-word' or 'missile word'. The main objective behind the use of this term (and not something epistemologically more coherent, like a-growth) is to re-politicize environmentalism. As we established a definition of ecology that is beyond mere environmental issue, we could say that degrowth wants to shift the perspective from environmentalism to (deep) ecology. This degrowth objective derives from the

awareness that the current development paradigms, both sustainable development and green growth, are suggesting a depoliticizing consensus (Aries, 2005; Latouche, 2009). From a degrowth perspective it is impossible to achieve sustainability without political struggle and direct democratic participation of all development stakeholders. Indeed, degrow presents itself as an alternative to development and the choice between two (or more) alternatives is an inherently political problem.

The apolitical discourse of sustainable development is no coincidence but fits neatly into a broader process of depoliticization in contemporary liberal democracies. In this scenario, "politics have, [for most parts], been reduced to the search of technocratic solutions of pre-framed problems without any genuinely antagonistic struggle between two alternatives" (Kallis et al, 2015, p.52). We can find the argument that the rise of neo-liberalism and the Washington Consensus – subjugating sovereign political choice to the needs of unregulated capital and liberalized markets – are the main causes for this depoliticizing process (Paulson, 2015). On the other hand, these depoliticizing processes have certainly other causes, such as the very perception of reality in our post-modern hyper complex world. In a context of extreme, indeed uncomfortable, complexity, an understandable human reaction is to avoid additional complexity. Here, the belief that there is only one system and one way ("TINA") to 'develop' our society (without even considering alternatives) reduces complexity and offers welcomed relief. More so, the over-whelming consensus on growth and development that has been reigning since the Post-War era is another depoliticizing element. Even the Soviet experiment with socialism was trapped in the pursuit of growth and development and the arguably most important socialist economy, China, ended up becoming a state-led (hyper) capitalist economy equally committed to growth and development.

Another central issue in the degrowth literature is the **politicization of science and technology**. When talking about the global economy or climate change, it is hardly possible to sustain a clear distinction between science and politics. This becomes very obvious when we consider the efforts of stakeholders to take influence in the scientific production. One of the most visible examples is the financing of academic production denying climate change by the oil industries and others (Van den Hove

et al, 2000). Especially in social sciences, knowledge claims are shaped by values and worldviews the different actors have – leading to 'wars of truth'. In the case of technology, we might argue that some technologies are 'neutral', in the sense that they could be used for different, and even opposing, social/political purposes. Yet, the process of their creation and application is influenced, sometimes even determined, by the political and social reality. In a different context there would have been no need to develop, for example, an atomic bomb simply because the knowledge was available. If we accept that science and technology are never purely neutral of apolitical, then we must ask how we can organize/manage them without turning into tools of oppression. From a degrowth perspective, we need a democratization of the knowledge production. If science and technology are inherently political, then a way to increase the potential well-being they provide is democratizing them.

One of the most important political decisions in any society is how surpluses of production should be invested. The destination of surpluses is crucial because it determines, at least to a certain extent, the development path of a society. In modern economies (both capitalist and socialist) a significant part of the social surplus is invested in new production through an institutionalized process that inhibits a democratic decision. Our current growth addicted system does not allow for any discussion on this topic because the vast majority – in fact, everything that does not turn into rents – will be invested towards activities that create new growth (Eisenstein, 2011). Beyond that, the answers where we should invest our extra resources and energy obviously depends again on what we consider a 'good life'. The point here is that this decision in modern societies is a private matter – the search for the 'good life' is almost completely privatized except from some very basic juridical frameworks such as constitutions. There is almost no need to mention that the social reality is far from the ideals formulated in those contracts. More importantly for our discussion is the idea that the decision of where to invest our excess resource/energy needs to be more democratic and that the construction of meaning of life (in other words, what constitutes a 'good life') cannot be left to individuals, but needs a collective component (Romano, 2015).

3.6 The economics of Degrowth

We already touched some elements, but here let us explore in more detail how a degrowth economy would look like. As mentioned, a degrowth economy – or better the economy within a degrowth society – would look very different from our current economic system. And, as we never had such an economy, we will not know which elements will actually work towards more sustainability and which not. Meaning that the construction of a new economy will have to be a process of continuous learning and adapting. Although we are still missing some details, the general picture is clear. As Jackson (2015) summaries, a degrowth economy has to be based on low-carbon (eventually even zero-carbon) activities that employs people (work, in all its forms, remains a central element as participation within society) in ways that are contributing meaningfully to human flourishing (beyond only the material dimension). A sustainable economy needs some kind of stability or resilience, trying to avoid collapse/crisis which would threaten human flourishing. We also know that it has to be a radically more equal society/economy, as inequality fosters unproductive (indeed, destructive) status competition, directly undermines our well-being, and erodes the sense of shared citizenship. Most importantly, our economic activity must be ecologically-bounded.[49] Very broadly, the organizational principles for economic activity should satisfy three simple criteria: contribute positively to human flourishing, support community and provide decent livelihoods, and use as little as possible in terms of resources and energy.

But, we are not only talking about the production systems we want to have. While modern economics rarely talks about this link, it is obvious that the way we produce and what we produce also affects our reproduction. Being a systemic, holistic approach, this seems only natural from a degrowth perspective and actions, including economic activities, towards degrowth are never purely economic. There is already a vast array of (economic) practices aligned with degrowth principles happening around the world. These practices include activities ranging from urban gardening and sharing economies to credit unions and (workers) cooperatives. Most

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[49] Crucial steps would include the valuation of ecosystem services, the greening of national accounts (adapting and substituting GDP with more sophisticated measures that account for ecological and social dimensions), and the internalization of externalities.

economic degrowth activities try to expand non-monetary exchanges and the re-creation of the commons. They all share the basic value of prioritizing socio-ecological sustainability over profit maximization (Kallis et al, 2015; Chiengkul, 2018). Natural candidates for a degrowth economy are social enterprises – defined as the collection of cooperative movements, mutual benefit and insurance societies, foundations and various non-profit organization whose primary goal is to serve community needs or a broader public interest. Different from the private or public sector, social enterprises are characterized by a democratic ownership structure, or decision-making processes that are more inclusive (Sekulova et al, 2013). Although we see social enterprises survive in the capitalist growth economy, they are constrained (and even co-opted) by its logic and practices. Hence, the expansion and sustainability of social enterprises would also require institutional changes – towards (economic) institutions that foster integration and collective rationality, instead of the separating and individual rationality of corporate structures (Vatn, 2009). In a sense, activities of degrowth are somewhat trying to "escape the economy" (Fornier, 2008), in its narrowly defined, dominant form.

As we will discuss some illustrations of initiatives/enterprises in chapter 5 (field work), we will start here on a more fundamental level. Our focus will be on two topics that are more related to economic issues in a strict sense, particularly money and income. First, we will discuss the potential for a **new approach towards the monetary system** and for **reform of the financial system** as a crucial requirement for a degrowth economy. And then we will take a look at the proposal of a **universal basic income** (UBI), one of the most promising (economic) institutions/strategies for a degrowth transition. This discussion is crucial for the debate about degrowth because financial institutions play a key role for economic growth and its destructive impacts. Today, almost all investment depends on credit meaning that it is the financial institutions that decide about where the money is applied to. And the main lending criteria for private and corporate banks are the maximization of return on investment (ROI) and of shareholder value (in some places like Germany or the USA corporations are even obliged by law to focus on profit). Consequently, credit flows to the most profitable sectors of the economy. Unfortunately, these sectors can be easily identified as the most successful ones in externalizing social and ecological costs – indeed, the externalization being their main source of profit. This

includes, for example, the fossil-fuel and mining industries, agribusiness, chemical industries, car and military industries, and so on. Thus, in a degrowth perspective it becomes central how to block the flow of money to destructive sectors ("divestment" instead of investment) and redirect investment towards economic activity that enables people and nature to flourish (Scheidler/Schmelzer, 2014).

3.6.1 Money and the financial system: in service of society?[50]

Not only since the 2007/08 financial crisis – which involved massive fraudulent and outright criminal activities by actors from the banking/financial sector and the government – it has become clear that our financial institutions are not working towards social well-being. Indeed, they can actually be dangerous for our economy and our planet. There is little trust in financial actors in the wider population, fostered by the lack of transparency, the creation of products that disguise their actual purpose, and a system that generally benefits the financial agents instead of the actual savers (Davis et al, 2016, Mellor, 2010). And we already mentioned the demands of degrowers to de-monetize our economic activities. But, reforming and designing it the right way, money and the financial system can not only contribute to enhance our capacity to finance projects considered socially important but could also be a lot more democratic and sustainable. We have to be clear that money, the monetary, and the financial system are social constructs and the values that are imbued in them can be changed. Within the degrowth (and other transition) discourses circulates the idea of public money. This concept parts from the presumption that money is a public resource and its creation should not be left to private banks. More so, the public creation and circulation of debt-free money under could democratic control could be the basis of a financial system based on social justice and ecological sustainability, and still able to provide for large-scale societies (Robertson, 2012; Mellor 2015).

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[50] The discussion of the monetary and financial system is based primarily on the Anglo-Saxon context. However, considering the leading role of these financial systems and the homogenizing effects of financial globalization these trends apply to most of the financially 'developed' world and, to some extent, also to the rest of the world – albeit with significant local variations.

Before we continue on this path, several explanations are needed. First, we must acknowledge that the creation of money has effectively been privatized. There are two ways in which new money can be created: by monetary authorities like central banks (usually called base money) or through the banking system as loans (usually called credit money). Monetary authorities have the monopoly on producing physical money (coins and notes), but they can also add money to the economy virtually. Latter occurred on a massive scale during the financial crisis of 2007/08 when governments infused trillions of dollars of new money into the banking system (quantitative easing) to avoid its collapse. While private banks cannot mint or print money, they can create money virtually simply by adding numbers to an account when a loan is made. More precisely, they set up an loan (or mortgage) account, effectively issuing new money to a borrower, which could be individuals, businesses, other banks or the government.[51] Standard theory claims that monetary authorities have control over the amount of new credit money privately created, for example, through reserve (and liquidity) requirements set by the central bank. Today, after decades of deregulation and so-called financial innovations, bank lending can easily spiral out of control – the crisis of 2007/08 being just the latest and most severe example. Besides the creation of financial bubbles and run-off speculation – two major ingredients for financial/economic crises – we are left with a financial/monetary system in which the creation and circulation of new money is privatized.[52] In modern economies today over 90% of new money is created as debt money via private banks (e.g. 97% in the UK in 2010) (Jackson/Dyson, 2013, Mellor, 2016).

From a DG perspective, there is a crucial difference between the two source of money creation. While publicly authorized money can be issued as debt, private bank credits or loans can only be issued as debt/credit. That means it must be

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[51] This is a very simplified description of the actual accounting process. And to be clear, private banks to not increase the amount of coins or notes in the economy, but the amount of virtual money and thus effectively the purchasing power in the economy.

[52] This “privatization of the money supply is caused by several factors. Including the already mentioned deregulation following neoliberal ideology, increased public and private debt, less use of cash and more use of transfers between bank accounts, and the role of the central banks as 'lender of last resort' (Jackson/Dyson, 2013).

returned with interest, creating a huge and unsustainable growth dynamic (Cato, 2009; Dietz/O'Neill, 2013; Mellor, 2016). In a system in which nearly all money is created as credit money/loans bearing interest, the money supply has to be constantly expanded – with more credits. Additionally, the demand for credit (which determines the lending activities of the banking) usually tends to be high because of insufficient (or better, highly concentrated) wealth, the desire to speculate (and make money without productive activities involved), and a variety of legal incentives. In sum, it is the willingness of private banks to lend that determines the supply of money in modern economies. If their confidence in the health of the economy decreases, the money supply drops. But also, if people are less willing to borrow (rather unlikely), default on their debts, or if debts are repaid the money supply shrinks If any (or all) of these mechanisms reach significant proportions the only source of new money (which is needed to not default even more credits) is through the monetary authorities. Despite the existing possibility to inject money directly into the economy or into citizens' accounts, most existing monetary policies require that new money has to be issued to the banking system or to governments as debt. There is hardly doubt that this logic of debt firmly maintains the current system. In the end, the money to rescue the banks – leading to huge budget deficits, increased public debt, and following severe austerity measures – will be borrowed again with interest by the public (Mellor, 2010, 2015; Jackson/Dyson, 2013).

What could be done to overcome these out-of-control spirals of debt, growth, and crises?[53] Well, the obvious answer is to remove, or severely limit, the right to create new money from the banking system. This could be done gradually by increasing the reserve requirements, which are usually a fraction of the credit/loan. That is why it is called fractional reserve banking. As any fractional reserve banking system tends to create increasingly more debt (and thus growth), for a steady-state economy the reserve requirement would have to be increased to 100 percent (full

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[53] The current global debt (as of 2017) was around 215 trillion USD, of which around 33% was added (mainly due to the bailouts in the wake of the 2007/08 crisis) in the last decade alone and which corresponds to roughly 325% of global GDP. To be paid back completely, that would imply to triple our economy activity, creating enormous pressure on our economies – that is, people – to grow and expand. Making debt not only an instrument for the reproduction and continuous accumulation of capital, but a fundamental social relation in our societies, an instrument of domination (Graeber, 2011; Desjardins, 2017).

reserve banking).[54] Then, banks would only be able to lend what has been actually deposited and the power of creating new money would rest entirely with the central bank/financial authorities. The decision of how much new money is created could either be taken by a national monetary budget (more democratic control) or by an independent monetary authority (based more on technical expertise). In either case, there could be regional investment councils to increase democratic participation. And to prevent inflation (or deflation) government spending and taxation would be directly linked to the money creation. Allowing for much more control than the debt-based banking system over inflation and deflation, potentially abolishing it. Most importantly, this money should be issued debt-free and spent directly into the economy. For example, through investments in key public provisioning (like health or care services), through building infrastructure for a low-carbon economy, or through paying a basic income to all citizens. (Dietz/O'Neill, 2013; Mellor, 2015).[55]

In sum, a system of full (or 100%) reserve banking could constrain new investment (only available when there is savings) and thus economic growth. It increases the role of the (democratic) state as economic actor and could thereby potentially increase social and ecological considerations in the process of resource allocation. And, it would allow to drastically cut current debt levels. Certainly, there are other growth drivers in modern society than debt-based money. And, the shift from fractional to full reserve banking has no historical precedent, making it harder to theorize about the impacts. It might be that the interest rate volatility increases, at least in the short-term. Finally, the increasing role of the state is only desirable, from a DG perspective, if the decision-making process is democratic and not captured by vested interests. So, there are several details that have to be considered, and which

[54] In the United States and most “financially modern” countries today the reserve requirements average around ten percent. Meaning that the bank must hold only 10% of a credit/loan as actual deposit (or in form of government bonds which are backed by the central bank). If that would not be enough, in some types of accounts the reserve requirements are zero, leaving the banks basically without restrictions on how much money they create (Dietz/O'Neill, 2013).

[55] Going beyond the national level, Cato & Mellor (2010) propose a three-currency approach. Besides, as mentioned above, the debt-free national currency created by a public authority, they argue for the expansion of local/regional currency to support local production and trade and for the establishment of an international currency to support equitable and sustainable international trade (see this chapter below).

might require further adaptions (Diamond/Dybvig, 2000; Dittmer, 2015). Yet, even these authors that are rather critical towards this approach conclude that a full reserve banking system means a tremendous reconfiguration of power relations between the state and the financial system (capital). That is very much what is needed from a DG perspective, thus making it a worthy trial.

While this might sound quite radical, these ideas are far from new – even important figures of neoclassical economics argued for such changes in the monetary system. In his essay “100% Money and the Public Debt” American economist Irving Fisher (1936) proposes a full reserve banking system in order to control and stabilize large business cycles.[56] To be clear, Fisher was concerned with stabilizing the macroeconomy, he had little or no interest in the social and ecological impacts. His proposal does not address the issue of debt-free money nor the idea of zero (or negative) interest rates. Hence, he is not talking about public money and not reaching far enough from a DG perspective. For further historical inspiration, we can look at the work of Silvio Gesell (1916), who argued that the 'natural' economic order would require profound reforms regarding land and money. Concerned with social justice and fluctuations in the macroeconomic cycles, his concept of interest-free “Freigeld” (lit. free money) was designed around money that would depreciate, losing its value over time. That way it would not enable “hording” (by artificial putting costs on money) and should allow for maximum circulation within the economy.

Although in the short-term, zero interest might increase economic growth, over the long-term this would imply low profit rates on real assets (like land or housing). Through the increase in capital supply (as nobody would want to hold money/liquidity) the interest rate on money and on profit (of capital) will converge to zero. In this zero-growth steady-state the whole economy would be consumed – meaning there will be no net savings or investment, just replacement of the capital

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[56] Writing in the aftermath of the Great Depression, Fisher (1936) concludes that there are various advantages of a 100% system: minimizing of depressions, avoiding inflation from excess reserves, unifying deposit and genuine money (making the money system more understandable for the average man and thus more trustworthy). He also points out that a full reserve system is not a panacea, it would only “smooth out” the business cycle (of boom and bust/depression) as over-indebtedness and other factors could still cause disturbances. Interestingly, he also notes that the implementation of such a new system would be easier after a money/banking crisis.

stock. While individuals might still safe the aggregate savings rate would be zero (Gesell, 1916; Schmitt, 1989). Effectively leading to a state where it would be almost impossible to extract rents. Or what Keynes (2013 [1936]) famously called the "euthanasia of the rentier, and, consequently the euthanasia of the cumulative oppressive power of the capitalist to exploit the scarcity-value of capital" (ibid., p. 376). Keynes, who called Silvio Gesell a visionary, also argued that it would be crucial that no other capital assets (like land or gold) would take the role of money and thus impede this tendency of its return rate towards zero. Indeed, Gesell was aware of this and saw his circulating free-money as part of a more comprehensive reform of the economic system. He was convinced that private property rights for land would have to be abolished and that the state would have to control natural monopolies (Schmitt, 1989; Kallis et al, 2012).

A system of full reserve banking and Gesell's idea about depreciating money offer us two strategies that could not only go hand in hand, but each by itself already constitutes profound changes towards a less speculative/destructive[57], more just, and possibly even ecologically sound monetary and financial system. And there is the possibility that such systems contribute (e.g. by effectively ending capital accumulation) to shifting capitalism towards something new. Nevertheless, addressing just great financial wealth and speculating rentiers or hedge funds would be a very limited critique of capitalism. Money is a very real social relation of power and dependency. If we want to have a deeper ontological shift, we also have to question how interest and profit is created through the surplus of wage labor and in an exploitative production process (Altvater, 2012). Hence, the challenge from a degrowth perspective goes further. In an era of ecologically and socially sound economics the monetary and financial systems will be fundamentally different: on one side, money will be created and circulated publicly, and on the other, the decision of where to invest and how the benefits are distributed across society will

[57] Although it is important to be careful with the distinction between investment in productive activities ("real economy") and mere speculation (essentially betting), this distinction might be misleading. Certainly, speculation can be highly destructive. For example, when after a burst its cost are imposed on the public (as after the crisis of 2007/08) or when it inflates prices for basic goods and services. But even economically sound investments can be destructive as long as financial markets have incentives to channel money to the least sustainable sectors of the economy.

be taken democratically. Therefore, the task of reshaping money and finance go beyond mere regulation in a degrowth economy – we have to address issue of ownership and democratic control. And, the criteria for investment decisions must be shifted from the profit principle to the common good (Scheidler/Schmelzer, 2014).

3.6.2 “Taming” the financial markets?

Looking at the evidence in the last decades, we have to acknowledge that the current financial markets have overreached their original purpose of efficiently investing the surplus of an economy (e.g. raising money for a company to build a factory). Instead most financial activity today is about extracting rents from the rest of the economy – mainly speculation and mortgage lending (instead of investments in productive capacities). The impact of this “evolution” of the financial markets on society and environment is quite disastrous. The current system fosters (economic) inequality and (public and private) debt, encourages risky short-term behavior (making it crisis prone), and is an obstacle for a socio-ecological transformation – mainly because investments in companies/industries that externalized most of its costs yield higher returns (they are the “rational economic choice” in this system). Since the 2008/09 financial crisis, the consensus that the financial systems need reform has increasingly grown, even within mainstream economics. Yet, even with major protest movements such as Occupy, the interest groups vested in (global) finance (and the industries depending on them) have very successfully blocked major reforms. That means that, so far, financial 'business as usual' continues and the next asset price bubble[58] accompanied by a financial crisis is most likely already on its way (Jackson/Dyson, 2013; Mellor, 2016; Silver, 2017).

How did we end up with such a system? In fact, the design of our financial systems is a historic legacy from a time when only economic growth and development were

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[58] An asset price bubble is precisely what occurred before the 2007/08 financial crisis. Meaning simply the dramatic rises in prices of certain assets, like real estate in the US in 2007/08 or tulips in the Netherlands in the 17th century. While not all bubbles are equally harmful, and some have even been neutralized, usually the bursting of a bubble has detrimental effects on the financial system – including the potential of systemic risks – referring to a complete collapse of the financial system (Brunnermeier/Oehmke, 2013).

of importance and little, if any, consideration existed for the integrity and health of nature and society. Today, and from a systemic perspective, it is clear that the financial (and monetary) system are inherently interlinked with social well-being and planetary health. Therefore, it will be very difficult, perhaps impossible, to move towards a more sustainable society without aligning all the sub-systems (including finance) with democratically agreed on objectives of sustainability. Unfortunately, there are no general criteria/standards for socially and ecologically responsible and sustainable financial products and services.[59] From a DG perspective, the establishment of such criteria through a inclusive and democratic process (for example, through carefully designed referendum or citizens assemblies) would be the first necessary step to reform the financial system. The mandatory application of the obtained criteria – which have to be transparent, comprehensible and comparable – would require new regulations, control mechanisms, and new levels of transparency. But even without being mandatory, which would probably be more feasible politically, the creation of such criteria makes sense. Without a clear definition of criteria, the performance of such products can neither be measured nor compared adequately. Thus, Individuals without access to information (like performance in terms of sustainability) cannot influence to system by choosing the most responsible investment. Without those criteria, financial actors face almost no pressure to provide sustainable products and services, and, obviously, it impedes third parties to verify if criteria a met. In short, the creation and implementation of social and ecological standards for the financial industry would be a huge advancement towards a more sustainable financial system (Silver, 2017; Walker et al, 2018).

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[59] That is also due to the still on-going debate about the definition of social and ecological responsibility and sustainability in the context of financial products and services. Additionally, past ideas, such as the triple bottom-line (considering economic, social and ecological aspects) and tolerance thresholds (e.g. requirement of "80% of investment in social enterprises"), have proved to lead to green-washing. What certainly would be required are so-called knockout criteria – applied to the whole value chain – that necessarily must be fulfilled in order for a financial product or service to be labeled (in a non-mandatory regime) sustainable or to be legal (in a mandatory regime). A knockout criterion could, for example, be no investment in fossil-fuel industries – something that has to be achieved anyway if the 2-degree objective of the Paris Climate Accord is to be fulfilled (Oehler, 2013; Walker et al, 2018, IPCC, 2018).

More generally speaking, for a DG economy to become a reality we would have to invert the process of **financialization**.[60] Today in the Western world (and increasingly in the rest of the world) we live in an “age of finance” (Storm, 2018, p.303), which describes the rise to supremacy of the financial sector over the rest of the economy. Sometimes also called financial capitalism, this process refers to “the increasing importance of financial markets, financial motives, financial institutions, and financial elites in the operation of the economy and its governing institutions, both at the national and international level” (Epstein, 2002, p.3). Looking at the empirical evidence for the US economy, Krippner (2005) – who defines financialization as a “pattern of accumulation in which profits accrue primarily through financial channels rather than through trade or commodity production” (ibid. p.174) – concludes that financialization is indeed the most important factor for the economy.[61] Some authors even argue that it is finance (and its strive for internationalization) that are dictates development and thus neo-liberalism and (economic) globalization are just manifestations of this hegemony (Duménil/Lévy, 2005).

Furthermore, it seems likely that financialization has contributed to eroding the post-war 'social pact' between labor and capital, which was a crucial pillar of the modern

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[60] The are several other processes considered in the literature that can be qualified as part of financialization, but which cannot all be discussed at length here. Including, for example, the shift to a “shareholder value” perspective in the business world, the emergence of new information technologies (allowing for virtually instantaneous transactions around the globe), or the rise of multi-national, very large corporations. The concentration of economic power is staggering: from the 50,000 stock market-listed corporations, only around 1,000 account for almost half of the global capitalization. With their vast global networks, they are responsible for around two thirds of both world trade in goods and foreign direct investment (FDI). Their global value chains do not only provide the technologically most sophisticated goods (gaining them support form modern consumers), but also enable them to exert economic leverage/pressure on even the most powerful countries. In other words, these few hundred corporations are the backbone of the existing globalization. And, as these large, multinational firms are themselves subject to pressure from the financial markets, they pass this pressure (the pursuit of financial efficiency) down through their global environments, and hence to a large part of the economic and social fabric – making them also drivers for financialization (Dembinski, 2009; Palley, 2013)

[61] The data used here is profit data (comparing portfolio and financial incomes from US corporations, departing from the assumption that “accumulation patterns shape the evolution of economies in the long run” (Krippner, 2005, p.200). With the available post-war data, the author could neither assert that financialization is a novel phenomenon (historical evidence suggests otherwise) nor conclude that it is a permanent one. While it seems that we are at a very high degree, there have been phases of more and less financialization before (Fasianos et al, 2016).

(European) welfare state. As non-financial firms and corporations gain increasing rates of their profit from financial activities, they depend less and less on productive activities and their workforce. In the end, this is having a similar effect as the international mobility of capital in deteriorating welfare systems – the infamous “race to the bottom” (Arrighi/Silver, 1999, Silver, 2003). Financialization has arguably been pushed by the United States – after a geographical shift of production to Asia – as a means to maintain the hegemonic status (favoring the USD role as main reserve currency and the power of their domestic financial market), but it is far less certain that this situation will remain so. The rise of China and other regional powers is undeniable. However, there is a real chance that – due to the present densely networked and highly unbalanced global geo-economic order – there will be no post-US regime capable of leading the global system through the next wave of expansion of capitalism. The seemingly increasing impediments to global capitalist reproduction (including the social and ecological impact of China's and India's rise) might lead us to a situation where an alliance of multinational corporations and states lead the way (Arrighi, 2010; Gulick, 2011; Palley, 2013).

Even though the intensity and form of processes of financialization vary over time and in their form, the influence (and often dominance) of finance over the real economy is real and not just in the Anglo-Saxon context (Palley, 2013; Fasianos et al, 2016; Silver, 2018). And, as pointed out, this is directly opposed to what a Degrowth economy is proposing. The dominance of the financial system over the productive economy is not sustainable in any dimension – especially when we consider the issue of debt, rentier dynamics and financialization of sectors like the food production system (Russi, 2013). But how can such a powerful macro trend be inverted? On one side, the creation of public, debt-free money would already tackle the perhaps major problem, the size of the dangerously blown-up size of the financial sector. But there are two caveats. The introduction of a new monetary system is such a major policy shift that it might be an easier strategy to start with the financial system (in which private business must be controlled and not the state itself). And secondly, even with a new monetary system there might still be financial activity opposed to a degrowth society – most importantly, financial speculation and uncontrolled capital flows.

The strategy to address these two issues are rather straightforward. Yet, they will be confronted with severe opposition from capital owners and unwillingness from political system (because of “political capture”). Regarding financial speculation, there are basically two options: reduction or ban. A viable strategy could be to start taxing financial transaction (sometimes also called Tobin tax) to make it less attractive and to raise revenues for social expenditure. However, to have an effect the tax rate would have to be significantly higher than some of the current proposals (e.g. a 0.0025% financial transaction tax rate was proposed in the EU in 2015). Ultimately, to avoid capital flight, such a tax would have to be applied on a global level implying also the closing down of tax havens. While a complete ban of financial speculation would obviously encounter stronger opposition, a partial ban in areas that are crucial for human well-being (like food, housing or healthcare) is essential from a DG perspective. In short, human livelihoods (and nature) have to be insulated from financial speculation, and more generally, from the boom-and-bust circles of the international economy (Jackson, 2009; Dietz/O'Neill, 2013; Hornborg, 2016).

Another step, that would help to reduce speculation and increase national autonomy/sovereignty is the control of capital flows. Again, this is not a new idea, already famously advocated, for example, by Keynes in the 1930ies.[62] Uncontrolled capital mobility has long been identified as an undesirable potential for economic instability. Large inflows usually cause the national currency to appreciate, thus contributing to inflation, and cause unsustainable booms (which eventually lead to a 'bust', a financial crisis, and a sharp reverse of the inflows). However, over time, as countries aspired for greater trade integration and as 'fine-tuning' the economy became discredited, they also gained a bad reputation (opposed to free-trade and considered too interventionist). But historically, all developed countries have applied exchange restrictions on capital (and goods) and they have proved to be an efficient instrument against fickle capital flows which tend to create instability. Indeed, the evidence suggests that capital controls during the Bretton Woods System were the

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[62] Admittedly, Keynes wrote in a very different context. While his main preoccupations were peace, domestic economic planning, and social well-being, he also envisioned that capital control measures would ensure higher rates of economic growth and lower rates of unemployment (Crotty, 1983). So, his is not an argument for less economic growth, but rather for economic stability and the possibility of domestic planning.

major factor for less frequent crises (Reinhardt/Rogoff, 2010; Ghosh/Qureshi, 2016).

Let us be clear, that such restrictions would have to be designed to address speculative capital. Ideally, we would be able to establish an independent international institution to control capital flows and balances – something in the direction of Keynes' proposal for an International Clearing Union as a cooperative way to internationally control capital flows (Helleiner, 2015). Such an independent international control institution could also handle the application of a financial transaction tax. And linked to this institution a global or regional development banks that could allocate savings and surpluses to projects that fulfill criteria for sustainability (Cato/Mellor, 2010). Eventually, the US dollars role as main currency should be phased out. This would not only force the United States to adopt a more sustainable macroeconomic path but would also reduce the influence of the dominant Wall Street firms. These are all very radical changes and thus might seem rather unfeasible. So, an initial strategy could aim at a combination of government support and local/regional initiatives to create a network of non-profit financial institutions that could re-direct household savings to sustainable investment.[63] This would be a central step towards democratizing finance and bringing the economy under democratic control (Latouche, 2010; Block, 2014).

In sum, we need to 'degrow' the financial system and align it with social and ecological interests and to recover its purpose of serving the society. This means decrease the size and power of financial institutions, because to 'too big to fail' is certainly too big (Dietz/O'Neill, 2013). While this step is crucial, fixing the economy is only part of the problem – as already pointed we need deeper, cultural changes. As Jackson (2009) argues, overcoming, for example, the logic of consumerism is a huge task because material goods are deeply embedded in the fabric of our lives.

[63] In the transition towards a steady-state or no-growth economy there will still be a huge role for investment to expand the social infrastructure and the commons – including education, care economy, and the reproductive and non-profit sector. Additionally, we will need investment in ecological projects such as reforestation, climate change adaption, and industrial waste clean-ups. None of these investments are profitable in monetary terms and in the short-term, making market mechanisms completely inadequate to generate them. A possible way is democratically control public investment. However, similar to the energy sector, new decentralized local and regional structures controlled by citizens are needed (Scheidler/Schmelzer, 2014; Mellor, 2015).

So, while there certainly is a material side to human flourishing, we have to broaden our narrow vision of materialistic prosperity and strengthen the social and psychological aspects of it. That involves changes on a personal and on a collective/structural level, which should go hand in hand reinforcing each other. On a personal level, less focus on materialistic values (like popularity, image/status or financial success) and more on 'intrinsic' values (like self-acceptance, affiliation or a sense of belonging to a community) is crucial. Because it is the latter that contribute more to our well-being making them “the constituents of prosperity” (ibid. p. 148). However, there needs to be structural change as well to support these personal changes, which otherwise remain opposed to the dominant structures/values[64] and thus, hard to live by. Thus, we need changes that both support social behavior and reduce the structural incentives to unsustainable (economic) activities.

3.6.3 Universal Basic Income

A proposal that has gained a lot of attention and momentum recently, that could provide a structural change we just talked about, and that resonates strongly with the degrowth paradigm is the idea of a universal basic income (UBI). This idea has various direct links to degrowth, in fact, it can be argued that the unconditional guarantee of material existence is a crucial ingredient, if not condition, for any sustainable, socio-ecological transformation. It reflects the conviction that every human has the right to an unconditional guarantee of material existence and participation in society. It is a monetary form of safeguarding these rights and, depending on its design, can be complemented with other (non-monetary) forms of guarantees (like access to education, infrastructure or other public services). Although it is not a new idea – early proposals reach back to the 18th century – the debate about basic incomes has intensified in the second half of the 20th century and focused on ecological and feminist dimensions. The ideas on UBI thus emerge as a critique of existing forms of (economic and social) domination and of forms of

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[64] Referring to the multitude of perverse effects on a structural level, such as private transport being incentivized over public transport, energy supply is subsidized while demand management is often neglected, waste disposal is more convenient than recycling, and so on (Jackson, 2009).

cohabitation. Nobody should be forced to act against his will or provide his labor because of fear of material misery and everybody should be able to participate democratically in public life without the fear of repression. In this sense, a universal basic income is a emancipatory project of empowerment seeking to end stigmatization, poverty and human and ecological exploitation (Gorz, 2000; Raventós, 2007; Bregman, 2016; Standing, 2017; Blaschke, 2017).

The Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN), a charity organization dedicated to education about basic income, defines a basic income as “a periodic cash payment unconditionally delivered to all on individual basis, without means-test or work requirement”. Including the five characteristics of periodic (not one-off), cash payment (appropriate medium of exchange and opposed to, for example, vouchers), individual (not paid to households), universal (paid to all), and unconditional (no requirement to work or willingness to work). A distinction could be made between “full basic incomes” that are stable and high enough to eliminate (in combination with other public services) poverty and enable full participation, and “partial basic incomes” that would not fully substitute other redistributive measures. Largely depending on the size of the basic income, unsurprisingly, this distinction is very controversial (BIEN, 2019). A very similar definition is given by Raventós (2017, p.8) who states that “Basic Income is an income paid by the state to each full member or accredited resident of a society, regardless of whether he or she wishes to engage in paid employment, or is rich or poor or, in other words, independently of any other sources of income that person might have, and irrespective of cohabitation arrangements in the domestic sphere“. So, in this definition, a basic income is formally secular, unconditional and universal, being received by each and every member of society independent from his or her gender, level of income, religion or sexual orientation. Thus, it is very different from other redistributive schemes such as grants, subsidies or (conditioned) unemployment benefits because the only “condition” is citizenship or accredited residence.

The most obvious question and controversy about a UBI is whether it is financially feasible and at what size/amount of income? A more anthropological issue is about the nature of human behavior and if people receiving an UBI would still continue to work? This is an on-going and already extensive debate and cannot be concluded

here, but we can provide some arguments and recent evidence to get a clearer picture of this proposal. Regarding the empirical evidence it is important to note that until now there has not been any long-term implementation of what could be considered a full basic income. Most recent trials have been rather limited in scale (never reaching the whole population) and have continued only for short periods of time. That means that the empirical evidence cannot be considered representative and has to be analyzed carefully within the cultural and political context it was applied. Despite the need for more research in this area, the existing trials and data already offer a glimpse at what a UBI could mean.

The longest and probably closest example of an UBI is the Alaska Permanent Fund (APF), which has been implemented in 1982 under the name of “Permanent Dividend Fund” (PDF) and has, since then, become extremely popular. It is funded by the states large revenues from oil extraction, of which a part flows into the APF and from there into investments in stocks, bonds and real estate. The returns from the APF, varying roughly between 800 and 2000 USD per citizen and year, is then distributed to Alaskans. Interestingly, the Fund was created through a referendum following a critique of too quick, imprudent public spending of the oil revenues. However, given the variability and the small size – not nearly enough to cover the costs for basic material needs – the APF is considered more of a bonus payment by the population. Still, it can make a huge difference as it is paid to every Alaskan (requiring only a minimum of 12 months in the state and US citizenship). For example, a mother with three children would receive between 3,200 and 8,000 USD, a substantial help for most households. More so, the APF is one of the reasons why Alaska has the lowest poverty rate and is the (economically) most equal state in the United States. (Raventós, 2007; Widerquist/Howard, 2012; Murray/Pateman, 2012)

The are several other basic income experiments or trials happening around the globe, including both rich welfare states such as Finland or Canada and financially rather poor states such as Namibia, India or Kenya. We will not go into the details of all these cases, which have been already discussed.[65] These cases have very

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[65] For a detailed description and discussion of most of these trials and existing proposals see, for example, Murray/Pateman (2008) or Widerquist (2018).

distinct contexts, thus the actual impacts on poverty or the labor market vary. However, independent from the context the results of these experiments have been promising and generally quite positive. The perhaps most significant empirical evidence is that even a partial basic income has demonstrated to have significant positive results in terms of health. In the cases of poorer recipients, for example, on the birth weight of children, that is, improving parental mal-nutrition. In cases in the developed world more on mental health (especially stress and anxiety reliefs). Unsurprisingly, the observed effects are generally stronger in at-risk groups. Considering the impact on the labor market, most studies find almost no, and sometimes even positive impact on labor market participation. While this evidence is not conclusive due to the small sample size of the trials, it indicates that the fear of major exodus from the labor market is overstated (Widerquist/Howard, 2012; Painter, 2016; Gibson et al, 2018; Gerrad, 2018). According to participants in the on-going Kenya trial, already the knowledge that they will receive a stable income for a decade has transformed their thinking. It means “a chance to invest in their own lives or their business with the security that they can still put food on the table. And that, they say, is priceless” (Arnold, 2018, p.628).

Looking at the Alaskan case, many people might think that only resource-rich states could adopt such a strategy. That would be a misconception, because Alaska ranks only tenth among US states in resource stock, finances the dividend almost entirely through a tax on only one resource, and even with a comparatively low tax rate. Alaskan enjoy this basic income because they gathered the political will for taking advantage of an opportunity. And these opportunities are not limited to oil. For example, in the context of capping carbon emissions and other forms of pollution, the “rights to pollute” - as long as the pollution is socially and ecologically acceptable – could be sold or auctioned to polluting companies. In fact, all around the globe common resources are privatized and thus represent a vast and legitimate potential for funding opportunities (Widerquist/Sheahen, 2012). And these would all be completely new public revenues. There are also various ways of reforming and updating the existing sources of public revenues, which will be necessary elements to enable sufficient redistribution in a post-growth economy and to finance the costs of ecological degradation (including climate change). The most urgent measures

are to close tax loopholes and (gradually) stop subsidizing unsustainable industries – above all the ones linked to fossil-fuel and arms.

Politically more controversial, yet indispensable form a DG perspective, is the implementation of higher taxes to combat wealth concentration. To effectively stop extreme wealth concentration, we have to consider the introduction of a maximum income. While this seems very radical, there are recent historic examples of tax rates close to a maximum income – for example, in the United States the maximum income tax rate until the 1980ies was around 90%. And this discussion is gaining momentum again, as examples such as the "Green New Deal"[66] recently announced by the Democratic Party proves. Technically quite simple, the income tax would progressively rise with the increase of taxable income and reach 100% at a democratically determined level. Despite the certain resistance of the economic and political elites against such a proposal, the socio-economic arguments for capping income are over-whelming. Besides providing additional funds for a basic income, a maximum income would create a less stratified and socially divided society by reducing the great inequalities in income and wealth. And we have ample empirical evidence that more equal societies are achieving better scores on most social and economic indicators. We also know that after basic material needs are met, more income does not contribute to subjective well-being or happiness. In other words, high incomes are essentially wasted, and a maximum income could significantly contribute to avoid wasteful consumption – best exemplified by million-dollar mansions, private jets and luxury yachts (Layard, 2005; Pickett/Wilkinson, 2010; Skidelsky/Skidelsky, 2012; Alexander, 2012)

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[66] In the US context, the proposal, inspired by the historic predecessor, is the part of the attempt of the Democratic Party to establish a counter-narrative to the Trump administration and position the party more to the left with profound socio-ecological reforms with the aim of addressing (economic) inequality and climate change (or ecological degradation in general). It includes, for example, the taxation of incomes above ten million USD with 70%, which is still far from a maximum income and would apply only to a tiny fraction of the population. It has been pushed forward by democrats like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. It is based on earlier proposal by various authors and has been adopted as a term within the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) focusing on green investments on a global scale (Jones, 2008; Barbier, 2010). To be clear, neither this US "Green Deal" nor the "Green Economy" often mentioned in the UN documents is sufficiently sustainable, from a degrowth perspective as these proposals are still holding on to the objective of economic growth. Yet, there are elements in them that resonate with DG ideas and help to make the politically more feasible.

In the case of the USA, Sheahen (2012) demonstrates that an annual basic income of 10,000 USD (just below the official poverty line of around 11,000 USD in 2010) would be financially feasible even without raising any new taxes.[67] Admittedly, the United States are a monetary, very wealthy country and such a basic income might not be financially feasible in all other countries. That is the reason why the construction of national, regional and international funds that collect money by taxing pollution or the rights to use common resources is fundamental. Considering the issue of migration and climate justice, it would also be necessary to expand the monetary transfers from the North to the South which then could be a source for UBIs there. In the end, the question of costs is a political issue of allocation of resources – we can finance subsidies for multi-national corporations or we can allocate money to local sustainable businesses. A UBI might not be political feasible, requiring more support from the population and adverse to the financial interests of the high-income classes, but the argument that it is not affordable is just another variant of the TINA ("there is no alternative") narrative and purely ideological. Politically more feasible might be the introduction of a very low (partial) basic income or a negative income tax[68] which is restricted to the lower income groups. From there the evolution to a full, universal basic income would be less radical (Alexander, 2015).

For the idea of a DG economy/society, the basic income concept is crucial for several reasons. It is essentially the fulfillment of the right to life and existence, anchored in almost all constitutions. It could provide a social safety net with

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[67] This proposal would roughly cost two trillion USD annually, which is a staggering amount at first sight. However, it is completely feasible without raising new taxes. By closing the majority of tax loopholes, cutting welfare programs that would become obsolete (like unemployment benefits), and by reducing the military budget in half this amount would already be covered. Sheahen (2012) further calculates that with reforming the existing tax system, including the introduction of new, albeit very low taxes on high incomes (a 20% subcharge on income over one million USD) and a financial transaction tax (0.0025% or 5 USD on a transaction of 2,000 USD) the household deficit could be completely abolished (numbers for 2010).

[68] The idea of a negative income tax is the idea that there is a certain income threshold (usually around the minimum wage) below which the tax payer actually receives money from the state. It was even proposed by Milton Friedman in the 1960ies, albeit in a very market liberal version. The crucial difference is that a negative income tax would only apply to poor people, thus having a potential of stigmatization. Still it might be something worth considering as a viable strategy for the later implementation of a UBI. For a more detailed discussion of negative income tax models, estimated consequences and some empirical evidence see, for example, Almsick (1982) or Moffitt (2003).

preventive character (in terms of poverty, health, etc.) and in accordance to human rights. As it involves a major redistribution, it also is a central component to combat socially unjust accumulation of wealth. Existential fears, precarious living conditions and social segregation/divide are all obstacles that inhibit the transformation processes and that could be tackled, at least to some extent, with a UBI. In other words, a degrowth society is not possible without sufficient and unconditional social safety for all its members. And the way towards such a society can only be achieved through more and direct democracy, which requires more time and more independence from (economic) pressures – both potentially fostered through a basic income. The social safety and individual freedom that a UBI could provide should not only enable more political participation but could also induce more solidarity in economic decisions and in general. For example, the decision to do voluntary or (monetarily) less lucrative work (e.g. non-profit organizations or cooperatives). Furthermore, a basic income would mean more individual and collective sovereignty over our time. In would affect both how much time we spend on wage labor and potentially also what kind of activities/work we decide to engage in. This resonates strongly with the DG demand for a reduction in working hours as a central element of a social-ecological transformation and the overcoming of the problematic division of paid and non-paid labor (Bregman, 2016; Blaschke, 2017).

As any proposal for profound social changes, UBI has received resistance and criticism. Recently, Switzerland had a referendum on the introduction of a rather generous UBI and the population rejected it with 77% (Elm, 2017).[69] The criticism directed to the UBI proposals can be distinguished in ethical and technical concerns. The two major ethical concerns being that UBI would stimulate laziness (or even parasitism) and that it would discourage from work (leading to an exodus from the labor market). Interestingly, the argument of parasitism – benefiting from something while increasing the cost borne for those who produce it – is often applied when

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[69] The proposal suggested a UBI of 2500SFr (around 2300 Euros) for each adult citizen. The result of the vote was not unexpected as Switzerland is not specifically known for avantgarde social policy. Even the initiators of the referendum never had the intention to win it, but rather to establish a public debate about UBI. Interestingly, the public debate was focused very much on the economic feasibility and the impacts on work motivation, while benefits and harms to overall well-being and health were hardly mentioned.

poorer people can do something (even in a very limited way) that was formerly reserved for the rich. Although it is widely accepted that rich people live off inherited wealth, the idea that poor people can choose to live without making a contribution seems shocking to most – revealing the deeply entrenched, discriminating traits of our society based on the ideologies of meritocracy and productivism. And the argument of both laziness and parasitism rely on the rather curious premise of a human psychology that does not need any stimuli. A premise that is not confirmed in modern psychology nor in everyday life observations – even people with their economic needs met usually engage in work. However, it cannot be denied that a UBI can “open the door” to parasitism, but unemployment benefits can do so, as well, and with a UBI this door would be open for everyone (instead of just the fortunate few) making it more democratic and egalitarian than proposals linked to conditions (Raventós, 2007, Bregman, 2016).

Would a universal basic income lead to people leaving the formal labor market? That would depend on the amount of income and the labor market itself. Most proponents of a UBI suggest an amount around the poverty line of the respective country. In this case, even with the basic financial security there would be still a lot of incentive to work for additional income. And again, people do not only work for money, but for a variety of reasons. We can see many people working over-time without being forced to do so or to work after their retirement even if they do not need to. A UBI would help to eradicate jobs and work environments that are considered exploitative, inhumane, etc. by the employees, though (Pateman, 2004; Lucarelli/Fumagalli, 2008). The most often cited technical objection towards a UBI is that its financial costs make it unworkable. As we have already discussed, this is ultimately a political struggle about redistribution. Thus, it becomes an issue of political, rather than financial feasibility, and this will vary in each country/context. As almost all significant (economic) measures, a UBI would also favor some and be seen less favorable by others depending on how the financing of it is carried out. The redistribution of income could benefit people with higher incomes (by dismantling public education and health systems) or people with lower incomes (by progressive tax reform and cutting subsidies). Undoubtedly, a UBI will involve considerable financing costs. However, compared to the costs of the current

(welfare) system a universal basic income holds up very well (Goodhard, 2006; Murray, 2006; Caputo, 2008; Perreira, 2017).

As the existing welfare state, even in the richest nations, has proven unable to eliminate poverty, there is a strong moral argument for reforming this system – a universal basic income has the potential to directly tackle poverty and many of the failures of the current welfare system. In short, a basic income has the potential to revolutionize the job market, effectively protecting workers from exploitative, psychologically destructive “bullshit jobs” (Graeber, 2018) which arguably account for a huge part (Graeber claims roughly 30% in advanced economies) of the labor market today. It would effectively acknowledge the value of non-paid work and other social contributions, thus extending economic citizenship to participants outside the 'formal economy'. A basic income large enough to live from enables a very crucial choice: to offer your time and labor for wage or not. Hence, from a Marxian perspective, a generous UBI could be the, at least partial, de-commodification of labor. It would empower the workers and almost certainly expand the non-market economy. Such a proposal will require a strong commitment to egalitarian policies and should be a priority for any government that aims at reducing inequality. Not only because it addresses and could solve a variety of issues related to social justice, but also because of its contribution to deeper transformation of capitalism itself (Wright, 2006). And even if a UBI alone would not necessarily end the current capitalist system, it certainly would create a more democratic and egalitarian society (Alexander, 2015).

3.7 Criticism of DG

We have now pointed out the many advantages a degrowth society could create, but what are the caveats and challenges of such a transition? The perhaps most obvious critique is with the term “degrowth” itself. As the degrowth proponent themselves, have pointed out that degrowth might not be an adequate term, because it focuses too much on the issues of actually reducing GDP growth. Instead, it might make more sense to call for “a-growth” (van den Bergh, 2011), meaning an indifference (as in atheism) towards growth, as long as principles of sustainability, solidarity, etc. are considered and followed (Latouche, 2009).

Furthermore, the term with its downward orientation might trigger negative feelings (going down equals bad, especially in a growth addicted society). Making it a bad starting point for public communication, unconsciously the initial negative feeling might bias subsequent thoughts. And consciously, people hearing “degrowth” might (mis)interpret it as a contraction of the economy (GDP decrease, which is likely but not necessarily a goal) – problematic in a society where growth is associated with higher wages, jobs, well-being, etc. Finally, using a term that contains the same term that you want to get out of the public mind, potentially backfiring by re-enforcing its framework (Drews/Antal, 2016). These arguments are valid and negative associations can really have an effect on the wider public that might be counter-productive for future policy debates. Hence, thinking about re-directing the discussion towards terms with more positive connotative potential makes sense. However, as pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, degrowth was meant as a provocative term from the beginning. And, as should have become clear, the profound changes it implies will not be achieved without conflict and so, it makes sense to direct the debate towards growth.

Another rather obvious critique, and also quite usual for any more profound changes, is that a paradigm shift of this magnitude is simply not possible. First, we should remember that profound changes are never easy, usually requiring long periods of adaption and often accompanied by psychological unease or even rejection. Nevertheless, paradigm shifts have occurred in our history. Now, considering the complexity of the interlinked and interdependent global systems, it remains an open question whether such profound shifts can actually be planned? Even if we are only able to plan for so much and we certainly will face unpredictable factors (e.g. nobody really knows how the ecological crises will play out in concrete circumstances). All in all, that seems like a very good reason why we should try to plan, project and implement as much as possible – obviously in a process of continuous learning and adapting – in order to create as much resilience and capacities as possible. And, as discussed above, some elements of a degrowth society seem too utopian in the sense that they are very far from our current really. However, we do need a vision (utopia) of where to go, of what to achieve. Of course, it is an entirely personal choice, but a vision of sustainability, real participation and well-being seems like a something to strive for. Also, many elements of a degrowth

society are already happening – some already mentioned, more will be discussed in chapter 5 (field work/illustrations) – making this paradigm shift really a concrete, tangible utopia in Bloch's sense.

In terms of a primary overarching goal to solve environmental problems, van den Bergh (2011) argues that degrowth might not be suited because it misinterprets relevant causalities. It could potentially suggest that degrowth is a first (and perhaps sufficient) step to achieve environmental objectives. Instead, the author suggests inverting the causality and start with a clear and safe environmental policy. He further argues that a degrowth strategy might put too much weight on the issue of scale and underestimate the role of the composition of the economy and technical change.[70] Linked to this argument is a concern about a specific care/cautiousness with (conceptual) vagueness. What actually has to "degrow" to achieve more sustainability? We have tried to discuss the various dimension of the term throughout this chapter but let us briefly synthesize. We can think of degrowth in terms of GDP, consumption, work-time, and, more generally, in terms of a cultural shift towards "less is more". Advocating the idea to policy makers and a wider public, it is necessary to avoid ambiguity and confusion. A more sensible political strategy might be to push for more stringent environmental policies, from which then specific degrowth (of 'dirty' production and consumption) would automatically results. This strategy should definitely be considered and applied if we cannot create a more general support for degrowth. However, degrowth goes beyond mere environmental issues. Meaning that, if we adopt a strategy of specifying policies instead of a vision/paradigm, then the set of policies has to include social and economic policies as well.

Regarding the economic sphere, there might indeed be obstacles that are considered severe in our current framework. For example, the potential crash of stock markets when the economy shrinks in GDP terms. This could lead the

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[70] As discussed, the issue of scale is certainly a primary concern within the quest for sustainability. Despite the argument here being valid, the current neglect of scale in mainstream economics and the wider public discourse seems to justify a focus on this issue. Certainly, composition and technology have to be addressed as well, albeit without to much optimism for technological fixes (see chapter 2 on development and technology of this thesis) and with more focus on changes in people and businesses' behavior.

economy implode and then, in combination with current crisis policies, leave us with a new long-term growth cycle. Therefore, a strategy of shrinking the size of the economy is economically unsustainable and a new growth cycle could be ecologically devastating. Moreover, the DG idea of “Living better, with less” seems unfeasible in a market economy, in which it would lead to deflation (Tokic, 2012). This is actually a very possible scenario, if we cannot establish/reform existing institutions before entering phases of prolonged GDP degrowth. The key to not ending up in yet another growth cycle here is the reaction of monetary and fiscal institutions. As discussed above, within a framework of public money there would be theoretically no real danger of neither inflation nor deflation. And with a democratic decision over new investments, it is entirely possible that the “recovery” of our economies does not add to GDP not to ecological degradation. This criticism, however, is crucial, because it demonstrates the very real need to have degrowth institutions in place before we actually shrink our economy – that is a scenario of planned degrowth (by design, and not by disaster).

A contradiction of DG that has been pointed out by various authors is the link between the local and the global scale. While the critique provided by the DG literature is systemic – although many authors discuss local or regional manifestation – the concrete strategies (grassroot initiatives, local currencies, etc.) are often small-scale. In other words, the approach links a broad, systemic vision with concrete projects in very specific realities – a potential for ambiguity, at least (Bádue, 2012; Acosta/Brand, 2017). The hope that small-scale projects will serve as platforms/incubators for larger networks and transformations might not be very realistic. Under the right socio-political conditions small initiatives can gain a lot of momentum (extrapolating even to the international level) but focusing too much on them seem like a strategic error (Schwartzman, 2012). Considering, for example, climate change (and the distribution of its costs and consequences) it is clear that we need international agreements, as well. Although the recent ones have proved to be not effective enough, they are an advance towards more international, environmental policies – although crucial dimension like equity and justice remain largely unsolved (Falkner, 2016; Santos, 2017).

There are other points that have been criticized as being little nor not sufficiently developed in the DG literature. From a Marxian perspective for example, degrowth is barely addressing the issue of domination and class struggle. By focusing a lot on alternative modes of living and eco-niches, DG tends to oversee the macro-structural conditions of our society (Acosta/Brand, 2017). And by doing so, its strategies will necessarily be insufficient to address the contemporary challenges of sustainability, like enabling real inclusion through direct democracy (Fotopoulos, 2010) or tackling the power relations between classes (Trainer, 2015). This is indeed a crucial point of criticism and a somehow open question in the DG discourse/paradigm. Because ultimately it will lead to the question of whether degrowth is compatible with capitalism and its inherent class structures? And that depends on which vision of degrowth we are looking at. If degrowth is understood very narrowly as simply abandoning GDP-fixation (and replacing it with “better” indicators), then this could certainly be possible within a capitalist system (Ott, 2012). But if we think of degrowth in a broader sense – as I have done throughout this thesis – then it becomes a lot harder to imagine a system without continuous accumulation and exploitation that is still called capitalism.

As the DG discourse emerges from high-income countries in the Global North, it is no wonder that it has been accused of elitism. Indeed, the idea of voluntary simplicity – clearly envisioning someone who enjoys material affluence and privileges – is elitist and moralistic. By its very nature, an elitist strategy can only work very slowly and gain wider support only in so far it becomes part of popular culture. In short, a strategy that might work only for a fraction of the population is certainly not a promising option and in stark contrast with the urgency for change that permeates the DG discourse (Romano, 2012). It seems true that a strategy of alternative niches could only reach so far. However, the idea of niches is more about having existing, functioning projects/initiatives as inspiration and test labs for future expansion. There is no doubt that in order to achieve degrowth – that is, to implement degrowth practices in everyday life and culture – on a larger scale more than niches are needed. And, as discussed above, degrowth advocates offer several transformative policy proposals, implying also support from governments and high levels of state intervention, that would help the current niches to expand to larger scales.

Two last shortcomings that should be mentioned are work reduction and population growth. A criticism, often coming from the left, that needs to be addressed more properly is the contradiction between a discussion about work hour reduction, on one side, and the obvious fact that (wage) labor equals social recognition. Meaning that (wage) labor provides benefits beyond money, dignifying human life, giving purpose, and so on (Mahnkopf, 2012). For a reduction and redistribution of wage labor, we will have to redefine collectively what constitutes as work and start valuing (initially even in monetary terms) other forms of labor (domestic, care, voluntary, etc.). This is also central because the concrete work experience usually perpetuates many forms of domination (e.g. of class, of gender, of race). Thus, redistributing/reorganizing work is directly linked to redistribution power, wealth, and participation. However, the DG literature has hardly explored that direction (Acosta/Brand, 2017). The second issue, population growth, is also little explored until now. Despite the consensus that too much people (8, 9, 10 billion or more?) would be unsustainable (Schneider et al, 2010), there are barely any proposals – besides voluntary reduction – on population growth. This is certainly an open question that needs to be addressed, especially because future population growth will almost exclusively happen in the Global South, for which the consequences and implications of degrowth are not well elaborated (Cosme et al, 2017).

Some of the arguments here against degrowth have been addressed, others remain valid (or open) questions and have to be considered for refining the DG paradigm and its practices. On the other hand, we have to consider that there is a multitude of practices and ideas that dialogue or directly link to the DG paradigm. Thus, not all initiatives or concepts that align themselves with degrowth can be subject to the same criticism. Also, it is important to note that the academic work on degrowth is relatively young and certainly not a mature field of studies (and perhaps it never will be). In other words, there is still much work to be done. It is also interesting to note that this first phase of academic production, more or less until 2012, was mainly focused on conceptual work, normative claims, and very much within the social sciences. Since then the research on the topic has expanded to formal economics (modeling), empirical case studies, and material and energy flow accounting (Weiss/Cattaneo, 2017). This new turn, especially the expansion of empirical case studies, could help. Finally, the objection that degrowth is only for rich, industrialized

countries of the Global North will be addressed separately in the next section constituting an ideal link to the chapter on Buen Vivir.

3.8 Is Degrowth only for the Global North?

As mentioned above the degrowth ideas sprung up in the context of the Global North. Yet, there are various theoretical and practical connections with the Global South that are discussed in the literature. So, we want to explore the question whether degrowth offers any perspectives for the Global South?

A first and direct link between the North and South is the argument of “conceding environmental space/capacity” to the South. This basically means that degrowth in the North – here primarily understood as a down-scaling of material production and consumption – is important, indeed necessary, to provide “environmental space” for the South to grow (to a certain material standard) without passing the biophysical limits in global terms (D'Alisa et al, 2015; Martinez-Alier, 2012; O'Neill, 2012). This argument is linked to a series of other points which will be discussed in more detail, such as the global carrying capacity of the earth, the 'right' scale of economic activity and the just distribution and consumption of resources and waste (“environmental justice”). This seems almost intuitive if we compare the access and actual consumption of resources (especially non-renewable ones) of an average German 'consumer' and one from Burkina Faso. However, this argumentation becomes far less clear in the context of the so-called developing countries (including the BRICS) where parts of the population have reached material affluence and others not.

This argument of conceding environmental space or capacity, according to Trettel Silva&Goncalves Dias (2017), can be useful for three reasons. First, it leaves little, if any, doubt about the responsibilities of the Global North regarding environmental degradation. The empirical evidence on these issues is undeniable, the per capita consumption of energy and material resources of the average 'consumer' in the Global North is on average a multiple of the average 'consumer' in the Global South. The so-called high-income countries house roughly 15 per cent of global population yet account for around 75 per cent of global consumption expenditure – consuming 3.2 times more energy and 2.3 times more material per capita than the rest of the

world (Lorek&Spangenberg, 2014). Thus, we have to clearly state, that the modes of production and living in the North are the main responsibles for our current overshot dilemma, and not – as sometimes argued – poverty in the South. The argument also implies that the consumption patterns in the North are far from being sustainable in terms of the carrying capacity and that a 'universalization' of those patterns to the rest of the world would be disastrous for the planet. Finally, it highlights the importance of distribution issues – something that is often ignored, if not intentionally excluded, by growth proponents. If we assume that there are in fact limits to growth and that various resources on this planet are finite, then, at some point, the only way to reduce (material) inequality is via a more equitable distribution.

Another direct link between North and South in the degrowth literature is the issue of population size. Degrowth arguments have already been criticized of being Neo-Malthusian and authoritative. Yet, a closer look at the degrowth arguments offers a different perspective. There is certainly a serious preoccupation with the size and growth of the global population in the literature. This results from the simple idea that an increasing population will require/demand increasing amounts of resources to satisfy their material needs. A common argument is that gains in efficiency and new technologies can take care of this increased demand without increasing the total demand for resources – an argument that requires quite some technological optimism. If we were not to share this optimism, then degrowth would ultimately mean also shrinking of the population. But even if we agree with the notion of population reduction, it is a completely different question how to achieve it. Schneider et al (2010) argue that authoritative, imposed population control (like China's One Child policy) is incompatible with degrowth principles. And that a reduction of population is based on 'bottom-up approaches, on the empowerment of women in regard of their reproductive choices and on democratic choices. Kerschner (2010) further points out that 'top-down' and market-based approaches are hardly sufficient for such a delicate, emotional issue.

The issue of population size and growth encompasses another crucial link in the North-South relations. Because the actual ecological[71] impact of the population obviously depends on the consumption per capita. In other words, a population increase in India of 10 million people (considering them average 'consumers') has very likely less ecological impacts than an increase of 1 million people in the US or Europe. Thus, from a degrowth perspective, policies for increased fertility in the Global North (direct cash transfers for having children, like the “Kindergeld” in Germany) might cause more damage to the planet and our civilization then the population growth in the Global South (Martinez-Alier, 2012). If we want to sustain the argument that the global population must decrease, then we should aim at decreasing those parts of the global population that have the most ecological impact. A much more effective way of tackling the issue of population without even speaking about it (invoking connotations of population control, eugenics or xenophobia) is female empowerment. And DG is all about emancipation and empowerment. In fact, looking at carbon-reduction solutions, Hawken (2017) found that the combination of family planning programs and education for girls comparable to OECD standards in the “developing” world has more potential for reducing greenhouse gas emissions than any other solution. And, empowerment is a value in itself with huge transformative power.

Population is certainly a very complex and controversial issue, so we should spend some more thoughts on this. A central question from an ecological perspective is: how many people can the planet feed or even nourish? Latouche (2008) argues that the answer to this question is relative and cannot be reduced to purely quantitative aspects. If every person on the planet would have a consumption pattern like the average US citizen, then our planet is already more than over-populated and global population would have to shrink to around one billion people. If everybody were to have the average consumption of a person from Burkina Faso, then our planet could

[71] Here we are intentionally using the term 'ecological' instead of 'environmental' implying that the impact of any population is never only towards the natural environment but also towards itself, other populations, culture, economy, etc.

sustain a population over 20 billion people.[72] Considering that industrial agriculture is one of the main drivers of ecological overshot, Georgescu-Roegen (2012) defines the sustainable population size as the one that can be fed only through organic/permaculture agriculture. This seems very much aligned with degrowth arguments that often advocate local, organic food production following the permaculture principle of enhancing (instead of exploiting) the earth (May Kruger, 2015).

Finally, there is another link between the North and South in the degrowth debate – the issue of reducing work hours. While a reduction of the material and energy consumption in the Global North seems an uncomfortable approach at first, it would probably lead to a reduction of work hours. Many workers with a relatively low salary would probably vote against such measures due to their financial losses. That is why any reductions of income in low-income groups must be offset with complementary institutions (such as the universal basic income) in order to avoid increased poverty. On the other hand, fewer hours spent for work provide a range of possibilities beyond mere leisure – participation in social and political projects, personal development or simply more time for education and caring. It offers also abatement of the various negative effects resulting from stressful, alienated working conditions. In sum, reducing work hours (and negative working conditions in general) is a main objective of the degrowth movement both to reduce economic output and to increase human well-being (Schorr, 2015).

What might seem as a win-win situation ("less work, more well-being") at first glance uncloses several potential problems from a degrowth perspective. First of all, degrowth proponents argue for a re-localization of economic activity. As the Global North has outsourced much of its economic activity (especially the polluting and work-intensive activities) to the South, a consequent degrowth policy would try to invert that trend and stimulate local economic activity – meaning that, in a first

[72] We have to mention here, that these numbers are crude estimates considering the current food and energy production. Obviously, these numbers could drastically change if we were to loose major ecosystems and/or huge areas of arable land. And there are various other factors, such as changes in the diet (e.g. from omnivorous to vegetarian) or the production loss, that could enormously affect the actual number of people our planet can sustain.

moment, more work is required in the North. Vice versa, the Global South would lose some work opportunities which would migrate back to the location of their consumption. This alone could institute drastic changes and their mitigation would require ambitious political, social and economic efforts. Sorman (2015) discusses another potential conflict in this context – the end of fossil fuels. Not matter if we actually reach peak oil or if we deliberately choose to abstain from fossil fuel use, it is likely that the end of cheap energy (which powers the industrial machinery) will lead to more demand for manual human labor. Until today, the vast majority of our energy use is covered by fossil fuels and we have yet to implement a renewable and ecological energy-system.

Considering now this discussion for the Global South, Trettel Silva/Goncalves Diaz (2017) concluded that there is almost no discussion at all. Reviewing several articles on the topic the authors show that the discussion on reducing work hours is almost exclusively focused on the North and that there are many aspects that still have to be explored concerning this topic in the Global South. We can, however, observe that in the Global South the average worker is significantly worse paid (and thus less inclined to forgo his/her work) compared to the average worker in the North and that on average the working hours (and conditions) are a lot higher (worse) than in the North. The perhaps most central question from a degrowth perspective here is how we can think of equitable consumption levels (“each individual not more than his/her share of the earth's carrying capacity”) when the time invested, and value given to work varies greatly between countries and cultures?

4. Mapping Buen Vivir

"Uma vida boa é a barriga cheia e um monte de netos"
(A good life is a full belly and many grandchildren)
Pai Nany Kateyuve Yawanawá[73]

4.1 A first approximation[74]

Now, that we have a general understanding of what the ideas and concepts behind degrowth are, we will to shift our focus to the other alternative to development we want to discuss – Buen Vivir or Viver bien. In recent years, Buen Vivir (BV) has gained global visibility through its inclusion in the constitutions of both Ecuador (in 2008) and Bolivia (in 2009) and has become the probably most discussed alternative to development emerging from the Latin American context (Acosta, 2009; Acosta, 2017; Estermann, 2010; Cortez, 2010; Becka, 2011 Friant/Langmore, 2015, Huanacuni Mamani, 2015). Also referred to as 'sumak kawsay' (in Quechua) or 'suma qamaña' (in Aymara), Buen Vivir refers to 'good life' or 'to live well'.[75] The concept originated from within the Andean indigenous cultures but is not restricted to these geographical spaces.[76] It is defined as an alternative to development and has roots in the century-long indigenous resistance against colonialism. Buen Vivir

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[73] Elder of the Yawanawá people living on the margins of the Gregorio River in the state of Acre, Brazil. This was his very precise answer to our question of what he personally would consider a good life, given during our stay in his village, Yawarany, in October/November 2018.

[74] We prefer to use the term "approximation" here because of the cultural wealth and richness that is embedded in the indigenous concepts discussed here. Even an anthropological inquiry – which we are obviously not doing here – will almost unavoidably reduce that richness simply to by trying to describe something that is inherently connected to a living experience and translated from languages that use very different references than usual academic language does.

[75] Just to give an example of the conceptual richness of the term "suma qamaña", we have to note that "suma" can mean plenitude, sublime, excellent, magnificent, and beautiful. And "qamaña" can mean life, to live, to co-exist, and being. The Aymara then say that "to live well or to live in plenitude, one has to be well and walk well". Meaning that "suma qamaña" (vivir bien) is the process of life in plenitude; to know how to live and to co-exist. To live well is living in material and spiritual balance/equilibrium (Huanacuni Manani, 2015).

[76] Similar worldviews can be found in various indigenous people from the Mapuche in Chile and the Guaranis in Bolivia, Brazil or Paraguay to the Kunas in Panama and the Mayas in Mexico and Guatemala (Acosta, 2017). In the following discussion the main references are the concepts from Ecuador and Bolivia, though.

is a central category in the worldviews, or better, cosmovisions of many indigenous societies and rejects the Western idea of progress and development. Approaches towards Buen Vivir are always community-centered, environmentally balanced and culturally sensitive. A special emphasis here lies on community and communal relations, which are the foundation of a 'good life' – without community 'living well' is impossible. And nature, or better mother Earth (“Madre Tierra” or “Pachamama”) with all its material and immaterial beings is a integral part of any community. BV strives to (re)establish harmony between nature and all beings – extending the concept of “being” also to trees, rivers, mountains, minerals, etc. (Gudynas, 2011).

Buen Vivir is always linked to “spirituality”, which emerges from an equilibrium between thinking and feeling. It is important to emphasize that this does not imply a rejection of reason but establishing a harmonious balance between reason and “heart”. Indeed, BV is always about creating balance and harmony with oneself, with the people around yourself, with the ancestors, with Mother Earth and Father Cosmos – a complete and integral harmony of all that is sacred, and which is based on respect and care. To establish such harmony, we require sensibility, the capacity to carefully listen and observe what surrounds us. If we remain insensible to the needs of ourselves and other beings, we are not on a path to a “good life”. Or as Aymara leader, politician, researcher and former chancellor (minister of foreign affairs) of Bolivia Fernando Huanacuni Mamani (2015, p.16) explains: “*If the human being does not love, does not take care, does not protect, and does not respect the house he or she lives in, nor the other beings who live in it as well, then he undoubtedly walks towards its destruction*”.[77]

From this perspective, if the equilibrium between humans and Mother Earth is broken, the result is violence in all its manifestations. More so, it would be futile to hope for peace as long as we remain alienated and separated from nature and our roots. In the centers of capitalism, where individuality (instead of community) is held above all and protected by law, this separation is more profound. And, consequently, creates insensible-ness, disintegration, loneliness and suffering; the opposite of a

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[77] Translation from the Spanish original. If not explicitly stated otherwise, the translations have been produced by the author of this thesis.

good life. Reactions to this suffering are mental illnesses, substance abuses/addictions and rising suicide rates – conditions that are caused by the “modern” lifestyles (Huanacuni Mamani, 2015). Living in harmony with nature means transcending an anthropocentric view, including and valuing the life of non-humans, plants and other beings. It also means having a close relationship with nature, which has intrinsic value. It also implies that we should only take – “extracting” becomes somewhat of a queer concept if we consider the integral unity of man and nature – from nature what is necessary for our subsistence (Kowii, 2011). While BV advocates a culture of sufficiency, subsistence should not be viewed as precarious. On the contrary, BV is about the flourishing and happiness of all beings. Therefore, it requires a careful and respectful treatment of the soil, the forests and the waters – all of which are beings, “alive” and animated by spirits, thus building a bridge between the natural (“physical”) and the spiritual (León, 2016).

Harmony with oneself is not an easy task. It requires, again, a balance between the material and spiritual aspects of one's life. According to Hidalgo-Capitán et al (2014) certain personal qualities, or capacities are required to obtain from the territory the resources necessary for 'sumak kawsay'. They include interior strength, a balanced behavior that avoids extremes, wisdom, the capacity of comprehension, a vision of the future, perseverance and compassion. In an approximation these concepts correlate to physical health, mental health, education and knowledge, “eudaimonia” (following Aristotle's conception)[78] and feelings/emotions. In the indigenous life, all these qualities and knowledge can, and indeed should, be acquired through the myths and the experience in the community. Having those capacities, and already the process of acquiring them, enable a person to live a happy, plentiful and flourishing life. Here sumak kawsay rejects a hedonistic perspective and follows the Aristotelian view of happiness/eudaimonia. While a hedonist has to be happy in order to achieve a good life, in Aristotle's perspective only someone who leads a

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[78] Literally meaning good (eu) spirit/true self (daimōn), eudaimonia is often translated as happiness or human flourishing. For Aristotle, eudaimonia/happiness, or simply a “good life”, is the final end of human existence and can be achieved by striving for a virtuous (meaning both ethical and realizing your potentials) and complete (not lacking anything) life. Beyond this very reduced summary, Shields (2012) offers a comprehensive discussion and contextualization of Aristotle's philosophy – particularly relevant here is chapter 19 on the conception of happiness in his Nicomachean Ethics.

good life can be happy. That means happiness and fulfillment depend on if and how someone develops his potentials – striving for harmony with oneself – and on how we interact with society (Ramírez Gallegos, 2012).

Now, harmony within the community and between communities (society) implies that we recognize that the other members of that community are an essential and necessary condition for our own (good) life. BV, as a life of plenitude and characterized by social and relational aspects, refers to a life of individuals within community and society (Coraggio, 2014). So, it is more of a shared living ("convivir") and the community goes beyond place and being blood-related. As Chancosa (2010, p.224) explains: "*living in community is not only about sharing the same geographical location, nor is it about the blood we share; it is about leading a collective life and about identifying and familiarizing with that collective. This allows for sharing our joy, but also for sharing our worries about how to advance collectively and how to feel part of the same tree as a people*". In fact, community and the well-being of it might be considered the central category in most BV perspectives. For all members of a community to live well, no one should live bad. That also implies that the enrichment of certain individuals or families is creating differences and is damaging social harmony (beyond mere cohesion). What BV requires is solidarity. Both in general, and especially with those members of the community that are in situations of need, like the elderly, children or widows (Kowii, 2009; Chancosa, 2010).

While BV is based on ancient cosmovisions, its recent resurgence is closely linked to the multiple crises we have discussed throughout the thesis. In the context of America, especially Latin America, the multiple crisis manifests itself within century-old structures of exploitation and marginalization of indigenous people, "campesinos" (rural and often landless peasants), "quilombolas" (descendants of escaped, former slaves), and other minorities. A first act of resistance against this historical process is decolonizing the language. Instead of using the term "America" - based on the name of Florentine explorer Amerigo Vespucci – indigenous groups and activists often prefer to call the continent "Abya Yala". The term, coming from the language of the Kuna people of present-day Panama and Colombia, literally means "land in full maturity" or "land of vital blood". Directly linked to the process of

decolonization (of language) is the rejection of "Development". From the Buen Vivir perspective, development (both the word and the practices associated with it) is first of all a manifestation of Western cultural dominance and colonialism. Similar to degrowth, Buen Vivir questions the fixation of the Western development/progress concept on production and economic growth. Some indigenous cultures do not even have a concept comparable to development because life is not understood as a linear process or as a dichotomy between the before and the after. Thus, there are no 'under-developed' states or phases an individual (or society) must undergo in order to improve; neither is there a conception of wealth as the accumulation of material goods or of poverty as their lack (Acosta, 2016). And because development is considered a process of colonization, Buen Vivir is – very much like degrowth – a task of decolonization and de-particularization. In the case of Latin America with its century-old and brutal history of colonization and slavery, these processes must be embedded in very different circumstances than in the Global North (Kothari et al, 2015).

Acosta (2017) describes the ethics of Buen Vivir as based on "sufficiency" - meaning sufficient/enough for the collective/community and not only for the individual. In this view, there is no motivation to accumulate material things to live better in the future, the aim is to have a "good life" in the present without jeopardizing the same possibility for future generations. Buen Vivir differs fundamentally from the Western worldviews/ideologies with its communitarian and anti-capitalist roots. It also differs because it postulates a biocentric, indeed socio-biocentric, worldview instead of an anthropocentric one. One of the common denominators of the different Buen Vivir approaches[79] is the understanding that all living beings are mutually dependent on and complementary to each other. Therefore, we should strive for a life in harmony with other beings, human or non-human (Escobar, 2011). This idea of interdependence and the conception of a plural reality a are fundamental break from

[79] Buen Vivir, very much like degrowth, is not a ready-to-go proposal that is globally applicable. Its proposal is rather a possibility to create and establish new forms of collective living. It is a platform for discussion and to develop responses (plural!) to the social and ecological threats and challenges of our time. Therefore, Buen Vivir approaches might vary distinctively between different regions, albeit following the same biocentric, collective-oriented worldview. For example, the Gandhian concept of permanence or Vandana Shiva's eco-feminist approach could be considered forms of Buen Vivir as well (Acosta, 2017).

many modern (Western) ideologies that include some form of society-nature dualism and/or (European) universalism. Understanding, assuming and respecting both differences and complementarities (in an inevitably diverse world), Buen Vivir offers a perspective that is holistic and mutualistic. It adopts, in contrast to a Cartesian view, a systemic perspective on the entire ecosphere and advocates a path of harmony and "*unity in diversity*" (Vanhulst/Beling, 2011, p.56).

Another aspect that arises from this biocentric worldview is the **right of nature** – the perhaps most famous demand and achievement of the Buen Vivir movements. A first objective of this demand is to overcome the artificial separation between humans and nature and (re)connect them. From a BV perspective, this necessarily requires stopping the commercialization of nature ("putting a price on nature"). Instead, social and economic objectives must be subordinated to the function of our ecosystems – obviously, without losing the goal of a dignified and 'good' human life. Talking about the 'good life' is always a normative issue and prone to controversy, however as we argued in Chapter I there are some underlying basic assumptions of what a 'good life' requires. And while Buen Vivir sprung mainly form the indigenous experiences in South and Central America, it is not about romanticizing those forms of society or about rejecting (all) the technological advances of modern Western society. It is, however, about critically questioning these advances and the possibility to learn from different forms of knowledge and cultures. According to Acosta (2017) the social transformations towards Buen Vivir are only possible with more democracy. Because if the transformation process is anti-democratic, perhaps even authoritative, then the resulting society will be as well.

Like degrowth, Buen Vivir is a plural concept that does not aim at defining a single, homogenous life(style) as good. It rather is different kinds of living-well together – what Acosta (2016, p.70) calls "buenos convivires". This 'living well together' applies for individuals within communities, between different communities and between individuals or communities and nature. It is also no static concept but must be understood as a concept that is in a continuous process of constructing and reproduction. It is a process that requires the collective and the community, because what actually constitutes 'living well' is a political issue that has to be decided democratically, but that does not imply that the individual disappears. On the

contrary, it emerges within the community in its natural capacity – this is what (community/collective) complementarity means. It is a state of equilibrium between the individual and the community, a point of encounter. It is a cultural paradigm which is based on the notion that life is necessarily and, from the indigenous perspective, naturally communitarian (Huanacuni Mamani, 2010).

A community does only work if people are considering themselves as equals – whether they choose someone to take decisions in their places or not is another question. The paradigm of Buen Vivir views all people – indeed all beings – as equal inhabitants of the Earth, all sharing the same environment, all living in a symbiotic relation with 'pachamama'. This vision is directly opposing the capitalist industrial culture of consumerism based on unsustainable extractivism. Instead, Buen Vivir encourages activities such as organic agriculture (or even more, permaculture), the use of renewable energy sources, ecotourism and recycling to just name some examples of cycles of mutual flourishing (SENPLADES, 2009).[80] It promotes active citizen participation in political decision-making which is considered, together with forms of economic cooperation, as means to re-organize the society from 'bottom-up'. Compared to current models of representative democracy, the approach of Buen Vivir aspires to create a radically democratic society based on consensus and in which citizens have meaningful influence over economic and political forces. This also implies more social control over the government and the means of production – instead of centralized, intransparent and bureaucratic processes (Esteva, 2010; Acosta & Gudynas. 2011).

[80] This list compiled by the Ecuadorian National Secretary of Planning and Development is particularly interesting because it already tries to translate more traditional practices into 'modern' concepts, such as ecotourism. On the other side, this creates a certain danger of appropriating and deflating the original concepts. Ecotourism, for instance, can be envisioned in harmony with a Degrowth or Buen Vivir perspective, but could also easily be compatible with neoliberal, globalized, and pro-profit tourism market. And, as with every “development” project, it depends very much on the actual, local implementation and execution, whether it contributes to BV.

4.2 Theoretical alliances of Buen Vivir

The idea of living a 'good life' and the question what this includes are probably as old as civilization itself. We can find this question in the ancient texts of Greek philosophers and they are present in the millennial indigenous culture – latter, however, are often transmitted orally. This question is also present in many spiritual and religious worldviews throughout history. Recently, Buen Vivir emerges as a discourse in the late 1990ies due to three coinciding factors: the social movements in Latin America (especially the indigenous movements against neoliberalism and the selling-out of their land and culture); a convergence of those movements and the ideology of other global movements (particularly the anti-globalization and the environmental movements); and the widely perceived crisis of the idea of development (Vanhulst/Beling, 2014). So, while its roots are ancient, the recent resurgence of BV is similar to degrowth – a result of the multiple crises we are in.

As already mentioned, the indigenous origins of Buen Vivir are diverse. The perhaps most present indigenous cosmology is the “Sumak Kawsay” form the Quechua people. But similar concepts can be found, among others, with the Guarani (“Ñandereko”), the Aymara (“Suma Qamaña”) or the Mapuche (Küme Mongen”). Considering this huge conceptual and semantic variety, it becomes clear that the translation into modern frameworks almost necessarily reduces the richness of the original concepts. Still, there are converging themes that can help to draw a better picture of these concepts. One of those convergences is around the principle that Huanacani Mamani (2010, p.32) summaries as: “living in **plenitude**, knowing how to live in **harmony** with the cycles of Mother Earth, of the cosmos, of life and of history, and in balance with every form of existence in a state of permanent respect”.

To understand Buen Vivir, we have to look at the history and presence of the indigenous people and nations. Buen Vivir is part, and perhaps the unifying theme, of their struggle against genocide, oppression, marginalization and colonization. It is part of a long-lasting search for alternative ways of life or rather the possibility to live these (already existing) alternatives without being colonized. This means Buen Vivir is a process that is grounded in the principle of historic continuity of these ways of life. And at the same time, it is a collective project for a future which the indigenous communities seek – not necessarily only for or designed by them. The strong

presence of Buen Vivir in the present debates is not simply due to the multiple crises we are witnessing (e.g. of the oligarchic Latin American national state rooted in colonialism) but was also strengthened by the increasing organizational capacities of the indigenous (and other) movements. And while the utopias of the Andean and Amazonian regions are the most influential within Buen Vivir, the approach should be as inclusive as possible to similar views. Partnerships with other approaches and discourses – such as degrowth – which are spiritually and politically connected to Buen Vivir are seen as a potential to expand the struggle for a transformation of civilization (Acosta, 2017).

4.2.1 Post-Everything?

A conceptual alliance for Buen Vivir can be found in the literature, especially from Latin America, on Post-Development. This perspective rejects the practice and concept of development which is seen as a manifestation and essential part of Western hegemony and, to some extent, the continuation of colonial projects. Escobar (1995, p.44) summarizes this criticism arguing that: “Development was – and continuous for the most part – a top-down ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treat people and culture as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of “progress”. Development was conceived not as a cultural process (culture was a residual variable, to disappear with the advance of modernization) but instead a system of more or less universally applicable technical interventions intended to deliver some “badly needed” goods to a “target” population. It comes to no surprise that development became a force so destructive to Third World cultures, ironically in the name of peoples' interest.”

According to Demaria & Kothari (2017) the concept of Post-Development has gained its current shape with four main book contributions: The Development Dictionary by Wolfgang Sachs (1992), Encountering Development written by Arturo Escobar (1995), The History of Development by Gilbert Rist (2003), and The Post-Development Reader by Rahnema & Bawtree (1997). Generally, Post-Development describes a society in which development no longer is the main organizing principle of social life. Thus, one of the aims of the Post-Development debate is to abandon the cultural and ideological bases and assumptions of development and encourage

alternative imaginaries, objectives, and practices. Three of those alternative imaginaries have a particularly close link to Post-Development: post-capitalism, post-colonialism, and post (or de-)growth. Beyond being mere criticism, all these lines of thought provide us inspirations for alternatives to development.

We have already discussed post-/degrowth extensively and post colonialism briefly in chapter 2 and 3. Let us just mention again the importance of **post-colonialism**, which cannot be overstated in the case of Latin America. Here capitalism is often perceived as the other side, or an extension of colonialism. Different from Europe, the colonial legacy – that is. the human consequences of control, subjugation and exploitation of the colonized people and their land – can be seen and felt directly in Latin America. These consequences are closely linked to the struggles for sovereignty and autonomy of the people in the former colonies. Post-colonial studies are a vast academic field that tackles a variety of issues that can only be briefly mentioned here. A central assumption is that decolonization has happened primarily on a formal political level, but colonial structures persist in culture, institutions and minds. These mechanisms and structures are still very present and present a major challenge in terms of emancipation and liberation – both on an individual and collective (national) level (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2005). Thus, a central challenge for any emancipatory process – and certainly Buen Vivir as a proposal for autonomous and self-governed communities/regions – requires unveiling, resisting, and overcoming this colonial heritage.

Another “post-ism” that is directly linked to the colonial regime and that has to be mentioned in the BV discussion is **post-extractivism**. This concept is especially interesting because it generates socio-political ties across Latin America, where not all countries necessarily have experiences with Buen Vivir. In Brazil, for example, the BV debate is almost non-existing, but there are many social movements and struggles around territory and ecological and social justice. And one of the main pressures these struggles are encountering comes from the resource and land demands of (neo)extractivism (Acosta/Brandt, 2017). Extractive industries exist in every country of Latin America with their growing demand for resources being driven by the global demand for more economic growth and increasing population. Extractivism refers to the processes of extracting natural resources from the Earth

with the aim of selling them on the global market. It is closely linked to what, in economics, is called a commodity export strategy or model. Meaning the extraction of large volumes of non-processed natural resources, including not only mining and oil industries, but also agro-industrial monocultures, fishing and touristic extractivism (Acosta, 2013).

There are different forms of extractivism, and some are even necessary for our existence. Gudynas (2011) distinguishes between predatory, sensible and indispensable extractivism. Predatory extractivism is the most practiced form today with little regard for ecological or social concerns. An improvement towards sustainability are the establishment of certain ecological and social standards in the process of extraction, leading to a sensible extractivism. Finally, indispensable extractivism additionally includes the inclusion of the (local) population in the decision of what and how much is to be extracted. This last form can hardly be compared to the other two, because it refers to an economic model in which natural resources are obtained in a socially and politically consensual way. And clearly, there will always be a need to “extract” resources from nature for our survival and well-being. The crucial point is that even indispensable extractivism should be carried out in a way that does not compromise Earth's capacity to replenish itself. Looking at examples of indigenous communities we can observe that some forms of extractivism might even be desirable, helping nature to flourish even more (e.g. practices of enriching the soil). There certainly are ways of taking from nature that can be considered harmonious or sustainable.

Overcoming (neo)extractivism and replacing its economic and social structures with different, post-extractivist models is a necessary condition for any alternative to development, such as BV, to flourish (Gudynas, 2013). A first step here would be to go from predatory forms to sensible forms of extractivism. This would already reduce the dependency on extractivist activities and increase the possibilities of state action towards alternative economic policies (and those will need all the political and institutional support possible). In a second step the massive exploitation of natural resources would be reduced to a necessary minimum and non-renewable production inputs would gradually be replaced by renewable and sustainable materials. This step would have to be accompanied by a restructuring of the tax and

subsidy systems (and in turn would also facilitate such reforms), aligning them with criteria of social and ecological equality (Acosta/Brand, 2017). However, what we can observe in most countries – even Ecuador and Bolivia which explicitly propose a Buen Vivir economy/society – is the opposite trend. Extractivism has been consolidated and even expanded, all around the globe but especially in Latin America and the Global South. We can see an intensification of a development model based on the intensive exploitation of natural resources, both in classical mining (including oil and gas) and in various agro-industrial practices (e.g. mechanized monoculture or meat production). Not only does this model offer very limited economic benefits – generating minimal employment and if costs were fully accounted for (internalized) it would probably be unfeasible – but it also creates considerable social and ecological conflicts (Gudynas, 2013; Burchardt/Dietz, 2014; Coryat, 2017).

Another characteristic of extractivist economies is the increased potential for rent-seeking. Rent-seeking refers to activities that aim at increasing wealth without being productive or creating any new wealth. It necessarily results in loss of efficiency due to poor allocation of resources, lost government revenues, and increased income inequality. Usually, rents are obtained by creating monopolies through the occupation of regulatory agencies. But privileged ownership of, for example, oil or mineral-rich lands can be another opportunity for rent-seeking.[81] An economy that is excessively based on “rentier” practices creates various problems. It fosters an economic and social system that has been called “crony capitalism”. Such system is characterized by authoritative governments and transactions, or economic activity in general, based on favors and often kinship (“nepotism”). Instead of the risky investment in a new idea, businesses will “invest” in political influence, that is corruption, to create monopolies or oligopolies. Rentier practices also offer an

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[81] This phenomenon has often been described as “resource curse” - meaning a situation in which a resource rich country's economic performance is rather poor. While the effects of this “curse” varies considerably depending on the resource and especially on the institutional quality (democracy with checks and balances, functioning laws, etc.) of the country, there are very few examples of countries completely avoiding the negative effects (Norway probably being the most famous case). In the literature, rent-seeking is considered the key mechanism linking high resource wealth to low economic performance and corruption (Bjorvatn et al, 2012; Williams/Le Billon, 2017)

explanation why many resource-rich countries have large part of their population in poverty (Hughes, 1999; Kang,2002; Acosta, 2016).

4.3 Principles and objectives of Buen Vivir[82]

A central principle, indeed a meta-principle of Buen Vivir is harmony. Harmony here describes a state of balance, of mutual respect and caring, of reciprocity and love. According to Phelan (2011) we should strive for harmony in three areas. First, on an individual level that includes physical, mental, and spiritual components. Then harmony between communities starting with the individual and the family. But the community level extends to neighbors, colleagues and the wider community – here also social and public institutions and the market play a role. And ultimately, harmony with nature, a mutual balance between human activities and environmental health. The process of entering in a state of harmony often starts with the individual (who then 'harmonizes' more easily with community and nature), but there is no rigid sequence. An individual who lives in a non-harmonious relationship with his or her community and nature will, very probably, have a more difficult time to 'find' inner harmony. Bringing all three dimensions together and each in harmony is both the objective of, and the path to Buen Vivir. It refers to an integral harmony of "existing and coexisting". Actually, not just living, but also dying as death is an integral part of life and always coexists (Huarachi, 2011).

To 'live well' is a life in plenitude. It is to know how to live in harmony and equilibrium: with the natural cycles (of mother Earth "pachamama"), with the cosmos, with history, and with all other beings. Following Huanacuni Mamani (2014), below is a list of principles for a daily routine of 'living well' that he describes as knowledge. 'Living well' is to know how to:

[82] Talking about cosmovisions and principles is obviously a normative discussion about values and ideology. It is worth to mention that both DG and BV are mostly very explicit about their values. Thus, there seems to be little need to take a critical approach towards their ideology – in Marxian sense of unveiling implicit values behind the "curtain of ideology".

• *Eat/drink*: meaning to nurture oneself choosing healthy food; respecting the natural cycles implies to choose food of the season and from the region

• *Dance*: understood as a spiritual exercise of connecting body and cosmos

• *Work*: which brings joy and should be carried out with passion

• *Meditate*: in a process of introspection the silence is integral part to our equilibrium and contributes to calmness and peacefulness

• *Listen & think*: both rationally and emotionally

• *Love and to be loved*: based on a fundamental respect for all beings, it creates harmonious relationships

And there could be others included, like know how to communicate (meaning respectful and constructive conversation), to dream, or to listen to the elders (absorbing life experience and wisdom). In Ecuador and Bolivia Buen Vivir principles have gained constitutional rank and have been explicitly addressed in the nations' legal documents. The most central one is to prioritize life; not just human life (as many socialists argue) nor money/profit (as most capitalist argue), but all forms of life. Another central principle is that decision-making requires consensus and not simply a majority. This is a crucial difference and implies that decisions should be made at the most decentralized level possible. It further implies that a lot more discussion/debate and time is required including a lot more people than in representative forms of democracy. It does not imply that differences should be ignored, instead they should be respected and through dialogue and consensual decision-making we have to get to a decision that does not provoke (or at least minimizes) conflict. Buen Vivir is also about valuing cultural identities, that is if they are in harmony with nature and cosmos and respectful towards others (valuing difference/otherness). And the production of food gains a special focus. Through the integration of this kind of work into our daily lives we can gain some degree of sufficiency and reconnect with nature (Hidalgo, 2011; Gudynas, 2011).

Just as degrowth, BV is characterized by its critique of economic growth, opulence, consumerism, and productivism. It questions the principle of “more is better” of capitalist societies/culture and their inherent tendency to accumulate. Instead Buen

Vivir proposes the principle of **sufficiency** in order to protect and to care for nature, of which we are a part. Meaning that “we should only take from nature what is sufficient for subsistence” (Hidalgo et al, 2014, p.54). Despite its clear tendency towards a materialistically simpler life-style, subsistence does not imply a precarious situation. As long as we do not damage the Earth and its ecosystems in the process, we can fully enjoy the abundance of wealth provided by nature.[83] This view is further strengthened by the principle of relationality which states that everything is connected with everything – humans, nature, and the cosmos are all part of each other and inseparable. And we are not only within this web of relations, but all beings and actions are complementary - in the sense that all coexists with its opposite or its complementary part which completes and harmoniously integrates with the other side. Furthermore, BV refers to the principle of reciprocity, which states that every action of giving corresponds to a reciprocal action of receiving. It is crucial to note that reciprocity is not a congruent link, but something hardly measurable that might occur in a different time and space. Taking all this together, is is no surprise that BV strongly advocates the principle of solidarity – between individuals, communities, and nations (Acosta, 2017).

All these principles are linked to **community** (and the communal space), a central pillar of Buen Vivir. In fact, without community there is no “good life” as BV is harmonious existence and co-existence. And it is within the community where traditions are learned and lived, where practical and spiritual knowledge is passed on, and where dialogues take place. As Barkin (2012) points out, communities that focus on the collective (instead of the individual rights of their members) have a better chance to liberate themselves from the pressures of globalized economic integration. Thus, the community should aim at enabling their members through collective actions and entitlements to improve as a whole and each individual. Especially the area of resource management offers a huge potential to strengthen

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[83] Obviously, the principle/criterion of sufficiency remains quite controversial. On one hand, it is clear that not everybody on the planet can have his/her private conventional car. - there are simply not enough resources (here mostly metal) in the Earth's crust to provide that. But what about material-intensive, high-tech health care equipment, like magnetic resonance tomography? In the end, decisions with difficult trade-offs will have to be decided collectively and as consensual as possible to guarantee legitimacy and to comply with BV principles.

collective capacities for a sustainable, regional management. Barkin's decade-long research and projects with mountain communities in Mexico show that a collaborative approach offers the chance to effectively organize local governance institutions, reinforce the demand for autonomy, and enable the dialogue about how to implement principles of sustainability. In sum, most Buen Vivir principles could be grouped around two main themes – strengthening (and reinventing) real democratic participation (starting with and from the community) and the fight for environmental and social justice (Friant/Langmore, 2015).

As already mentioned, Buen Vivir is a very diverse and plural concept, hence it is not surprising that there are different “branches” of Buen Vivir. Most of the principles are overlapping to quite some degree, yet we can get a better understanding by comparing, especially the indigenous branch with the other two. Different understandings of BV also explain how, for example, in the case of Ecuador the government followed a socialist BV approach which is most compatible with its claims to power and its economic model. And the connection of the socio-economic model with the territory and local cultures, which is central in the indigenous BV branch, is less considered (Zaldívar, 2017). The table 5 below provides an overview of the three main BV branches on the question what principles they follow. It becomes clear that the ecological/post-development branch and the socialist/eco-Marxist branch are very close to the degrowth principles. Most of the focus in this chapter of the thesis will be dedicated to the indigenous/culturalist branch because it is the most different to degrowth and the most genuine or radical, in the literal sense that it stems from the roots. Therefore, it offers more potential to learn from each other and a chance to dialogue than the more similar branches. Obviously, these categories are rather fluid in reality and we cannot also clearly distinguish between them. A central principle that is not listed for the indigenous branch is sufficiency which is derived from the other four below. In fact, these principles lead to the maxim of auto-sufficiency and solidarity, which further imply a wise management of the forests and waters (respecting the natural cycles) and a rejection of the idea of accumulation. In fact, individuals or families that have

accumulated wealth are obliged to share the accumulated wealth[84] – ideally only on a moral basis, yet in larger societies regulations and redistributive policies are required (Hidalgo et al, 20014).

Indigenous/culturalist	Ecological/Post-development	Socialist/Eco-Marxist
1) Reciprocity (mutual assistance and solidarity in social relations - “ranti ranti”) 2) Integrity (guiding the holistic indigenous thinking) 3) Complementarity (identifies opposites not as confronting but as complementary) 4) Rationality (guides the decisions towards consensus)	1) Social equity 2) Economic and political equality 3) Solidarity 4) Redistribution 5) Reciprocity 6)Environmental sustainability 7) Freedom/autonomy 8)Democracy/ participation	1) Social equity 2) Economic and political equality 3) Redistribution 4) Shared reciprocity 5) Sustainability 6) Autonomy 7)Democracy/participation

Table 5 - Different Buen Vivires (adapted from Hidalgo et al, 2014; Cubillo&Hidalgo, 2014)

4.4 Buen Vivir and autonomy

The notions of autonomy in the Buen Vivir debate are similar to the ones already discussed in the degrowth part, yet there are some differences that should be emphasized. A huge step in the struggle towards more autonomy was the inclusion of Buen Vivir principles into formal-legal frameworks, in the case of the Ecuadorian and Bolivian Constitutions. Certainly, the legal framework of any constitution and its reality in practice are two different things. Nevertheless, the inclusion of indigenous concepts (such as the right of nature) is, in fact, the recognition of indigenous rights and provides a legal safeguard for indigenous autonomy and difference. At the same

[84] This is really not very different from what is written in many modern, Western constitutions. We can almost always find passages on how property and wealth come with a social obligation. Resulting from the understanding that nobody is able to accumulate without the non-paid, voluntary or exploited work of other members of society. For example, in the case of the German “Grundgesetz” (the federal constitution) is says in article 14 that property creates a commitment and its use should also serve the well-being of the collective/society (dt. “Eigentum verplichtet. Sein Gebrauch soll zugleich dem Wohle der Allgemeinheit dienen.“).

time this presents a potential for exclusion, because it structures and legally codifies what is recognized as cultural difference (or authenticity). This has the effect of making legal claims only visible when they correspond to the legal code and it also divides those that are recognized as sufficiently authentic from other marginalized groups (Engle, 2010). This is particularly worrying because the Buen Vivir approach emphasizes inclusiveness and is, by no means, limited to indigenous populations.

Another important aspect linked to the legal debate about autonomy is the acknowledgment of different cultures and even nations within the same territory. The Bolivian Constitution of 2009, for example, defines Bolivia as a unitary, yet **plurinational state**. The new Plurinational State of Bolivia created or changed a series of institutions to include indigenous representatives (e.g., in parliament, the Plurinational Legislative Assembly) or to establish community land ownership (“Native Community Lands”). In the new Bolivian state, all ethnic groups are entitled to various collective rights, among them self-determination, self-government and the conformation of indigenous autonomous territories. In the case of Bolivia, Evo Morales' government has undoubtedly achieved much in terms of multicultural recognition and regulation – inspiring movements in and outside of Latin America (Postero, 2007; Fabricant & Gustafson, 2011). The proposal of a plurinational state, which is born out of the indigenous movements, has the foundational concepts of land and territory,[85] recognition of self-governance, and autonomy. In this sense, the conception of a plurinational state is a structural critique of the colonial state. And this state is constituted by different nations, which are defined/created not only politically, juridically, and culturally, but also spiritually. Thus, it respects diversity and fosters integration (understood as construction/creation with the participation of all, instead of inclusion without any participation). In Western terms it could be called a new 'social contract', although it would be more precise to call it a “community consensus of life” (esp. consenso comunitario de vida). The plurinational state is the beginning of a process of naturalization, which generates not only new (human)

[85] Land and territory imply the soil/surface, the sub-soil, and the air space. However, it is not a relationship of property. It is a spiritual relation which constitutes itself in the geographic, social, and historical space. The plurinational state is a system of integration, a proposal of modes of living in diversity and harmony with Mother Earth. The use of the land and its “natural wealth” is a central element of plurinationality (Huanacuni Mamani, 2015).

laws, but should also guarantee that laws and norms are respecting nature and its laws. It is a public declaration to incorporate different perspectives on community and nature (“madre tierra”) (Huanacuni Mamani, 2015).

But these legal changes and recognition did, in many cases, not translate into different practices on the local level and in everyday life. Sieder & Vivero (2017) discuss the cases of Mexico and Ecuador and come to the conclusion that these newly-gained rights remain “a dead letter” (p.12). They argue that the relationship between state and indigenous (and other) communities is characterized by paternalism and cooptation – for example in form of cash transfer or poverty reduction programs targeting specific regions – on one side, an increasing militarization and repression/criminalization of community leaders on the other side. One consequence of this relationship is that, since the 2000s, several indigenous communities have turned into movements of self-defense, have retreated from cooperation with government, and have strengthened their local self-governance, much like the Zapatistas already did in the 90ies in Chiapas. Even though the case of the Zapatistas is a great example of how regional self-governance can work in practice (and already for decades!), it is important to note that indigenous or “campesino” autonomy does not occur outside the state. It is intimately connected to the state and modern society. And, in a relational view, the state is an important (perhaps the most important) site of the continuous struggle of social forces within society. Thus, there always remains the possibility that indigenous communities are incorporated into the government apparatus opening them for new forms of control and regulation (Augsburger/Haber, 2018). And, we have to keep in mind that these (and other) struggles for autonomy, occur within a socio-political field that has been shaped by neoliberal influence for decades. Thus, the current structures tend to encourage competition (and disagreement) over scarce resources between regions, municipalities and communities. In the case of Bolivia, Alderman (2017) shows that communities need exactly the opposite – cooperation and agreement within a municipality or region – to pass through the politically and bureaucratically complicated process of gaining autonomy.

And in practice, the issue of (indigenous) autonomy gets even more complicated. It would be naive to assume that all communities want the same kinds and degrees

of autonomy. In the case of Bolivia, for example, which has since its 2009 Constitution specific statutes which allow indigenous communities (in this case, regions or municipalities) to declare their autonomy, the bureaucratic process is prohibitively complex. Admittedly, Bolivia is the first country to actually follow the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and it is the world's first legal framework of such a kind, so adaption difficulties were expected. Despite being an important, indeed huge step for indigenous rights, the legislation remains with gaps and the process of actually gaining autonomy remains slow and cumbersome (AIN, 2012). Also, some local actors might prefer, rather practical, the national redistributive programs (instead of more local autonomy), challenging common assumption of (indigenous) attitudes towards more autonomy (Tockman et al, 2015). Further issues on the local level frequently involve tensions between individual and collective rights, the definition of the ideal scope of autonomy, and the lack of adequate implementation (Binder/Binder, 2016). Finally, the expansion of indigenous rights – that is, the realization of the plurinational state – directly conflicts with two central elements of the current Bolivian government strategy: the adherence (and even expansion) of an economic model based on non-renewable resources and, directly linked to that, the government's efforts to control the political space (including indigenous territories). Thus, while Bolivia's legal frameworks appear to support an expansion of indigenous autonomy, political and bureaucratic processes effectively constrain it (Tockman/Cameron, 2014).

A central element of (local/regional) autonomy is the **right to self-governance**. From an economic perspective this means a system of production where the workers (and eventually also affected “stake holder”) have democratic and equal participation in the decision about production. This economic organization will be discussed further below in part 4.6.1 on cooperatives. From a political point of view, self-governance implies the direct participation of citizens or community members in public decisions and tasks. Although self-governance requires considerably more investment on the local and regional level from citizens, it is, at the same time, a central element for more democracy and participation. It is effectively a process of citizen empowerment. In fact, we can find arguments that with increasing complexity self-governance becomes a necessary element in governing a society. That is not to say that the central governments simply concede their powers to regional or local

levels, but that they themselves can profit from expanding structures of self-governance. However, self-governance capacities cannot be taken for granted and have to be carefully nurtured and designed according to local realities (Sørensen/Triantafillou, 2009). For the realization of a plurinational state, indigenous autonomy – and with it as much self-governance as possible on the local/regional level – is essential. By creating new material, ideological and institutional structures, communities and nations have the possibility of transforming the historic social and political relations of exploitation and exclusion into something more inclusive and sustainable (Ausgburger/Haber, 2018).

4.5 Buen Vivir and repoliticalization

As should have become clear by now, Buen Vivir is not only a concept but a lived practice under construction. So, how does this look in the daily life? Contrary to the recently 'awaken' degrowers in Europe, the indigenous communities have generation-long traditions and practices which are in harmony with, and respect towards nature and community. In particular, there are many economic practices and relations in the Amazonian and Andean regions that rely on reciprocity and solidarity. For example, the “minka” (or minga) which is basically a form of collective work on community level. It guarantees (non-monetary) access to labor in the case of collective needs or interests, e.g. the construction of infrastructure projects such as an irrigation canals or maintenance of a road. Or the social institution of “waki” which is concerned with land use. If a community member or family is absent or cannot plant on their land, this land is allocated to another member/family and the product will be shared between the two. Another really interesting example within the economic sphere is “ranti-ranti” which describes a form of barter/exchange that is neither singular nor isolated. Instead the barter is part of an endless chain of transfers that is based on the 'give and take' principle. However, here the giving and taking is not limited to time, places or invested work-hours but rather linked to certain cultural, ethical and historic values in the community (Taibo, 2015; Acosta, 2017).

And there are many other forms of economic and social relations that are based on cooperation, solidarity, and collective support. As Acosta (2015) points out the fundamental value for a Buen Vivir economy is solidarity. This economic model puts

humans, instead of profit, at the center of the economy, emphasizing the need for dignified, meaningful work. Here the economic and productive relationships are based on cooperation and collaboration aiming at quality (more than quantity) and sufficiency (more than efficiency). A solidarity economy also requires restrictions on the level of (not all) competition – which in this logic only increases existing inequalities and incentivizes economic cannibalism – and financial speculation. Also, precarious work relations have to be prohibited and democratically chosen working norms and regulations to be enforced. In fact, any form of unemployment should become unacceptable because work is both a right and a societal duty – ultimately, work is not simply to produce for sufficiency but an integral part of 'living well'.

4.5.1 Ecuador's PNBVs (2009-2017)

Looking at the example of Ecuador, the first country to amend its constitution in favor of Buen Vivir principles, we find an example of how this approach could be translated into (national) policy.[86] After the constitutional changes in 2008, Ecuador established a new framework to guide its economic and social policy in form of a four-year plan called 'National Plan for Buen Vivir' (Plano Nacional del Buen Vivir, PNBV). Two plans that have already been enacted (2009-2013 & 2013-2017) aim at three main objectives. First, an economic transformation away from the dependency on the primary sector (especially petroleum) and towards a tertiary sector based on services, ecotourism and biotechnology. Second, to increase social equity through redistributing resources towards education, health care and social security. And third, to create a more participatory democracy via increased citizen involvement on all governmental levels. In order to finance and implement these

[86] The Ecuadorian Constitution states in Article 14 that "the right of the people [is recognized] to live in a healthy and ecologically balanced environment, guaranteeing sustainability and Buen Vivir, sumak kawsay.". And further, in Article 275 that "Buen [V]ivir requires that people, communities, populations and nationalities effectively enjoy their rights and to accomplish their responsibilities in the frame of an intercultural, diverse and natural harmonic existence" (OAS, 2019).

measures the National Plan advocates increased mining activities in the short term. (SENPLADES, 2009 & 2013).

It is crucial to mention that this is the official government position and, to some extent, just discourse. The idea to finance a transition away from extractivism with more extractivism is clearly in contradiction to the biocentric vision of 'pachamama' and it does not encourage structures for a grassroot social economy. According to Friant & Langmore (2015) this shows how the government has already adopted its own interpretation of Buen Vivir more in line with interests of the economic elite. Indeed, during the first National Plan (2009-2013) the increased government revenue – from 14.7 per cent of GDP in 2006 to 23.1 per cent in 2012 – was partly possible with high oil prices on the global markets. However, the government also implemented some more progressive actions. A 2010 law increased the state's share in the petroleum profits from, almost ridiculously low, 13 per cent to 87 per cent. In this period, the government also achieved to drastically increase its efficiency in tax collection which tripled the income tax revenues. Additionally, a foreign debt default in 2008 saved Ecuador around three billion US Dollar that could now be spend for social programs (Becker, 2013).

We will not be able to discuss all results of the two National Plans for Buen Vivir, but the increased social spending had a very significant effect on many conventional socio-economic indicators, including income, health, literacy, and the GINI coefficient. But these improvements were accompanied by high rates of GDP growth and several new mining projects which both has considerable effects on the environment (Radcliffe, 2012). Furthermore, it is clear that the standard socio-economic indicators alone are not adequate to picture an alternative strategy such as Buen Vivir. Nevertheless, Ecuador also improved its ranking in a more holistic indicator, the Happy Planet Index, rising from the 58th rank in 2007, first to the 23rd rank in 2012 and then entering the top ten in 2016 (HPI, 2016). All in all, the implementation of the PNBV in Ecuador seems like a step in the right directions, albeit, with major short-comings. The expansion of natural resource extraction, even to generate more distributional justice, have both impede advancements in social economy, and increased Ecuador's reliance on the primary sector – latter a potential path towards a 'resource curse' scenario. And the autocratic style of governance

and mode of confrontation, in particular of Rafael Correa's government, have received severe criticism. It seems that the government views its population as passive clients instead of active participants in a project of radical democracy (Walsh, 2010; Becker, 2013).

4.6 The economics of Buen Vivir

We already touch some elements in the section above but will now explore with more detail how the organization of the economy would look like from a BV perspective. It is probably no surprise that not only the dominant capitalist forms of economic organization, but also the socialist approaches are not “sufficient” for the kind of sustainability that BV is aiming at. Although, socialism ultimate objective – at least in theory and arguably not so much in its real-existing manifestations – can be described as human well-being, it also fails to go beyond an anthropocentric view. Both economic systems have ideological elevated humans to see themselves as the 'kings of creation' and at the same time effectively reduced to “productive identities” (farmer, miner, etc.), to human capital, to just another “resource” in the production process. While capitalism prioritizes capital and a “better” (material) life, socialism prioritizes work over capital and worries a lot more about a more equal distribution of goods. But if our objective is Buen Vivir, to have a “good life”, we should consider a different economic organization. One that could be called “**community/communal economics**”. Here, life is prioritized before work and capital and the ultimate objective is to care for all forms of existence. It is an economy embedded in society and nature, and that is based on solidarity and ecological sustainability (Huanacuni, 2015; Acosta, 2017a; León, 2016). It is important to state, that most of the practices and elements discussed here correspond to the indigenous/culturalist branch (as distinguished in table 5) of BV.

In this form of economic and social organization the community is the pivotal element. Remembering that the concept of community refers not only to humans, but to a unity of all visible and invisible existence. As Fernando Huanacuni Mamani (2015) explains, in Aymara/Quechua, this form of integral community is called “ayllu” and it refers to the unity and structure of life – instead of a social/societal unity and structure. As all is part of a sacred creation, there is no term or concept for “resource”

in ayllu, as there are no objects but subjects/beings. Thus, instead of domination, this form of organization seeks relationships based on the principle of “ayni” - referring to reciprocity, to the energy that flows between all forms of existence. And as everything is connected to each other and of the same importance, there are no hierarchies but natural, complementary relations and responsibilities. In the Aymara vision, economics then refers to the form in which humans and communities relate to all other forms of life/existence. These relationships should be based on reciprocity and be complementary in order to create and maintain an “equilibrium of life” (ibid, p.149) - including the decisions what and how to produce, how to distribute, and how to redistribute between all members of the community. From this perspective there cannot be any winners or losers, because if one loose, all have lost. For the Aymara elders this sums up to the principle that “all should walk together, that no one should be left behind, that all should have the necessary, and that no one lacks anything” (ibid, p.150).

The Aymara economist Simón Yampara Huaracho (2007) proposes an economy of reciprocity for communal economic organization. Such must be ecologically complementary (sustainable) and its redistribution has to be based on solidarity. It can be characterized in 5 central elements:

1. Access to and control over land and territory through the “ayllu” (the community)

2. Multiple and simultaneous use of agricultural cycles, according to the natural seasons and their impact on production

3. Consideration of climate risks and the application of instruments and processes for (food) storage (“pirwa” is the storage of, for example, dried potatoes or meat, but also textiles as a buffer)

4. Production based primarily as a response to nutrition (and other basic) needs (“food security”)

5. Distribution and redistribution of the natural resources and the agricultural production.

In this form of economic organization, complementary relations generate distribution and redistribution according to the needs of the moment. Each member of the

community receives or contributes as much as he or she needs or can. And each household, family or group within the community has the “right to relate” to Mother Earth proportionally to the number of individuals in this group. Meaning that large families/groups are allowed to receive more than smaller ones – yet, always following the principle of not harming Pachamama, but being complementary to her. Thus, in agriculture, mono-cultures should be prohibited and rotating multi-cultures or permaculture practices should be encouraged. That way productive communities can be established that are capable of sustaining themselves to a large extent with basic goods. And those basic material goods that cannot be produced on a given local scale, can be traded with other communities. However, not necessarily in monetary terms and certainly not with the objective to be inserted in a global capitalist market.[87] Talking about agriculture and food security, it becomes clear that BV also requires implementing new relations between states which have to address the basic needs of all people. And, the relations within any state have to fundamentally change. The Western juridical system is focused on the individual and needs to be balanced by including a logic of the community, collective rights and the protection of life (Huanacuni, 2015).

As territory and land are central for a BV economy, one urgent demand for economic policies would be a land reform. In the Latin American context, primarily, the breaking up of large land holdings (“latifundios”) that are a direct result of the colonization process. This is not simply a moral issue, but an economic one. With the public distribution of land, according to necessity and the aim of nurturing the land with productive permaculture, many people living marginalized and in precarious conditions would have opportunities to sustain themselves. The production of food in a sustainable way will be one of the major challenges in the 21st century, and agroecological approaches, exemplified par excellence by small-scale permaculture, are the most promising alternative to the unsustainable model

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[87] The global exportation and commercialization of indigenous handcrafted goods in this context might seem as a step away from BV. But we must be careful not to confuse an ideal, where whole regions or nations are practicing a BV economy, with the existing capitalist reality. Most indigenous communities today are in contact with the modern world and under heavy pressures. Thus, a strategy of capturing rent for resisting and protecting their land and way of living is to insert themselves to some extent in market relations that would otherwise perhaps not be part of a “good life”.

of petrol-based large-scale mono-cultures (Altieri, 1995; Veteto/Lockyer, 2008). Also, communities that have not enough land or lack of access to water for the production of their basic goods have to be considered in the redistribution of land. Now, it is very important to emphasize that we are not talking about individual property rights here. Instead, the “right to relationship” to the Earth should be assigned to local communities collectively. In fact, from a BV perspective the issue of private property of land is incoherent, because there is no separation between the land and the beings (including humans) living on and off it (Gudynas, 2011; Huanacuni, 2015).

Considering that nature, indeed everything, is a subject – which is already explicit in the Ecuadorian constitution as the “rights of nature” - ownership, and more so private ownership, is unacceptable. Ownership of subjects, or better beings, is simply slavery. That also means that the idea of natural capital or the idea that we should pay for ecosystem services are not aligned with BV, both putting a price on nature and assuming some form of ownership. Instead, humans should strive to be stewards of the earth and all its inhabitants (Gudynas, 2011a). The idea of stewardship and caring for shared spaces and resources is directly linked to the debate and practices around the commons. The idea that resources could be effectively managed and shared through commons was famously discredited by Garrett Hardin (1968) who argued that collective access to goods inexorably leads to their overuse and degradation – hence, “the tragedy of the commons”. Although Hardin's arguments were vastly overstated, his premises not realistic, and his conclusions deeply flawed (Rodgers, 2010; Araral, 2014), his work had a huge impact on the discussion. Fortunately, the work of Elinor Ostrom (1990) showed that collective use and property of resources (like forests, pastures, the atmosphere, oceans, rivers, watersheds, fish stocks, etc.) is not only possible, but can also last centuries without exhausting/degrading common resources. However, to function properly their “management” has to be designed accordingly. Interestingly, several of Ostrom's design principles are directly related to BV proposals such as participation in the decision-making process of all resource users or self-determination of the community.

This should not imply that private property must be abolished completely. But rather that we establish new property regimes that go beyond all property is either public or private and include communal/common property. In fact, empirical research around the world has shown that private property is paramount for households. And, collective rights need to be adapted carefully to fit the local context and the resource reality. Ultimately, collective rights must be enforceable, fit the context, provide users with effective access to a resource they deem valuable, and be perceived as legitimate to actually work. Achieving a fit and legitimacy usually takes time and hybrid arrangements are likely to emerge through trial and error (Agrawal/Ostrom, 2001; Marschke et al, 2012). But, there is a role for collective property rights and if applied properly they can actually contribute to the social relationships of the community/region. The case of native populations on the Ecuadorian coast, who have maintained extensive territories under common property since colonial time, is a prove to that. The common property here is built on to the way of life within the community which encourages participatory, deliberative and consensual behavior (Álvarez Litben, 2017). To function within a regional/national framework, such special property regimes need to be considered legitimate by all communities, respecting non-indigenous communities, as well. Crucially important in order to function and to enable and protect environmental and social stability, is the existence of fair dispute-resolution mechanism(s). More generally, when designing such property regimes an open-mind approach regarding group identity and the available options (who to include?, who to exclude?, when individual and when collective property?) is certainly useful (Arraiza, 2012).

There are several (economic) practices in indigenous communities that can help to shed more light on what a BV community economics look like and how to apply them. In the case of the Aymara people, Huanacuni (2015) cites several institutions that follow this logic. We already mentioned “ayni” - in Kichwa also called “randi randi” - which refers to reciprocity, mutual help and complementary relations within the community. It is crucial to understand that this reciprocity applies beyond space and time because everything is interdependent. So, any action might not need to get an immediate response nor does the reciprocal effect(s) need to occur at the same location – which applies to all other practices described here as well. Another central element is the creation of common spaces (“tampu”) where goods,

particularly food, are made available for the whole community and especially for those in need. That is, if someone in the community produced more than he or she needs, the surplus would be donated. This is closely linked to “tumpa” which refers to the permanent care of everybody for everybody, and to shared responsibilities which are distributed according to the natural rhythm – a pregnant woman or an elderly person would not need to contribute in the food production, but might be active in its processing, for example. The surplus production of any community should be shared with other communities which in turn share their surpluses in a non-monetary exchange, often referred to as “trueque”. As all these practices, the “trueque” is not just an economic activity, but a communal one which also serves for personal encounters and maintaining bonds within and between communities.

These examples of indigenous practices demonstrate that not all economic activities have to be organized under the dominant market logic. And obviously, the same is true for many public and common goods in the modern world, such as education, health or transport, that are not (or at least not exclusively) designed to maximize profits and ruled by “laws” of demand and supply. However, we should not expect that indigenous practices can directly be implemented in other forms of economic/productive activity, nor that such profound changes occur over night. Nevertheless, it is useful to look at these practices as sources of inspiration for creating BV institutions also outside indigenous cultures. This is crucial because the commodification of basic goods, such as health and education, is taking up pace. The access to quality healthcare of schools in most parts of the world today depends on your income. Although good health and access to education are essential for any 'development', a peaceful and sustainable society certainly requires more than simply just more conventional schooling. Reinventing education and learning based on the ideas of BV seems necessary to push beyond the limitations of modernity. If we are committed to sustainability, then we might seek inspiration on how it looks like in worldviews with a quite different ontology from European modernity and how this knowledge is taught and transmitted there (Brown/McCowan, 2018).

Acosta (2017) discusses additional practices to ones just presented above. For example, the institution of “minka” or “minga” which enables work or productive activities for the good of the community. This is especially important for larger

construction or infrastructure projects that a family alone would not be able to achieve. So, this mechanism of collective work allows excluded communities to tackle their exclusion by the colonial system and stimulate work or savings. That way the “minka” also provides a contribution to the social cohesion of the community, a space for cultural exchanges, and potent cultural ritual. Or the practice of “waki”, which refers to the “leasing”, or better giving/handing over of fertile land to another community or family. This involves the moral obligation of sharing the products from this land between the families or communities. And there are several other, like “Makikuna” - a moral support of the whole community for individuals or families in emergency situations – or “Uniguilla” - the exchange of food products between regions to complement and improve the diet. All the above are economic activities, but more importantly, these practices are forms of relations based on solidarity, reciprocity, and co-responsibility (including always all sides) between individuals, communities and nature.

4.6.1 The market embedded in a social and solidarity economy

As should have become clear by now, a BV economy is not determined by the market. Opposed to a capitalist form of (economic) organization, where the market is the main, if not only, mechanism for exchange and transactions, BV does not advocate a society in function of the market and increasing commodification.[88] And BV certainly opposes an economy controlled by monopolies and speculation, both obstacles to (economic) freedom and harmonic relations. Buen Vivir is about creating markets, in the plural, that are in service of the society (Escobar, 2015; Acosta, 2017). It is important to note two facts about “the market” and its perception in media and popular understanding. The first is that capitalism is not a synonym for

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[88] It is important to note here that even in contemporary capitalism we can find many, perhaps even the majority of relations and transaction being done outside the formal market. This not only includes the main still existing practices of reciprocity in the periphery of capitalism, but also all the really important relations and “transactions” based on love, care, friendship, kinship, but also any subsistence activities. Some even argue that capitalism can only function by allowing – yet trying to appropriate more and more of – these non-capitalist relations – the “lower circuit” as Milton Santos (1979) called them.

market economy.[89] Indeed, there are valid arguments that capitalism – as it fosters concentration of economic power (inequality) and has a tendency to evolve towards monopolies – is rather an anti-market system. Leading to the second remark, which is that there is no such thing as a free market, and never has been in (economic) history. Despite the existing myth of capitalism as a free market society, markets always have been regulated, controlled, and planned – mainly in favor of those in power, thus becoming structures of domination – in order to guarantee certain legal and social norms. Market regulation also served to develop certain industries or establish certain development paths. Certainly, it has not been the supposedly free markets that led to industrialization and development, in its conventional sense, in the rich nations. In fact, market should never be free (of regulations), if we want to avoid economic and social disasters (Polanyi, 1957 [1944]); Chang, 2010).

As the indigenous world and uncountable historic examples show us, there are many societies with markets but without capitalism. The seminal book "The Great Transformation" by Austro-Hungarian economist and economic historian Karl Polanyi (1957 [1944]) demonstrates that the capitalist market society (organizing everything via prices) we know today is a very recent historical and social construction. Before the mid-19th century markets played a much more marginal role within society (instead of dominating it) and human (economic) activity was organized also by principles of reciprocity, redistribution, and householding (basically subsistence activities). Connecting historical and anthropological evidence his work provides a substantive critique of market liberalism. He argues that it is impossible to reconcile the sacred dimension – which has been recognized by all societies for centuries – of nature and human life with the subordination of work (humans) and nature to the market. Furthermore, he develops the argument that such a market would be a disaster, writing that "the idea of a self-adjusting market implied a stark utopia. Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness.

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[89] By market economy we simply refer to an economic organization with the possibility to exchange goods and services through markets that are principally free to access but regulated in their range and rules.]

Inevitably, society [took] measures [to] impair the self-regulation of the market [...]" (Polanyi, 1957 [1944], p.3-4).

Another important distinction for our discussion that Polanyi (1957 [1944]) makes is between "real" or genuine commodities which are produced for their sale on the market and fictitious commodities, which include land, labor, and money, none of them being actually produced. While neoclassical, modern economics assumes that the same dynamics apply to both, or more precisely makes no distinction between them, Polanyi insists that this is mistaken and that it is putting society on a path of destruction. There is a moral argument here that it is simply wrong to treat humans and nature as objects, violating the ancient principle of their sacredness. The other side of the argument is the central role of the state that is needed to commodify the fictitious commodities, thus making it impossible (like market liberalism claims) for the state to be "outside" of the economy. The state must intervene for the "supply" of those, to avoid inflation or deflation in the case of money, to avoid unemployment in the case of labor, and to maintain food production and manage urban use of land. For Polayni, these fictitious commodities explain the impossibility of "disembedding" the market (relying simply on its self-regulatory power) from society and nature. When state policies move in that direction, the higher costs (more unemployment, more competition, less social security, etc.) borne by the population create counter-movements, a natural resistance. And this dynamic – what he calls double movement between market liberalism trying to disembed the economy and the resistance it necessarily creates – can lead to dangerous situations, like the rise of fascism in the 1930ies or its strong "come-back" in recent years in various manifestations.

Very much in a Polanyian sense, a BV economy would have markets that are embedded in the community/society, which "civilize or socialize" them by imposing values of sustainability, solidarity, and reciprocity. Despite neoliberal utopias (dystopias from a DG or BV perspective), the economy cannot exist isolated from society and nature, the same way that humans are inseparable from the land/territory. A BV economy thus would be similar to the traditional modes of economic integration, production, and reproduction Polanyi described, which should not be surprising given that his work is based on evidence from traditional

communities/societies. The structural change to a BV economy is nothing less than the transformation of the existing market society into a “society with markets”, where markets will continue to play a role but not the dominating one. A transformation from a society that dominates and degrades nature and humans to one that cares for them and protects them, respecting their rights. In Polanyian terms, that requires the 'destruction of the fiction', the de-commodification of the fictitious commodities of labor, land/nature and money. The self-adjusting market is not apt to organize the fictitious commodities and BV is about protecting them from the self-destructive tendencies of the free market (León Guzman, 2016).

The ongoing expansion of the capitalist market (“commodification”) to all spaces of life - which is in direct conflict with BV principles of equity, social cohesion and sustainability – is directly linked to the growth imperative in the capitalist system. As already discussed in chapter 2 and 3 of this thesis, economic growth measured in GDP has been the ultimate answer to improve human well-being within the conventional development model. In this logic, economic growth means increasing the production and thus the potential to satisfy needs. It also means to increase the availability of jobs and people's income, leading theoretically towards Buen Vivir. However, in the contemporary context there are many undesirable effects of economic growth, such as alienation (in various forms), inequality, and ecological destruction. So, it produces just the opposite of Buen Vivir, a situation of social and ecological degradation and under-development, in short, a “mal vivir” (living bad). Unfortunately, the solution to how to get out of this situation of “mal vivir” is most of the times more growth, leaving us stuck in a vicious downward spiral – illustrated below in figure 5 “Vicious downward spiral of growth”. Buen Vivir requires to escape this spiral, following a different logic than “always more growth”. Ultimately, a BV economy is a post-growth economy (Huanacuni, 2010; Gudynas, 2011, Garcia Alvares, 2011; Unceta, 2012; Acosta, 2017).

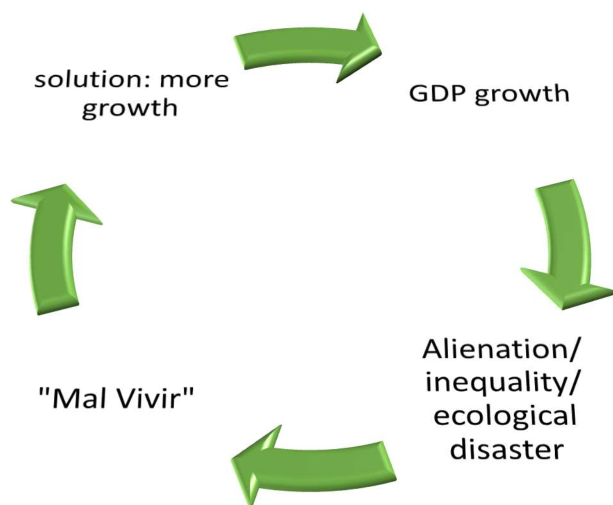

Figure 5 - Vicious Cycle of Growth (source: Unceta, 2012)

According to Unceta (2010), a post-growth economy is based on three main pillars: de-commodification, de-materialization, and de-centralization. These three are all interrelated and advances in one of them can contribute to the advances of the others and vice-versa. But that also means that negative developments are reinforced as well. It seems hard to imagine advances in the de-materialization or de-commodification of the economy without advances in decentralization of economic activity and power. For example, de-materialization of production requires a more efficient organization and more efficient of use of economic inputs (materials and energy). That basically excludes long-distance transport of goods enabled by cheap (because most costs are externalized) fossil-fuels. And that means that more economic activity has to occurr decentralized in the locality instead of the global supply chains we see today. Furthermore, decentralization reduces the transaction costs as geographical and cultural proximity foster networks of trust and shared values. In turn, well-established local networks potentially enhance de-commodification as exchanges can more easily happen in non-monetary spaces. Now, these three interlinked pillars are not just requirements for a post-growth economy but also aligned with BV principles on all levels of organization of our lifes.

On a personal level, for example, decommodification, which means less dependency on the market and monetary transaction, could create huge potentials for personal and community 'development'. Today people need to dedicate most of their life time to wage labor to be able to buy the marketed goods and services they need to survive/live. That considerably reduces, indeed often eliminates, the time that can be dedicated to the expansion of personal capacities, human relations, or leisure. Additionally, less dependency on the market reduces the vulnerability and inherent insecurity that are created by the constant changes in them (due to crises, shocks, speculation, etc.). In the social or societal dimension, increasing commodification – which has very successfully been implemented in the last couple of decades – has proven negative for both equality and social cohesion. The expansion of the market sphere and logic means an increased obligation to compete instead of cooperating and collaborating which foster social integration, mutual trust and collective/communal safety. Finally, decommodification also affects to environmental/ecological dimension of Buen Vivir. The size of the market obviously affects the use of resources required to attend the existing demand. And this is worsened in an age of planned obsolescence and constant substitution of older (yet functioning) products for the latest model. In short, decommodification - understood as a shrinking of the market sphere and its influence on social life – is a central element for a Buen Vivir society (Unceta, 2014; Becka, 2015)

Just as the degrowth perspective, a BV economy adopts a critical view towards globalization and international trade. In short, it would also prioritize local and regional production and consumption. Which does not imply that it would be static or isolated, but rather search for more regional cooperation, taking advantage of complementary neighbor economies and creating mutual benefits. For most economies based on commodity exports, as is the case for the majority of Latin American countries, the insertion in the global market is usually a disadvantage as they export cheap materials and have to import expensive processed, knowledge-intensive products. From a BV perspective, international trade agreements should therefore not be on a basis of equal conditions but recognize the higher productivity and technological advantage the early-industrialized countries have and, consequently, level those. Above all, the economy would not be structured primarily towards the export markets, but towards the local necessities. And both exportation

and importation, if considered beneficial socially and ecologically, should aim at the highest degree of diversification of markets – that is, trading partners – possible in order to avoid dependencies (Grugel et al, 2008; Acosta, 2017).

Here it is important to emphasize again, that globalization is not a natural phenomenon, nor is it a homogeneous or harmonious process. Globalization is produced, with very heterogeneous effects across the globe, and, most importantly, often the cause of conflicts. It significantly affects local cultures and the local economy, potentially "infecting" them with the idea of economic progress and often producing alienation from the local spaces ("Westernization"). The term "globalization" also obscures the hierarchy of power between North and South and that the inequalities it produces are intentional (Escobar, 2005; Santos, 2006). In principle a BV economy is not anti-globalization as there are various potential forms of solidarity-based and ecologically just international integration. However, the dominant, contemporary form of neoliberal globalization based on the prescriptions of the Washington Consensus, where the local gets subordinated to the global economy, is strongly rejected. Also, BV is concerned about decoupling of our well-being from excessive material needs – it is more about doing and being than about having (Albo, 2009). Thus, increased international material exchange, which is the historically usual effect of the "insertion into global markets" is not considered beneficial, but rather counter-productive for local well-being. Thus, the current dynamics of the processes we sum up as "globalization" would have to somehow be inverted – creating processes of inter-regional and international integration that are based on complementary elements, mutual help, solidarity, reciprocity and the understanding of radical interdependency – much of this is summed up by the concept of Ayni (Perreira da Silva/Guedes, 2017). Common to all visions of Buen Vivires is the strong necessity to prioritize local autonomy, equity and sustainability on one side, and emphasizing the non-viability of the current (globalization) model on the other, which is also closely entrenched in the slogan of the ecological movements of the 70-80ies: "Think globally, act locally" (Unceta, 2011).

Therefore, social transitions, in a BV perspective, have to be thought and designed with this notion of self-reliance and with increasing focus and support for the local levels. As in degrowth, we are talking about decentralization of economic processes

and (political) decision-making. In the context of food sovereignty, that would imply to produce and consume as much as possible locally. Not only due to the elimination of transport costs, but to create a (re)connection between farmers, consumers and their food. Public policies should therefore aim at strengthening local, regional and national markets- in this order and only then look at international markets. In other words, Buen Vivir is about the construction of endogenous productive capacities and markets. A crucial step in this process is the closer link between the urban and the rural, the city and the (back)country.[90] The internal market, from a BV perspective, is focused primarily on popular needs and, most of the time, it would take the format of a local, community market. These decentralization processes should be accompanied and guided by full political participation of all citizens, above all through the creation of local spaces of "real" power. This means the power to actually decide (direct democracy through counsels and referendum) and mechanisms of permanent representation to establish local autonomy. From the local articulation, regional and national articulation can follow. So, self-reliance implies re-politization, re-connecting the economy and the political sphere in a process of (auto)construction of the power of the people (Acosta, 2017). This bottom-up establishment of consensus and decision -making is a fundamental element of any BV or DG society and perhaps also their main challenge (as it will have to address to existing asymmetries in larger groups).

Including BV in a wider (academic) dialogue on alternative forms of economic organization, we can use the concept of a **social and solidarity economy** (SSE), as proposed by José Luis Coraggio (2007, 2011, 2016) and others. To be clear, BV

[90] An interesting example in this context are the so-called "zero kilometer" initiatives which aim at a 100% local production and consumption. Emerging originally from the gastronomy sector – restaurants that are directly connected with local farms – it also can apply for urban farms and other sectors. Although subsidized fossil energy and exploitative, large-scale farming practices can make products cheaper, the idea that it is ultimately a lot better to buy organic, local food is gaining momentum. Unsurprisingly, this trend is stronger in the Global North, where consumers have more purchasing power (Pancorbo, 2016).

and SSE are not exactly the same,[91] but they share many, if not most, common ideas (as well as with degrowth) and their dialogue here can be very enriching. Now, social and solidarity economy are incredibly diverse and rich concepts, which cannot be discuss here at length, but which need to be mentioned in this context. A solidarity economy seeks to put humans back at the center of economic activity (and not capital interests) through social, democratic, need-oriented, and ecological approaches. SSE aims at creating a culture and communities of cooperation (instead of competition), and at fostering relationship of mutual support and solidarity (instead of isolating each individual). Instead of prioritizing profit, in a SSE social and political objectives are considered first (Felber, 2010; Miller, 2010; Coraggio, 2016). On one side, it is based on reciprocity which is generated by voluntary and collective actions of citizens who have equal rights in each project, who self-organize for mutual support, for collective production (e.g. cooperatives), and for political articulation. On the other side, it is based on redistribution through the state, which create laws and norms that work towards more social cohesion and less inequality in all its dimensions (Laville, 2014). The fostering of solidarity in the economic system and the expansion of SSE, according to Coraggio (2011, p. 341, author's translation), would be an “organic form of emancipation of the workers.”

Talking about SSE, Corragio (1994, 2001, 2016) also uses the term “economy of work” (“economia del trabajo”) as opposition to the capitalist economy (“economia del capital”). The focus of such an economy of work is the role of work and an extended view of reproduction: the reproduction of life (“reproducción ampliada da vida”). The micro economic organization of this economy is based on the household (“unidade doméstica” - UD), also in a wider sense. The household can be an individual or group of individuals that are united either through family or other links (ideology, ethnicity, vicinity, etc.). That is, any kind of community whose final objective is the reproduction and quality of life of its members. Looking at the

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[91] Also, the distinction between social and solidarity economy is sometimes not very precise in the literature. Sometimes solidarity economy is seen as just one part of a social economy, for example. But this is rather a semantic matter and for the purpose of this thesis we can simply use SSE as an overarching term, describing all forms of production, consumption, and distribution of wealth that value and prioritize people/humans and their needs instead of capital interests. For a more comprehensive discussion on the definitions and concepts around SSE see Singer (2002) or Coraggio (2016).

economic through this lens it becomes clear that wage labor never has been, and increasingly less will be, the only means of realizing the objectives of the UD. Especially in the Latin American context, this sector of the economy plays a central role in providing basic necessities for the poorer parts of the populations. A recognition and active support of activities in this direction will most certainly also strengthen the role of women as they do most of the reproductive work today.

By defining economics much more broadly, “as all the diverse ways that human communities meet their needs and create livelihoods together” (Miller, 2010, p.3), Social and Solidarity Economics unveil a whole host of other kinds of economic activity. Those economic activities are often based on relationships, principles of care, and cooperation instead of competition and individualism. Thus, they do not fit into the narrow definition of neoclassical economics of self-interested and rational humans driven by endless desire for accumulation (profit-making). To visualize some of the economic activities that fit into a SSE, Miller (2010. p.4-5, see figure 6 below) illustrates the economy as “interconnected flows made up of different moments, or spheres of economic activity”. This flow starts with creation (Where do the raw materials come from?), to production (Which ways of production foster solidarity and cooperation?), to transfer and exchange (Which are ways from production to consumption that enact solidarity values?), to Consumption and Use (How are people organized as consumers?), to surplus allocation (How is surplus appropriated and used in ways that foster solidarity?). This flow does not include the element of governance, which would ask what kinds of policies, rules and procedures contribute to a supportive context for solidarity-based activity.

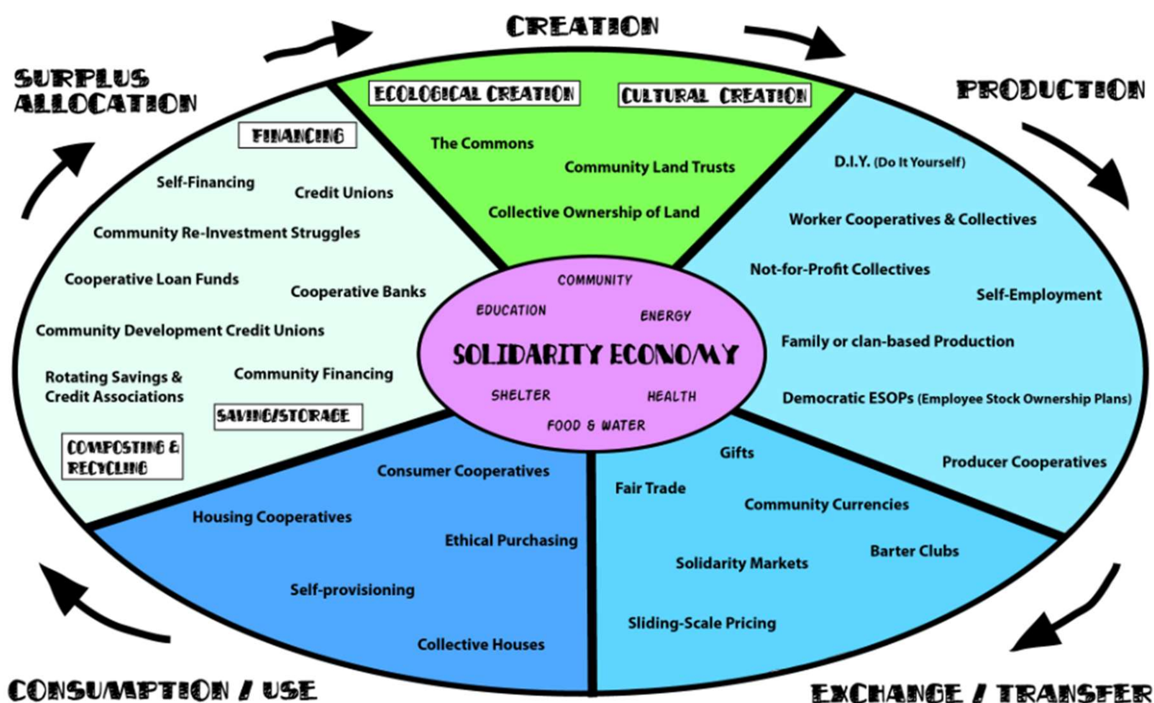

Figure 6 - The economic cycle from a SSE perspective (source: Miller, 2010)

The starting point of the economic process is creation, both ecological and cultural. Recognizing that ecological creation – through natural processes such as geological and chemical transformation, photosynthesis, respiration, birth, growth (until maturity), death, and decomposition – is the beginning of all production, is very much in the direction of a BV economy. It is these processes that sustain and generate all life and culture. And to honor and share these collective gifts is a moral responsibility and fundamental starting point, for both SSE and BV economies/societies. In the same sense, the cultural creation – including resources such as language, stories, music, ideas and skills – is generated and transformed over thousands of years from one generation to another. These gifts passed down to us from our ancestors were created through collective processes and thus should be shared collectively (Miller, 2010). Let us here just look at the economic forms in the moment of production, to get an idea about applied SSE. Remembering that the objective of a SSE or BV economy is to foster solidarity and cooperation, creating social bonds and relations instead of alienating people from each other. So, it is no surprise that collective forms of organization are prioritized here. This might include

worker and producer cooperatives, non-profit collectives or family/community-based production.

We already discussed to possibility of “public” money and the potential of a Universal Basic Income as central (economic) elements of a degrowth transition. And, within a BV perspective, the creation of non-monetary space and exchange practices seems even more important than in the degrowth debate, which is expressed by the variety of practices we discussed above that are based on solidarity and reciprocity instead of monetary exchange. These non-monetary aspects will be further discussed below with references to the **sharing and gift economy** – linking ancient wisdom to modern day practices like peer-to-peer networks. The other discussion is about **cooperatives** as the natural form of economic organization within a BV economy and as an example of how empowerment through work can function even within the capitalist system. Both ideas are neither new, nor are the exclusive elements of the BV debate. Their perhaps most obvious common characteristic is the focus on alternative, local economic organization and the expansion of non-monetary spaces.

4.6.2 Cooperatives

Looking at the sphere of production, the form of economic organization that makes most sense (beyond subsistence activity) from a BV perspective are cooperatives. Although cooperatives in the modern sense have been around more than 200 years and have had increasing importance throughout the world, they are often considered marginal (and only relevant for marginalized groups) and receive little academic and

public attention.[92] In very general terms, a cooperative is “a voluntary network of individuals who own or control a business [or organization] that distributes benefits on the basis of use or ownership where ownership is largely weighted equally across individual members” (Altman, 2009, p.1). The International Co-operatives Alliance (ICA), the world's largest organization that unites and represents cooperatives, defines cooperatives as “people-centered enterprises owned, controlled and run by and for their members to realize their economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations. […] Cooperatives are democratically managed by the 'one member, one vote' rule. Members share equal voting rights regardless of the amount of capital they put into the enterprise. […] Putting fairness, equality and social justice at the heart of the enterprise, cooperatives around the world are allowing people to work together to create sustainable enterprises that generate long-term jobs and prosperity. Cooperatives allow people to take control of their economic future and, because they are not owned by shareholders, the economic and social benefits of their activity stay in the communities where they are established. Profits generated are either reinvested in the enterprise or returned to the members” (ICA, 2019).

There are several different formats of cooperatives, and the classic workers cooperative is, at least in quantitative terms, not even the most important. However, it is the worker cooperative that offers the potential of a completely different position of the worker compared to traditional private sector firms. Other forms of cooperatives include consumer cooperatives (sometimes called retail cooperatives), which are the most important ones considering membership and which are usually concerned with retailing food and clothing. Although the day-to-day management

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[92] In fact, the cooperative form of economic organization is much more common than imagined. According to the International Co-operatives Alliance (ICA), there are around 3 million cooperatives around the world comprising at least 12% of humanity. Cooperatives are employing around 280 million people worldwide which equals roughly 10% of the employed global population. And the top 300 cooperatives reported a total turnover of 2,1 trillion USD in 2017 (ICA, 2019). In Germany, for example, in 2012 there were more than 7.000 registered cooperatives – mainly credit unions and housing cooperatives – with more than 20 million members. A very interesting fact is that the insolvency rate of German cooperatives was almost zero (0,06%) demonstrating a far superior performance than private businesses (Wegner et al, 2012). In the G10 – the ten largest economies regarding GDP – conservative calculations estimated that cooperatives accounted for almost 5% of GDP in 2010. Especially in the agricultural and financial sector cooperatives play significant roles in today's global economy. It is estimated, for example, that about 50% of the world's agricultural output is marketed by cooperatives (Sanchez Bajo/Roelants, 2011).

can be very similar to private enterprises (which can be the case for all forms of cooperatives), the crucial difference is the issue of ownership/participation and that the cooperative focuses on meeting the needs of its members (instead of maximizing profits). Another very common form of cooperatives are credit unions. They are especially important in local financial markets that traditional financial institutions deem too risky, basically meaning the poorer income segments. Then there are supply and purchasing cooperatives which play a crucial role in the agricultural sector. They allow small scale farmers to take advantage of the economies of scale and scope that are usually only afforded to large corporate farms. Yet another form is the marketing cooperative which aligns the interest of producers regarding the marketing output to retailers or wholesalers. They also often provide services of storage, processing or packaging. This can not only increase the bargaining and market power of its members but can also help to provide a more stable income in fluctuating markets (especially agriculture). Finally, there is a huge part of cooperatives that are often called social cooperatives as they bring together providers and users of social services such as health care or housing. (Croop, 2005; Altman, 2006; Kerswell/Pratap, 2019)

Historically, the modern cooperative originated in Europe during the 19th century and then spread to other (industrializing) countries as a method of self-help against extreme conditions of poverty (Hoyt, 1989). Two historic cases have had profound influence on the operating principles of contemporary cooperatives: the consumer cooperative Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers Ltd. Founded in 1844 and the first savings and credit cooperative founded in 1864 by Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen in Germany. The former was founded by a group of mainly weavers in Rochdale, England at a time when worker and consumer rights were hardly existing. The motivation of the cooperative was to provide better housing, employment, food, and education to its members. In the case of Raiffeisen the idea was to provide credit and saving services in regions and to people that had no access to such. In both cases principles were formulated that govern cooperatives until today. Later this form of economic organization also spread to developing countries with examples of successful marketing and supply cooperatives in Argentina, Brazil and India. In all cases, national government policies formed an essential element for the development and lasting existence of cooperatives. Mainstream economic theory

suggests that cooperatives are not economically efficient (as they are not obliged to (re-)invest profits) and that they are too egalitarian to generate the effective incentives. However, cooperatives have maintained a significant presence in an increasingly competitive global economy. And historically, their profitability and levels of productivity are generally higher than privately-owned, similar companies (Birchall, 1997; Ortman/King, 2007, Altman, 2009).

The high degree of convergence with BV principles becomes clear when we consider the characteristics that, according to Mellor et al. (1988, p.173), an “ideal cooperative would have:

1. Provide employment according to the desire of its members.

2. Employ no more people than can effectively participate in decision-making on an equal basis.

3. Produce socially useful products in a way that is not damaging to the environment.

4. Organize work in a way that is personally satisfying and rewarding.

5. Increase the political consciousness of cooperative members.

6. Operate in a way that is economically exploitative of neither its members or customers.

7. Adopt non-discriminatory employment policies and work practices

8. Be part of a co-ordinated but decentralized communal economy or a movement working towards that end.”

Admittedly, this is a synthesis of the tendencies of over two hundred years of cooperative movements and practice. Each of these characteristics will provoke conflict when being implemented within a capitalist economy – because all of them challenge the profit logic. This is also part of the explanation why cooperatives are not much more present and successful in our current system. Today, cooperatives are essentially confined to small sectors of the economy and their workers and customers are usually from rather narrow socio-economic strata. However, in a BV

(or DG) economy they are the natural basic unit of organization. It is also important to point out that a certain view of human behavior/nature is assumed for such a regime to work. Instead of inherently competitive (like the “homo oeconomicus”), people are assumed to be inherently non-competitive and non-aggressive. Historically, under capitalist regimes cooperatives have not been the spaces of social change that they potentially could be in their ideal form. Within the cooperative movement, the organization and education of workers and consumers have traditionally been considered a central seed for a new society. But today the majority of new cooperatives has primarily pragmatic motivations (mainly job creation) instead of the ideological commitments (Mellor et al, 1988; Münker, 2014).

As BV is about the local community, the scale of cooperatives in a BV economy would ideally be rather small. Which is also important to guarantee effective participation of all workers. In smaller settings it is also more probable to achieve other benefits of the cooperative format. For example, the rotation of tasks which becomes more difficult the larger the operation gets. As in a private enterprise tasks within a cooperative are usually divided according to skills or natural endowments. However, ideally at least some tasks are rotated in order to deepen the worker's understanding of the involved processes, to make the work more diverse (and less alienating), and to improve the acquiring of skill. But if designed well, size is ultimately not a constraint for those benefits as the examples of Mondragón (around 74,000 members) in the Basque Country or Cecosesola (around 20,000 members) in Barquisimento (Venezuela) demonstrate. Established in 1956 in the autonomous region of the Basque Country the Mondragón Corporación Cooporativa (MCC) is the largest producer cooperative in the world with a current revenue of over 12 billion Euros.[93] The MCC unites more than 100 enterprises from automotive industries and construction to retail and banking. The size of MCC has created some tension between the cooperative ideals and the reality (e.g. around 20% of MCC employees

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[93] In terms of people/workers, the Kibbutz movement in Israel is bigger. The first settlement was established in 1910 and – although there have not been any new settlements since beginning of the millennium – there are around 270 settlements with around 120,000 people living and working there. Their activities were initially limited to agricultural but have diversified to included manufacturing (even high-tech products) and tourism. While their simple lifestyle (including radical income equality) and basic democratic orientation have lost appeal in modern, capitalist Israel society, they still play a significant role in the economy (Tsuk, 2000).

are non-members). Besides protest against the re-location of factories, the main issue has been the equal representation and participation in the decision-making processes by all members (Kasmir, 1996). However, Mondragón has since its founding days never laid off workers and has proven to be a lot more resilient than its private counterparts (Hafner, 2009; Altman, 2009).

The case of Cecosesola, which started as a funeral service in 1967 and has evolved into more than 50 different cooperatives, is also interesting. Especially the provision of healthcare in their own hospital at prices 60% under the rates of private hospitals (and free for cooperative members) shows the potential of this kind of economic organization. Although the cooperative (more precisely, a network of cooperatives) has very successfully provided jobs for more than 1,300 workers in agriculture, transport and healthcare, the recent economic turbulence in Venezuela have affected it, as well. Despite higher productivity and lower prices for their goods distributed on the local markets, Cecosesola is not immune to macro-economic shocks like the current rates of inflation in Venezuela. This highlights the importance of macro-economic stability that we have discussed in chapter 3.6 on financial and monetary regimes. The case is also interesting because Cecosesola is strictly non-partisan. While the government of Hugo Chavez introduced a new cooperative law in 2001 and declared solidarity economics to one of its main policy pillars in 2005, the increased number (from 800 in 1999 to more than 260,000 in 2008) of cooperatives and their reality in Venezuela is less impressive. Many of the new cooperatives exist only on paper (less than 40% actually active) and most have not incorporated cooperative principles (instead functioning like private enterprises). This is a strong argument that self-organization and decentralization of power (e.g. reducing of hierarchies) are not easily implemented top-down but rather requires bottom-up, organic structures and time to 'grow' (Arnold, 2012; Cecosesola, 2019).

Although cooperatives have demonstrated huge potential both within a capitalist market economy and also for transforming it, there are some critical points that should be addressed. A quite obvious point of criticism is the higher cost of decision-making (“transaction costs”) compared to vertical and hierarchical organizations (Williamson, 1981). It is certainly true that decision-making requires more time and debate (capabilities) in cooperatives, however from a BV perspective that favors

consensus and participation this cannot be considered a cost but a benefit and potential. However, this process requires more involvement and potentially more hours of work from the individual member. Cooperatives that are very big have been criticized to become something barely distinguishable from a normal investor-owned firm (Hansmann, 2000). This is specifically true if ownership and control are separated, for example, by hiring non-member managers. Then we have a classical situation of the principal-agent problem, where the interests of the principal (members and their board) usually tend to diverge from the agent's (non-member management). To be clear, this problem occurs in any private enterprise and in cooperatives only when they become too similar to the former. In fact, according to Iliopoulos and Cook (1999), this problem is a lot less serious in cooperatives compared to similar-sized private companies. Another problem that comes with size is that the range of activities generally increases, and it becomes more challenging to take decisions as there might be lack of technical know-how (Royer, 1999). So, this critique is actually an argument for maintaining the scale of the cooperative rather small and not separate ownership and control – both points that are aligned with the perspective of a BV economy.

Cooperatives might have often been established because the private sector and government could not attend the needs of local populations, occupying only market niches until now. But, as we have argued here, cooperatives have a real potential to empower their members and contribute to social change. They have demonstrated higher resilience during economic crises and longer lives than other types of enterprises. This is mainly attributed to how cooperatives share the risks and benefits between members, how they foster innovation through the ideas of many, and how members have a tangible ownership stake in the enterprise. They focus on the long-term economic perspective and their practices contribute to the development (skill and capacity building) and education of “ordinary” people. The existence of cooperative banking and credit unions has helped to stabilize the economic systems in a number of big economies (USA, Canada, Germany, France, Italy) as cooperative banks build up a counter-cyclical buffer against financial turmoil. The role of agricultural cooperatives in ensuring the availability of food cannot be overstated and might even increase due to rampant speculation in commodities that endangers the food security of entire populations. And, through

their horizontal and democratic approach, they have a real potential for economic democracy where people have a say in decisions that directly concern their future (Altman, 2009; Sanchez Bajo/Roelants, 2011). Finally, their values and general direction aligns almost naturally with the BV paradigm. In a BV economy, cooperatives would have a central role ideally replacing most privately-owned enterprises. This way the economy could become more democratic, more equal, and the shared wealth created by cooperatives would tend to remain in the locality/region.

4.6.3 Sharing & Gift Economy

Another economic aspect closely linked to BV and that has gained a lot of attention recently in the public and academic debate is the sharing economy. In fact, sharing practices are a central element to the economics of BV as discussed above. Sometimes also referred to as share economy or collaborative economy, the sharing economy is an umbrella term for companies, business models, platforms, communities, and practices that enable a shared use of completely or partly unused resources. Access to something becomes more relevant than actual ownership. This kind of exchange is explicitly not a zero-sum game, as sharing yields higher degrees of utilization than individual use and therefore higher efficiency and gains in welfare (Teubner, 2014; Hamari et al, 2016). The contemporary version of the sharing economy originated in the open-source community and referred to peer-to-peer (P2P) sharing of access to goods and services. This sort of exchange happens in the intimate or community sphere and not in the market or work sphere. According to Puschman & Alt (2015) there are three main drivers for the rise of the sharing economy: changed (consumer) behavior, social networks/electronic markets, and mobile devices/electronic services. Although the predominant model for using goods was, and still is, ownership, temporary usage has become more attractive for many consumers/users. Reasons for this shift in behavior are more convenience, lower prices, and ecological sustainability (no need for purchasing new goods). The emergence of social networks through advances in communication technologies enable the networking of peers and consumers who are willing to share. They also provide mechanisms for trust and reputation through ratings and feedbacks in

otherwise quite anonymous markets. And most importantly, they drastically reduced the formerly high search and transaction costs. Finally, the widespread use of mobile devices like smartphones enables and facilitates services such as car or bike sharing where you can unlock and use the vehicle without any physical gear.

However, the original idea became quickly absorb by capital interests and today the sharing economy most cited examples are AirBnB and Uber (Botsman/Rogers, 2010). And peer-to-peer has transformed into customer-to-customer (C2C). It is no surprise that capitalists have taken over this part of the economy as the volume of transaction in the “sharing” sector was already over 30 billion USD in 2015 in Europe alone and estimated to rise to over 300 billion USD globally until 2025 – making it one of the major future growth sectors (PWC, 2015; Fokkema, 2017). To be very clear, AirBnb, Uber and all the other companies that charge fees and transform users into paying customers are not the real sharing economy. And their rise – which includes the crowding out of the many of the original sharing platforms – means, according to Kessler (2015, p.2) that “the real sharing economy is dead. [And that] an idea that everybody loved so much, […] that made so much sense on a practical and social level, morphed into the pure capitalism that it is today”.

Sharing is a form of social exchange without any profit. It is a practice among people that know each other or get to know each other while riding a car together or sleeping under the same roof. Especially when applied within the family or a community, the collective consuming space, time, and resources establishes communal identity. As soon as “sharing” becomes market-mediated – meaning when a company becomes an intermediary between consumers that do not know each other – it is no longer sharing at all. It has become an economic exchange where consumers pay for accessing someone's goods or services for a particular period of time. This is a crucial difference because by paying the feel of a reciprocal obligation is lost. It also implies that customers are more interested in lower costs and convenience instead of fostering social relationships and community (Eckhardt/Bardhi, 2015; Gyódi, 2019). This development from platforms that would inspire human interaction and generate less waste to giant companies that completely twisted the vision of community/neighborhood sharing has generated a variety of problems. Although the main players (like Uber and Airbnb) are today

highly professionalized corporate structures they often operate without much regulations and evade paying taxes. As their “employees” are complete free-lancers without any worker's protection (e.g. minimal wage, employment insurance, working hour restrictions, etc.) those companies have unfair advantages compared to the formal, regulated market. Additionally, because they argue that they are only intermediaries, these companies avoid any responsibility and risk. This new “platform capitalism” is fostering precarious working conditions and mercantilization, extend free-market practices into formerly protected areas, and profits by damaging communities and by exploiting vulnerable individuals (Slee, 2017; Das, 2018; Geissinger et al, 2019). In short, this “sharing economy” is no sharing at all and is, in general, highly unsustainable and completely opposed to BV principles.

Fortunately, the real sharing economy is not completely dead. There are still sharing platforms active and successful around the globe which enable also people in the modern world foster reciprocity and social relationships. The perhaps most famous example is the couchsurfing (CS) platform, a social network for hospitality exchange which provides members with the option to request lodging in another members house, to host other members, and to participate in local community events. Although the former non-profit network had to be converted formally into a corporation (due to rejection of the Internal Revenue Service to grant CS the non-profit tax status), the original idea of connecting people and non-monetary exchange remains intact in practice – however, its future is unclear. Qualitative studies have shown that the over 12 million members worldwide are contributing to a network that generates trust and the sense of belonging. The shared values and motivations (e.g. cultural experience, social interaction, reciprocity, and social responsibility) of the community enable a social practice with a high transformative power (Rosen et al, 2011; Decrop et al, 2018). In fact, couchsurfing and similar practice can already be considered part of a **gift economy** in which goods or services are not being traded but simply given without any explicit agreement or expectation for immediate or future rewards/return. However, it is a reciprocal exchange and any gifts creates a form of moral debt and usually counter-gifts. More so, a gift creates a feeling of gratitude and establishes a bond between the giver and receiver – powerful tools for building community (Mauss, 2002 [1950]; Cheal, 1988; Hyde, 2007 [1983]).

And a gift economy could address another crucial point of BV, that cannot be solved with monetary exchanges. As we have discussed, the most important things for human happiness are unquantifiable (e.g. beauty, love, knowledge, attention, connection). And when we try to buy love or knowledge we either receive a counterfeit, or the seller is exploited because she/he sold something infinitely precious (unquantifiable) for a finite sum. That is why we need non-monetary ways to circulate our gifts. As Eisenstein (2011, p.320) points out, we need to address three fundamental economic issues: "(1) how to connect the provider of a gift with the person who needs that gift; (2) hot to acknowledge and honor those who give generously of their gifts, and (3) how to coordinate the gifts of many people across space and time in order to create things transcending the needs or gifts of any individual. [Which] corresponds roughly to the three cardinal functions of money: medium of exchange, unit of account, and store of value." In traditional communities the giving and the needs of each member were common knowledge simply because they were small and personal familiarity was usually a given. The P2P technologies of today allow us to bring gift relationships into a broader realm. The esteem or prestige gained through previous contribution and registered through rating systems function as a quasi-currency. And shrinking the monetary realm facilitates the transition towards a BV (or degrowth) society – embedded in gift communities which honor and reciprocate generosity, we depend less on money and associate it less with survival (Eisenstein, 2011).

According to Eisenstein (2011), the transition to a gift economy does not imply the immediate abolishing of money, but rather to imbue the monetary system with properties of the logic, or better the spirit of the gift. It is essential that over time giving and receiving must be in balance. In economic terms this means that we have to internalize all externalities, especially the ecological cost which are burdened onto future generations. That would ensure that we take not more from nature/earth than we can give. For a gift to function properly, the source of the gift (the giver) has to be acknowledged. So, witnessing a gift and accepting a gift is perhaps the hardest part because it implies accepting a social relationship – become as important as the actual giving. This is part of the recovery of the commons: any use of what belongs to all (biodiversity, aquifers, soil, etc.) is acknowledged by a payment that goes to all. Indeed, anything that comes from the commons has to be subject to fees and

taxes and their use should be allocated to those who use it to benefit society and the planet. Circulation is more important than accumulation and is the natural characteristic of a gift. In monetary terms this implies a decaying currency (as discussed above in chapter 3.6.1 on money and the financial system) which ensures that wealth remains a function of flow and not of owning/accumulation. Finally, gifts should flow to the greatest needs. That is, the basic survival needs of everyone have to be met through a social dividend or universal basic income (as argued in chapter 3.6.3. on UBI). In short, a gift economy is egalitarian, inclusive, personal, bond-creating, sustainable, and non-accumulative – all principles of the Buen Vivir paradigm (Hyde, 2007; Eisenstein, 2011).

To sum up, Buen Vivir demands another form of economic organization. It seeks to establish an economy that is based on equality, solidarity and sustainability. It should be environmentally sustainable by respecting the natural, ecological cycles and rhythms, from the beginning and at every step of the economic process. Thus, maintaining nature's capacity of replenishing itself over time and without creating scarcity of its resources – in short, staying within ecological limits. And it should be sustainable socially, which implies a strong democratic foundation created from the bottom-up, direct and consensual. A crucial point within such an economy is to establish criteria for sufficiency (Acosta, 2017a). This implies, analogous to the degrowth debate, separating the needs, which should be attended always, from the wants, which can be discussed politically as long as they are within ecological and social limits. Even though many aspects of Buen Vivir are a long way from being an actual reality, it has created a forceful counter-hegemonic, transformative and cross-national discourse.

Buen Vivir is an invitation to leave the periphery of capitalism. Yet not to join its center but rather transcend its horizon. For these processes we must rediscover the notions of reciprocity, solidarity and redistribution. BV is the transformation of a market society into a society with markets; from a society that dominates and damages nature and humans to a society that takes care and protects nature and its rights. It also means to treat work/labor, land/nature, and money as fictitious commodities, that is to determine the condition for their use and reproduction outside the market which is not apt for their management. As pointed out, this

transformation requires the de-commodification of work and land/nature. And a radical change of our productive systems which are dependent on fossil fuels and the externalization of costs (Braña et al, 2015). A Buen Vivir economy needs to actively foster forms of production that are aiming at the reproduction and quality of life, as well as increasing autonomy and emancipation – including all the forms of domestic and communal work that are excluded from social recognition in the capitalist economy (García Álvares, 2013). The economic dimension of BV might be the most complex aspect of this paradigm shift as it implies a transition to a post-capitalist economy – an economy and society in function of the needs of its people and Earth, and based on cooperation, solidarity, fairness, and sustainability (Carpio, 2016).

4.7 Criticism of BV

As with any proposal, there are certainly challenges and points of criticism that need to be addressed. Stefanoni (2012) points out that Buen Vivir as a concept fails to create a linkage between the indigenous communities and their ontologies and the everyday-life of non-indigenous local communities. A special challenge here is to think Buen Vivir from an urban perspective and for people who have been shaped by immigration and the immersion in a capitalist city life (that is, alienated from nature). Additionally, we have to be very careful not to romanticize indigenous or other marginalized groups and their practices. For example, the idea that all indigenous people are natural allies of Mother Earth is dangerously reducing a very complex reality.[94] In the case of planned resource extraction on indigenous territory, some community members might fiercely resist while others prefer compensation. Likewise, some traditional customs can be used to advance the movement's

[94] Regarding this issue, we want to be very clear that it is also important not to have an overly romantic vision of “Mother Nature” herself. We can certainly say, to keep that metaphor, that she is a caring and providing mother, on one hand. On the other hand, she also takes life. In this sense, we should see, for example, the concept of plentitude not as some abundance provided by a natural, untouched paradise but as the result of the complementarity of humans and nature.

struggle and to maintain gender discrimination within communities (Sierra, 2004; Franco Valdivia & Luna, 2009).

Looking at indigenous communities and nations, there are clearly some contradictions, such as their relation to power (often centralized in a male elder), the role of women and other gender issues (e.g. some indigenous traditions reject homosexuality and traditionally killed homosexual group members). The often-centralized power structures sometimes lead to questionable alliances of indigenous leaders with the regional political and economic elites (Houtart, 2011). And also, the academic writing on Buen Vivir has been criticized for failing to engage with non-heteronormative orientations and thus following the normativity of patriarchal, colonial society (Pryor, 2017). There is clearly a lot of room for improvement in a relatively recent scholarship and it would be in the academic BV discourse's best interest to let more female voices speak and write. Despite this valid criticism, León Trujillo (2008) points out that Buen Vivir is highly compatible (certainly much more than conventional economics) with feminist ideas, especially by valuing activities of care and reproduction – what she calls the economy of human care ("economía del cuidado humano"). And although BV is about respecting indigenous culture and traditions, that does not imply that all traditions are in accordance with BV nor should they be accepted uncritically. In fact, the set of concepts and practices that comprise BV are based on indigenous traditions but the academic and political discourse mostly represents a piled together compilation, an invented tradition (Domínguez et al, 2017) So, if there are contradictions in the existing traditions (whether in indigenous or non-indigenous communities) then reforming or even abandoning them becomes a necessity in order to enable a good life for all.

Another point that probably will be raised by modern scholars and planners is that BV is not applicable as a policy because it is too spiritual, or has too many spiritual elements, and that is something that the state and society should not be concerned with. It is the liberal, modern vision that religious and spiritual matters are a private matter and strictly separated from the state – indeed, that religion and spirituality is something dangerous. And even progressive intellectuals are critiquing the traditional, archaic, and romantic potentials of indigenous spirituality. However, as

Mignolo (2011, p.62) argues, spirituality is “fundamental to the decolonization of economy and politics, since both – political theory and political economy – have become imperial tools in the formation of the subjectivity of consumers and voters that nourish and support imperial actors and institutions in the states and corporations. […] What the spiritual options offers is the contribution of opening up horizons of life that have been kept hostage (that is, colonized) by modernity, capitalism, and the belief in the superiority of Western civilization. Hardcore materialists tend to look at spirituality as related to 'new age' or to soft and romantic revolutionaries. By such arguments, progressive secular intellectuals indirectly support capitalist's arguments for modernity and development”.

But spirituality has always been, and probably will be, an important part of human cultures. So, instead of rejecting it as something backwards we might look at it as a “new” potential for understanding and knowledge. However, spirituality can be defined as referring to humans trying to transcend themselves and reaching out for the ultimate possibilities of their existence. In this view spirituality is distinctly individualistic and private, quite analogous to the individualization and privatization that transformed religion with the rise of modernity and capitalism. According to Carette & King (2005) it is precisely that emphasis on individualism and one's private life that make spirituality (like religion) prone to being privatized and serve capitalism. Expensive spiritual retreats for corporate managers or the material promises of prosperity religion (mainly adopted by the neo-pentecostal movement) are examples of such consumerist and capitalist spiritualities. This is not the spirituality that Buen Vivir is talking about. Instead, BV adopts a critical view of spirituality which rejects the historical emphasis on transcendence. Here, God or the divine is not separated from ourselves, the Earth, nature, and the cosmos. Speaking of the sacredness of Mother Earth implies a rejection of patriarchal religions and recognizes the existing ecological crisis – a result of the desacralization and exploitation of the natural world. Buen Vivir, advocating a critical, indigenous spirituality, provides a different way of looking at the world and our ways of knowing. The imaginary of modernity has created a series of dichotomies and dualisms, such as the sacred and the profane or the public and the private. A key contribution of Buen Vivir is that it contributes to breaking down those distinctions (Smith, 2017). In this view, there is nothing profane on this Earth, only sacredness that has been

profaned. And, as Eisenstein (2011, p.347) argues "as we heal the spirit-matter rupture, we discover that economics and spirituality are inseparable."

Not directly a critique but the perhaps most serious challenge for the concept of Buen Vivir is its co-optation by the state and capital interests – as it is for any alternative to the existing model/paradigm. Buen Vivir originally appeared at the margins of the state and political power, but its success in Ecuador and Bolivia made it susceptible for political interests. Similar to the concept of sustainable development which has been completely emptied and overused, BV lost its meaning through inflationary use for government practices that are far from contributing to a "good life". For example, the Ecuadorian government understands BV fundamentally as access to services and hence, in the government's opinion, more public investment in education, health or infrastructure are leading to more BV. This way the construction of a new road – deeply entrenched in the logic of the automobile instead of the human being – is labeled as a BV project. The same applies to the Ecuadorian and Bolivian government's continued approval of the mining industry as a temporary means to 'develop'. This is effectively sidelining the concerns for the environment, further contributing to consumerism and productivism, and not questioning at all the economic model behind this. That is the threat of Buen Vivir becoming simply a marketing strategy for government programs/projects or even a new ideology for development, emptied of almost all of its content (Caria/Domínguez, 2015; Acosta, 2017; Dominguez et al, 2017). Meaning also that the efforts to define BV, or better to fill it with meaning (linking it to terms like plurinational or territory in a specific context), are central for not letting it become a random term and losing its relevance. By doing so, the term Buen Vivir can be an innovation to rethink sustainability without the conventional reference to development (Altmann, 2013).

The importance of defining Buen Vivir – often being easier to identify what is not compatible with BV – is also crucial because without it there is no chance to tell whether we are moving towards or away from it. Which leads us to the critique that Buen Vivir is mostly not measurable and therefore not applicable as social policy. First, there are basic material needs which are the basis for any human life and whose fulfillment can be measured or estimated (like the intake of calories or

energy-use). We cannot really measure immaterial, yet central elements of BV such as conscience, harmony or spiritual equilibrium. And it is also quite hard to measure happiness which might change from one day to the next without any changes in other socio-economic indicators (Huanacuni Mamani, 2015). However, we can try to approach them as the example of the Gross Happiness Indicator (GHI) from Bhutan demonstrated. Clearly, the more complex the issue the more single indicators we will need to get a picture with explanatory value. In the case of the GHI Bhutan applies, besides traditional quantitative indicators, qualitative questionnaires to monitor its citizens happiness (Dixon, 2006). To capture a more holistic view of any given reality/conditions, the inclusion of qualitative research such as interviews and questionnaires will be indispensable. It is also clear that any simple measure will not do, but that we need wide set of indicators to approach (human) flourishing. To measure the coexistence ("buenos convivires") indicators of governance could be a starting point, especially those measuring participation and political stability, as already developed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Although they are not sufficient and contradictory, the set of indicators developed for the UN Sustainable Development Goals can be another point of departure for possible BV indicators. Finally, possible indicators (or sets of indicators) should be appropriate for each reality, meaning they need to be capable of handling diversity (Albó, 2011; Acosta, 2017).

Finally, there has been ample critique that the ideals of Buen Vivir as stated in the constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia and the fundamental policy shifts they imply are far from being realized. Also, that certain constitutional principles are prioritized over others effectively reproducing poverty, difference, and exclusion. That instead of becoming empowered subjects of social change, social movements, indigenous groups, and other networks have become increasingly targets of government control and discipline. And, that the enforcement of the new constitutional rights (e.g. the right of nature) ultimately depends on the will of government or a very active citizenry (Becker, 2011; Radcliffe, 2011; Huanacuni Mamani, 2015; Acosta, 2017; Ranta, 2017). This seems to be true and the governments of both Ecuador and Bolivia, which committed to BV in their constitutions, will have to be evaluated on whether they actually implement policy that are concerned with BV or continuing the current economic model of extractivism and exploitation (Lalander, 2014). However, this

critique addresses the implementation and not the actual paradigm of BV. And, to be fair, there also have been advances in both countries and we must consider that these are the only examples globally of countries that have taken this quite radical path. So, even with political will and favorable conditions, the implementation of further and more radical policies might require more time. After all, we are talking about the overcoming of 500 years of history that is being confronted by two Andean governments – in a world-system of capitalism – and expecting immediate results would be hardly realistic (Boron, 2015). Additionally, as Ortiz Lemos (2014) points out, it would not serve BV to be only defined and implemented by the government which can easily appropriate it. What is needed is a public sphere that is capable of critical, inclusive debate about the complex issue that are involved when addressing the details of achieving a good life. Although government policies are required, as well, Buen Vivir has to grow from the bottom, from the community.

In many ways, BV is an even deeper change than degrowth with falls somewhat short of the more emotional and spiritual dimensions of human life. It is clear that this process will require profound transformations which imply a permanent struggle for power – mainly because the fulfillment of the right to a dignified life requires a huge distribution of wealth and income. And not only in monetary dimensions but an equitable redistribution of land (including the issue of “agrarian reform”) and access to natural resources. It is also clear that the transition to BV will require time and patience. Although the construction or recovery of principles of reciprocity and solidarity should occur on all levels of society, the household, the community, and the schools seem to be a natural starting point. Building up from the local and regional level, Buen Vivir cannot stop at the national level but must consider the global dimensions. Of crucial importance for this transition are efforts to regulate the global financial system with an international financial code (which could be built on regional codes at first). Addressing the issues of external debt, speculation, fiscal/tax havens, and an international financial transaction tax are all about putting the financial and banking system at the service of society again (Acosta, 2009a). It is also evident that, due to the size and depth of this task, it can only be achieved

through ample alliances which require the willingness to dialogue and to leaving behind dogmatic positions (a typical issue of the traditional left).

As Acosta (2017) synthesizes, the construction, or reconstruction, of “buenos vivires” cannot be achieved through extractivism nor neo-extractivism, predatory economic models that inflict extreme violence onto nature and society itself. Although BV will have to be constructed from the present reality of conventional development, it proposes an alternative to development beyond the capitalist logic of accumulation. Similar to degrowth, a main contribution of BV is the creation of possibilities for dialogue – offering and opening this vast map of practices and concepts that could help to invert the dominant concepts. It is the possibility of a collective, respectful and frank construction of bridges between the past, the present, and the future; between ancestral, traditional and modern knowledges; between the rural and the urban. Despite the understandable sense of urgency and rush, this conceptual shift and the collective construction of new forms and modes of living will certainly require time, implying that we will have to learn, re-learn and adapt on the way. And this process will require a whole lot of constancy, political and emotional will, and humility. Buen Vivir is an invitation to cultural diversity, to pluri-nationality, and to political pluralism. However, “a diversity that does not justify nor tolerate the destruction of nature, nor the exploitation of human beings or the existence of privileged groups at the cost of […] others. [Buen Vivir] will be for everyone or not at all.” (Acosta, 2017, p.240).

5. Illustrations of sustainability in action

5.1 Adventuring into the field

The literature on DG and BV is full of example of grassroot initiatives and local projects that are trying to implement elements of a socio-economic transition. The literature also often emphasizes that these "islands of sustainability" (in a vast ocean of unsustainable practices) hold valuable insight and potentials for a broader socio-economic transition (Escobar, 2015; D'Alisa et al, 2015; Burkhart et al, 2017). Thus, studying and discussing Degrowth and Buen Vivir from a conceptual perspective, which is a rather broad perspective, created a strong motivation to look a little bit closer at those practices of sustainability and include some kind of field work in this thesis to get a more detailed insight of the concrete realities of practicing sustainability. Considering our theoretical discussions, it seemed clear form the very beginning that the illustration of practices of sustainability would require a qualitative approach for this endeavor. Thus, the initial idea was to conduct two rounds of qualitative interviews, one in the Global North (illustrating Degrowth) and one in the South (illustrating Buen Vivir). Including practice from very different realities would not only allow for a more diverse picture and perhaps offset a little the fact that we are only looking at tiny pieces of the whole but might also reveal common difficulties and obstacles. This chapter 5 is trying to give a little glimpse into the vast universe of concrete experiences of alternatives for transition around the globe.

What we are going to discuss here are four cases of initiatives that touch various elements of the theoretical discussion we presented in the last three chapters. These cases represent possibilities of how principles of DG and BV can be enacted in different contexts. In one way or another, all of them are working towards a more sustainable society. At the same time, they are far from representing the whole complexity and range of projects that are working in such a direction. They are merely the tip of the iceberg – giving us a first impression of possibilities and also difficulties, but hardly the whole picture. That is why we prefer to use the term illustration, because the selection presented here is neither representative for the huge variety of transition initiatives nor can it comprehensively account for the complexity and variety of issues within the different initiatives. The search for initiatives/projects was not limited to Degrowth or Buen Vivir, specifically, but more

generally to projects concerned with sustainability. That is mainly due to the factor that many initiatives, even though they are clearly implementing and living DG and/or BV principles, are not explicit about it. Both terms are relatively new and probably have not been absorbed by all social movements and projects yet. For our purpose here, it is irrelevant if a given projects adopts the labels Degrowth or Buen Vivir, as long as it involves proposals and elements of a transition towards more sustainability. Assuming that both the state and corporations/businesses have the tendency to subordinate concepts and project to their interests, our focus is on initiatives from private citizens or civil society groups.

In October 2017, two conference participations in the United Kingdom (in Edinburgh and Newcastle)[95], opened the door for an extended stay in Europe. Without any prior contacts to transition or degrowth projects, the initial search started online. The idea was to find several initiatives that address different aspects of the socio-economic transition to get a broader picture. The UK had already been identified in the literature as a promising starting point to look for socio-ecological transition initiatives, because it is the place where the Transition Town Initiative was originally founded. Arriving in September 2017 in Edinburgh, we already had established contact with one of the local transition town projects, the PEDAL (Portobello Energy Descent Action Plan) in the coastal suburb of Portobello. The interview with one of its founders, Eva Schonberg, marked the beginning of our field work. The PEDAL was the only sensible choice of transition town projects in and around Edinburgh at that moment, because another project was on hold and a third was at the very beginning (having only one activity/project at that moment, compared to the four projects PEDAL was doing).

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[95] The first conference was the Young Scholars Initiative (YSI) Festival for New Economic Thinking in Edinburgh from October 19th to 20th. The active participation in this event, which was designed as an open space for academics and local/regional activists – led us to meet other local initiatives. Being an organizer of a workshop on regional sustainability, we had the chance to meet Kate Raworth and activists from the Positive Money Network. The discussion with them, for example, revealed the importance of monetary reform and local credit unions/cooperatives in the UK context. The second conference was the Regional Studies Association (RSA) Early Career Conference in Newcastle.

Through the transition towns online platform[96] and further online search, we were able to find and get in context with the Shrub (Swap and Reuse Hub) cooperative. The Shrub engages in a range of activities around zero-waste, creative reuse and community empowerment, which will be further discussed in one of the illustrations presented below. It was also the initiative in Europe we spent most time with (almost two weeks). During the time in Edinburgh we had to chance to participate in two Shrub member meetings and get to know and participate in their different activities (even helping with their second application for the Scottish Climate Challenge Fund). Still, in Edinburgh we had already heard about the importance of credit unions and community banks in the UK context. Such a case seemed especially interesting for our research because it would address the topic of financing and credit, which the other two initiatives did not. We found the Castle Community Bank (CCB) which forms part of the large network of credit unions in the UK. It is a member-owned financial cooperative and operates under the principle of helping people by providing access to credit and financial services and through community building activities (like financing a local soccer field). This constituted our third case in the UK.

The choice to look for initiatives in Germany was not only because of our own cultural background but also because it has (alongside France and Spain) the largest and most active Degrowth community in Europe.[97] Since the 2014 Degrowth Conference in Leipzig there exists an online platform specifically on Degrowth projects and working groups around the country. This provided the contact to the Förderverein Wachstumswende (FW), which was the first German initiative explicitly working with Degrowth and post-growth and our first case there. The FW seemed a promising case because they already existed since 2012, had much experience, and had a wide network of partners. As their work is mostly educational and

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[96] https://transitionnetwork.org/

[97] Obviously, there is also always an issue of feasibility (e.g. language of the author, knowledge of cultural backgrounds, access to locations) that influenced the selection of countries and initiatives. Especially considering that the interviews were planned to be done at their respective locations to have the chance to meet some of the persons involved (beyond the interview partner) and get a better understanding of their work and context. In the case of Colombia, for example, this was not possible due to lack of financing for travel and the interview had to be done via Skype videocall.

organizational, we tried as in the UK to find more projects with different foci. At that point it seemed valuable to include a transition town initiative to have the case of a German approach within this framework. Thus, a second case in Germany was the Transition Town Braunschweig. Through the personal contact with parts of the Degrowth community in Germany we learnt about a new project on creating post-growth alliances that was just starting in Bremen. As all the previous cases were already established for several years, this case was selected to provide an insight on the very beginning of an initiative.

After this first round of six interviews in Europe it became clear that we would have to make a strategic decision concerning the further field work and general direction of the thesis. An initial screening of the material that the interviews had produced – on average around one hour of audio recording, which translated into between 9 to 12 single-spaced pages of transcript – indicated that it would be too extensive too cover in an adequate manner within the space of this thesis. It would have implied, in our opinion, a too drastic change of this thesis from a conceptual discussion to the field research. This would have been a different thesis and would have meant to abandon (or at least reduce very significantly) the conceptual discussion, which was and remains the main objective and contribution of this thesis. Which lead to our decision to select two of the six cases from Europe and complete them with two further cases from South America. To be clear, the immersion into the field was more than enriching and we do hope that the produced material that is not entering this thesis (a total of four cases) will lead to further research and publication in the future. We think that there is still much confusion and misinterpretation concerning the concepts around Degrowth and Buen Vivir. Hence, the decision to focus on the theoretical discussion and leave the further elaboration of the practices for future research.

The selection of the two initiatives from the North, the Shrub cooperative in Edinburgh and the Förderverein Wachstumswende (FW) in Berlin, was based on several factors. The case of Shrub was the amplest display of sustainability in action because they had six of projects/themes, compared to the four addressed by PEDAL or the one focus of the Castle Community Bank. Additionally, they were the only case in Scotland that embraced the organizational format and ideals of a

cooperative and, thus had an additional direct link to our theoretical discussions on the economics of DG and BV. Considering our goal of providing diverse illustrations and after choosing already one case from Scotland, it seemed the most consistent decision to pick another case from Germany. Here, the selection was a bit more difficult, because the cases of Bremen and Berlin are not only interlinked and directly working together, but they are also very similar in many aspects. Ultimately, the choice for the FW made more sense because they were active longer (since 2012 compared to 2016 in Bremen). And, in our opinion, occupied a more central space in the German Degrowth network/movement. The case of the Transition Town Braunschweig could have been an interesting choice, if they the group would have been more actively engaged together. What we discovered there is that the members of the local group were coming from different, already existing social initiatives around the city and were only very loosely connected to each other.

In Latin America, the focus of our search for initiatives was guided by two factors. On one hand, it seemed necessary to include a case that is explicitly about Buen Vivir as it is the case for our German case on Degrowth. On the other hand, it seemed reasonable to search for initiatives that are addressing the specific problems of the continent beyond the ecological aspects. In particular, the conditions of high-income inequality and land ownership distribution, which were already identified as major obstacles towards sustainability in our theoretical work. The decision to include the Landless Workers' Movement (MST – Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra) in Brazil was based mainly on its singular importance for the struggle of access to land, rights and social reform. Additionally, the MST started to embrace ecological principles (working towards agroecological production). As the MST is neither explicit about Buen Vivir nor directly linked to an indigenous background, the selection of the last (of our four) illustration were bound to be an indigenous initiative/experience.

We did actually have the chance to spent ten days with the Yawanawá people in one of their villages on the margins of the Gregorio River in the state of Acre. And, in this particular case, the village even had a zero-waste project (as there are already many traces and residues of the modern world in the middle of the Amazon rainforest) in planning. However, the immersion into their reality and initial

discussions with the village elders led us to the conclusion that this case would require (at least) a basic training in anthropological studies and more profound knowledge of the socio-cultural concepts and terms that they were using. From then on, the search for our last illustration was oriented towards projects that would explicitly address Buen Vivir elements but that are not completely within the complex indigenous reality. Through our participation in the First North-South Degrowth Conference in Mexico City in September 2018 we had met a group of young researchers that were involved with a Buen Vivir inspired project in Colombia. Besides the desired connection between Buen Vivir and the "modern" reality, the project is trying to address the issues of global supply chains and land ownership – making it an ideal selection for our work.

We have already discussed at some length (especially in chapter 2) the very different realities of the Global South and North. The reality of the cases in Scotland and Germany is that of Northern Europe. Two countries that share, for example, the benefits of well-funded public education. Countries that have a functioning social welfare net, that effectively reduces the potential for material precarity (much less for immaterial aspects such as stigmatization). They are both part of the European Union which has resources, indeed a policy mandate, to fund projects and initiatives that are concerned with environmental risks (through the European Regional Development Fund). In short and very general terms, it is a reality of material wealth and access to many public goods for most of the population. A result of this European reality is that in both Northern illustrations the people involved are usually not poor in a material sense or suffering other forms of deprivation. On the contrary, the initiatives around Degrowth and socio-economic transition in general were mainly constituted by members of the educated middle class. That is not surprising as these are the segments of the European population (given their privileged access to information and income/wealth) that have the most resources to articulate themselves.

In the case of Latin America, and here particularly of Colombia and Brazil, we find a very different socio-economic scenario. Large parts of the population live under precarious situations in terms of housing, income, and access to public goods (including health care and education). Even if a legal basis for rights exists (which it

usually does), the enforcement of them is much less guaranteed, as well as the access to legal representation. In general, the intensity of conflict – whether in urban peripheries or at the commodity frontiers in the Amazon – is incomparably higher than in Europe. Activism is often confronted with violence, as the high numbers of dead environmental activist, for example, in Brazil demonstrates. Very different to the European context, many struggles in Latin America emerge from and are fueled by conditions of deprivation of large segments of the population. The case of the MST and the coffee farmers in Colombia are both a testament of these conditions. In both cases the objectives are directed towards poverty alleviation and the movements/initiatives are comprised by people from low income classes.

Admittedly, we could have found much more initiatives, we would have heard very different and always unique stories, and probably obtained different insights from the interviews. However, given the references in the literature and the similarities in just the few cases we studied, it seems safe to assume that the significant difference between the cases are mainly related to the very different contexts of Europe and Latin America. Beyond that it is surprising how several issues – like internal coherence/unity, the importance of partnerships/alliances and trust, or financing – appear almost always at some point. As already mentioned, these are very different realities and we do not intend to compare them directly, instead we hope to indicate where are potentials for dialogue and mutual learning beyond the specific cultural and socio-political context. Thus, the highlights and conclusions drawn from these illustrations and not universally applicable, instead they offer a point of departure that might be useful in similar (or even different) conditions.

5.2 Methodology

The interviews for our field work followed a semi-structured format following a predefined set of question. The questions were organized around three main themes: the general nature, objectives and context of the initiative, the difficulties and facilitating factors that the initiative encountered, and the relationships/alliances between the initiatives and other agents/groups/institutions. The complete script of the questionnaire, together with the general procedure for setting the stage of the interview, can be found in the appendix (chapter 9.1) In the following sections

(chapter 5.3 to 5.6) the information obtained through the interviews is synthesized and discussed in its specific context. All interviews were recorded as audio files and the full transcripts of the conversations can be found in the appendix (chapter 9.2) The transcripts were kept in the original language of the interview. If the interview was not originally in English, the translation into English for this chapter was all done by the author of this thesis himself. The opinions expressed in the interview do not necessarily represent the official opinion of the whole initiative/project or the opinions of the majority of the organization's members. At some occasions, divergent opinions are explicitly stated.

The use of qualitative research has recently gained new attention for the analysis of social relations and phenomena in social sciences, including economics. The 'new' and plural reality of modern societies – in the sense of increased uncertainty, very specific individual contexts and the disintegration of former social structures – has created a scenario which requires a different sensibility towards the objects of empirical research. The absence of universal social theories, including particularly theories of transition, favors theories and narratives that are limited in the scope concerning space/locality, time and situation. Here, qualitative research designs can offer a different and more detailed insights into social phenomena. This kind of research does not dissect its objects into separate variables but tries to understand them in their ordinary, daily-life context both holistically and considering their complexity. Considering that perspectives and actions of different actors will inevitably vary due to the subjectivity and different social backgrounds. Also, the reflections of the research about his or her impressions, actions, influences and even emotions during the field work can be usable data/information (Gephard, 2004; Flick, 2006). Especially research related to sustainability in a holistic sense, as described throughout this thesis, has a need to transcend purely quantitative studies.

So, the choice for qualitative interviews arises from their potential to consider the everyday-life and life experiences of the interviewed person. Qualitative research, in this sense, is not so much worried about 'measuring', but about 'understanding' and providing 'meaning' to our perceived world. It aims at providing a more detailed and integral picture of some aspects of reality – here meaning the social reality

rather than the “objective”. For this kind of understanding and meaning, the socio-economic context and environment (dt. “Lebenswelt”) is crucial. That implies that besides the actual interviews (and the context of the specific interviewee) some contextualization of the specific socioeconomic and political realities will also be required. The most promising interview format for the questions considered above seems to a semi-structured interview. In this format the interviewer develops and provides the general framework of questions (interview guide) but at the same time allows for possibilities to divert – thus creating more freedom to adapt the interview to the specific context and interviewee (Flick et al, 2004; Helfferich, 2011).

Regarding the format of a semi-structure interview, we also have to mention that an interview in general is not simply about asking questions. We must consider that an interview – beyond being a research methodology – can, and normally will become a kind of relationship which, to some extent, reflects the personalities (and the social context they are in) of the interviewee and the interviewer (Mishler, 1986). To be successful in terms of data/information production, this relationship depends on equity – not as in being equal, but a balance between what is sought and what is given – as well as on mutual understanding and trust. This also implies that differences of gender, race, age, class, etc. between the interviewee and the interviewer must be considered, which, at the same time, minimizes the potential for misunderstanding. While a certain level of sympathy between the persons involved in the interview is necessary and desirable, any form of therapeutic relationship should be avoided (e.g. the interviewer trying to help/giving advice about difficult personal situations etc.). Still, there can be a relationship of reciprocity between interviewee and interviewer. Normally, the latter gets 'more' out of the process but can in return offer to listen seriously and to value the interviewee's story and details (Seidman, 2006).

According to Zorn (2010), there are several things that should be considered while designing a qualitative survey/questionnaire. In the case of a semi-structured interview, we should obviously avoid closed-ended questions that could be answered with yes or no. Instead the objective, concerning the general style of the interview, is to formulate open-ended questions that allow for lengthy and descriptive answers. Also, we should try to reduce our (perhaps inevitable) bias by

not asking leading questions, that means questions that already suggest a certain kind of answer or that contain information that the interviewer wants to be confirmed. Furthermore, we should avoid questions which have strong positive or negative associations – something that is very difficult because we cannot completely anticipate the interviewees associations. And in terms of phrasing, it is important to avoid negative phrasing which could easily create a bias, such as “Do you like to go to work?”.

It is crucial that the interviewee understand the questions well. That means the interview must adapt the language of the questions depending on the background of the interviewee (knowledge, culture, age, gender, etc.). This step might result in (at least slightly) different questions for different interviewees because the different social and cultural contexts must be considered. To not confuse the interviewee, the question should be as concise as possible, meaning short and specific. Bernard (2000) points out there is also some disagreement whether to start with less important, non-sensitive questions and then move on to more important and perhaps complicated questions, or vice versa. In any case, some introductory talk and warm-up questions certainly play a role in relaxing the interviewee.

Besides the considerations just mentioned, there were several challenges that we encountered during the field work. The general challenge – and, at the same time, potential – of semi-structured interviews is the amount and the content of information that can be obtained. As this form of interview is designed to let the interviewee speak freely within the defined structure, it is hardly possible to limit how much a person would like to talk about certain topics – making it difficult to not over strain the time limit (which was initially set at a maximum of 50 minutes). This limit is of course flexible, but from experience we can observe that at some point both interviewer and interviewee loose concentration. In the case of this research, the people and projects involved with sustainability transition are rather keen to be heard and to get more visibility. Thus, instead of having the difficulty of not getting enough information with an interview, the opposite was the case. Almost all interviews took more time than expected as the interviewees happily shared a lot of information.

Then there are various issues from an ethical perspective when collecting data/information, especially when the researcher delves into the lives of other human beings as it is the case of interviews. The format of an interview can be very personal, and the research must ensure that the rights and the privacy of the people involved, as well as the confidentiality of the information are always guaranteed. To comply with ethical guidelines, each interviewee was provided with a consent form. This form had already been sent to the interviewees before the actual encounter and then was read together and then signed (by both interviewer and interviewee) before the interview. Thus, giving the interviewees the opportunity to voice any concerns. None of the interviewees wanted to take the option of anonymity (like changing the names and locations). Both parties received a co-signed copy of the consent form (see appendix, chapter 9.3).

5.3 Illustration 1 - Shrub Coop, Edinburgh

"*Waste is only waste if you waste it*"

(written on an old plank of wood in the Shrub Swap Shop on Guthrie Street, Edinburgh)

The interview at Shrub (Swap and Reuse Hub) Coop was undertaken with Olivia Nathan, one of the founding members and current (as of 2017) board member of the initiative. The Shrub Swap and Reuse Hub is a student-founded and now community-led cooperative working to create a world without waste, that is a Zero Waste Edinburgh to begin with. Shrub has a store on Guthrie Street in downtown Edinburgh which is used as space for the swap shop (non-monetary exchange), for workshops and for the bicycle repair hub (bike kitchen). Additionally, Shrub is involved in food sharing projects around Edinburgh and organizes several regular educational and awareness-raising events related to waste reduction, reuse and sustainable living. Shrub wants to encourage citizens to rethink their relation to waste, consumption and resources, to support community empowerment, and to provide a living laboratory for a circular economy. In recent years, Shrub has gained funding from the European Union and the Scottish government, enabling them to expand their activities and to plan for a more visible presence on Edinburgh's high street.

The Shrub started in 2012 as an initiative by a group of a few friends who didn't like to see things that have barely been used left behind by Edinburgh University students. Students would come for a short period and leave behind lots of things (e.g. books, furniture, cooking tools) and usually it would go to the landfill. A partnership with the University of Edinburgh was started in which the group of students would collect the goods, store them, and then at the beginning of the academic year open a free shop. That would not only provide people with second-hand stuff and prevent them from buying new stuff but would also raise awareness about issues around waste and allow people to move away from consumerism. Soon after, the group – with the help from the University of Edinburgh (reduced rent for the first 4 years) – decided to open a space for non-monetary exchange, the Shrub Swap Shop (where items can simply be swapped with other brought items or also bought regularly if the person has nothing to swap). As the group of interested people grew, the idea of a bike kitchen was born and implemented in the basement of the Swap Shop, providing people with the opportunity to learn skills, like to ride, repair, or build their own bike. And then, food sharing and workshops around sustainable living emerged as new projects the community wanted to explore. So, the aim is to provide a community hub for waste reduction and the promotion of swap economy. A key word for Shrub is creativity – how to do things differently and the creative reuse of available material ("waste"). It is very much a learning space. So, Shrub's purpose is to provide a welcoming space for rethinking people's relation to waste, reduce consumption and develop effective use of resources. The project wants to support community empowerment in Edinburgh, that means sharing skills and also practical equipment (like tools in the bike kitchen).

Initially only a group of six students, basically doing the University the favor of getting rid of items they would otherwise have to collect and transport to the landfill, the project quickly established a network of volunteers and members. In the past years (from 2013 to 2017) the project gained over 400 members (paying an annual fee of 12 GBL) and even more people who are volunteering, close to one thousand in October of 2017, in the different projects. Members do not have to volunteer – although most of them do – and can still enjoy the benefits of swapping in Swap Shop. This significant growth of people involved is due to the active engagement with the Edinburgh community through the food collecting, having the Swap Shop

open three days a week, on the ground workshops, and cultural events (like poetry slams). And any volunteer who has contributed three months to any project will automatically become a member (without paying the fee), a decision that intends to strengthen the volunteer-based character of Shrub. Obviously, not all volunteer and supporting members are active all the time, but the initial group of six individuals has evolved into a community of around 40-50 active members. Although Shrub firmly maintains cooperative structures, it had to be transformed into a limited company when the rent contract for the space was signed. Later, the organization type was changed to a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) which adheres the principles defined in the International Cooperatives Alliance Statement on Cooperative Identity.[98]

A crucial factor in the development of the Shrub community was, and still is, the Scottish Climate Change Fund (CCF), which funds projects that are combating climate change. In the second year of the project, Shrub applied for a grant of the CCF which was successful and allowed for the implementation of various things.[99] One of the most important factors was being able to pay some regular staff in order to keep the shop open, coordinate activities, and doing account work (which was more difficult with only volunteers). That freed up time for the volunteer members, which enabled the expansion of Shrub through the formation of new working groups and projects. The idea for the working groups, indeed all activities within Shrub, is very much about facilitating and enabling for other people to come in, get excited about the idea and get involved. That way more and more people got involved, also because Shrub is perceived as a very open, diverse, and inclusive space where people can be creative and develop projects. In this function Shrub is rather unique in Edinburgh and thus has gained a lot of interest. And having the means to realize this all, through government grants, has made Shrub not only very attractive but also

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[98] The list of principles can be found on the International Cooperative Alliance homepage: https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity (accessed 20 March 2019)

[99] The main argument that helped to win the grant was the huge amount of CO_2 that could be saved through reusing (and reducing the consumption of new items) the items Shrub collected and through the food sharing projects. Their calculation estimated that they saved around 12 tons of CO_2 in the first and over 20 tons in the second year of their existence. And this is probably a virtuous cycle as the Shrub's activities expand and as more and more people in the city become aware of this potential and start doing things differently – like riding a bike instead of a car.

made a huge difference in its evolution. Shrub expansions also meant increasing visibility within Edinburgh and beyond (e.g. newspaper coverage on national level and visits of Scottish cabinet members) – another important success factor.

Nevertheless, more available resources also brought some tensions, mainly over decisions who gets paid and how much, and on how to conserve the volunteer-led character of Shrub. Making conflict or tension-prone decisions is a challenge in any organization and usually resolved by imposing decisions top-down. However, as Shrub is a non-hierarchic organization where everyone's opinion is heard and valued, they have implemented a consensus-decision making process. To be clear, consensus is neither compromise nor unanimity - it aims to go further by weaving together everyone's best ideas and most important concerns - a process that often results in surprising and creative solutions, inspiring both the individual and the group as whole. Admittedly, consensus decision-making requires more involvement by the individual group members than, for example, a majority vote where everybody only has to vote, potentially without any debate or group interaction. On the other hand, for a consensus there are various conditions required, such as the commitment to reach it, a space of trust and openness (which enables the expression of desires and must-haves), and a common goal. Additionally, the process must be clear to everyone, it needs enough time, and the active participation of all group members. Furthermore, if the group is larger and less homogenous, facilitators might be needed. And in the case of several groups, it is useful to have a spokesperson for each group that knows the consensus and concerns of his or her group. (Hartnett, 2011).

In the case of Shrub there is a process of forth and back between the working groups and the two-weekly main members meeting, where working groups (with most knowledge of their area) feed into the main meeting. This is very much like a hub-spoke model – inspired by the approach of sociocracy – as depicted below (see figure 7), where the main hub is the members meeting and each working group is a

secondary hub (which then might have tertiary hubs). [100] Proposals can be formulated on each level and have to go through certain time frames – in the case of proposals at least two weeks to guarantee that each secondary (and tertiary) hub has had time to review and decide on it. Each hub/working group has to send at least one, ideally two representatives to the main meeting. Although this is an industrious, time-consuming process and the Shrub community is still in the process of solidifying it, it has been working so far and encouraged people to participate. The main requirement being that people, especially the representatives from the working groups (e.g. bike kitchen, food sharing, etc.) need to keep coming to the main meeting to enable the flow of information and the function of Shrub.

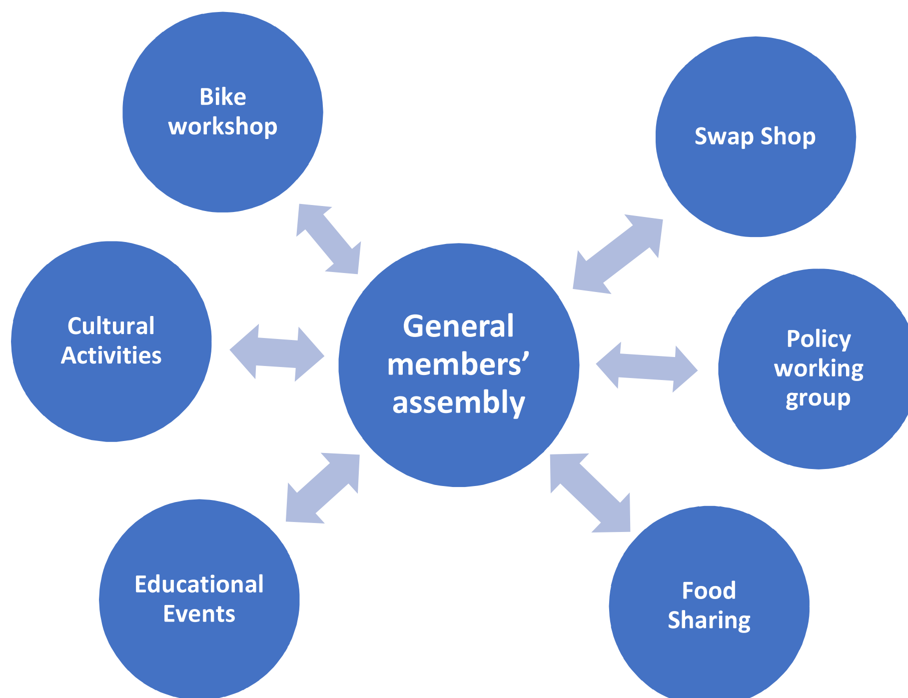

Figure 7 - Hub-Spoke model with SHRUB's working groups (source: own figure)

[100] Sociocracy describes an organizational form of varying size – from the household to, potentially, the state - that enables self-organization and seeks to achieve harmonious social environments, as well as productive organizations and businesses. Based on consensus decision-making it tries to guarantee a minimum of social security by structurally avoiding ignoring member's/citizen's needs. Originally coined by French philosopher Auguste Comte, the concept was significantly further developed in the 20th century in the Netherlands by Kees Boeke and Gerard Endenburg, among others. Sociocracy is a social technology that describes how to make decisions and how to manage power, based on equality, transparency, pragmatism, fairness and feedback loops/circles. These few values offer a framework for any type of organization (Rüther, 2018). For a comprehensive discussion and guide on how to implement sociocracy see Buck&Villines (2007).

Another crucial aspect of the success of the Shrub Coop are the partnerships it has created, starting with the support from the University of Edinburgh (which now is actually only benefiting since it receives full rent payments and still saves the costs of cleaning up the left behind items). The food sharing project, which involves collecting food from over 50 businesses in the city, has created a network of partnerships based on mutual benefits. These businesses (among others supermarkets, bakeries and restaurants) have agreed to collect food products they would not commercialize anymore and donate to them. However, partnerships are only constructed with time and establishing trust. Meaning that there is the need for some very committed individuals, people who firmly believe in the vision of Shrub to get such an initiative going in the beginning. But there is always an element of transience in almost any organization, and especially in this case where around 50% of the members and volunteers are students (who usually leave the city after a couple of semesters). Thus, there is the conscience and, at the same time, the challenge to create institutionalized structures that remain and are easy to pick up and continue even after key members leave. In order to achieve this, some members have formed a governance and policy working group that tries just to do that – create structures and mechanisms that are easily accessible and enable the organization to continue in the long run.

It is also important to remember that Shrub has gone through a steep and continuing learning curve. And the expansion of activities means that there are always new areas that usually require a process of learning and adaption. An important policy in this context is that Shrub members never act alone, but always in pairs or groups. That way both the insecurity and responsibility (e.g. if an ad-hoc decision is needed) of anyone immersed in a new topic/area is reduced. This challenge continues as Shrub has been awarded 300 thousand GBL by the Scottish government and the European Regional Development Fund in 2017 to expand their food sharing activities, mainly by creating a food waste supermarket. This is Scotland's first ever recycled food shop, called the Food Sharing Hub, where members (1 GBL per month) can fill one basket with food per day and pay as much as they feel. By trying to reduce the roughly 27 tons of wasted food in central Edinburgh every week, the Food Sharing Hub is part of the Zero Waste Edinburgh project. Beyond the food waste, there are roughly another 20 tons of waste (including among others paper,

glass, wood, plastic, and textiles) which could be reused or up-cycled. For Edinburgh to become a zero-waste town, Shrub is expanding both its waste collection beyond the university (also enhancing the relationships between students and local community) and its hands-on workshops (e.g. how to create furniture from waste).

As indicated above, a main challenge for the Shrub is the issue of leadership. Being a cooperative and non-hierarchic in its structure, the Shrub community is still trying to understand what leadership could look like. What is needed is some form of fluid leadership that can act when its needed but also fold away easily so it does not impede people from stepping up and participating – which is a common feature with strong, rigid leadership where people let the leader take control. But it is also clear that Shrub, as any organization, needs leadership that helps members to refocus and that inspires them. It will be integral that Shrub develops a system of leadership that people can agree on and that does not hijack the practices of a consensus and member/volunteer-led organization. Another challenge that arises with funding and expansion is the fact that the moment funding stops and the finances are not solid – which was the case until 2017 – activities (and very probably membership) will decrease. The dislike of finance and account has obviously to do with the people involved with Shrub who are trying to establish non-monetary spaces (meaning they usually do not like money). The initiative has never been about profit or money, and until 2017 it has not even been about covering the costs. However, that must change (as the assumption of continuous funding is not realistic) and will constitute a major shift and challenge for Shrub. It is a delicate balance between making enough money to cover the costs and still being acceptable to the values of an organization that is about expanding non-monetary spaces. Money and finance, which have never been a focus, will have to become a focus in order to make Shrub economically sustainable and self-sufficient.

So far, the Shrub Coop has been a huge success story and will have secured funding until 2020. Meaning that is also the timeline in which it would be ideally gain some financial self-sufficiency to avoid being dependent on the next grant. But even without that funding, Shrub has already established a structure that can continue without the influx of external money – albeit on much smaller scale. A crucial

obstacle is the establishment of a more coherent and sustained volunteer team in the context of high transience within a student community. And this is certainly not a straightforward task. It asks a lot of people, to step outside their box, take responsibility and ownership for what they are doing, and at the same time still remain joyful. Despite all challenges, the case of the Shrub Coop is inspiring because it demonstrates how a small group with a simple idea can have a huge impact in the local community. The financial support of the government certainly made a huge difference and accelerated Shrub's expansion – which is crucial for taking advantage of a momentum within the group. The initiative also showed how people can empower themselves, simply by understanding that they can play an active and creative role in doing this differently – at the same time taking care of and strengthening their local community by fostering a culture of sharing.

Figure 8 - Part of the SHRUB community and their activities (source: SHRUB, 2019)

5.4 Illustration 2 - “Förderverein Wachstumswende”, Berlin

The interview at the Förderverein Wachstumswende (literally, post-growth/growth-critical support association) was held with Andreas Siemoneit, current managing director of the project. It is a non-profit, registered association (dt. Eingetragener Verein) that provides the legal, financial and technical structures to support the German post-growth network (Netzwerk Wachstumswende, NEWW). This network was born during the annual conference “Wirtschaft ohne Wachstum” (economy wihout growth) of the German Association of Ecological Economics (Vereinigung für Ökologische Ökonomie, VÖÖ) in Kiel, 2010. Soon after the conference, the network started receiving much attention and a considerable influx of new, predominately young members. It soon reached such a proportion that the network could no longer be organized in private hands, which in 2012 led to the birth of the “Förderverein Wachstumswende” (FW). The primary purpose of the FW is educational work and projects related to sufficiency and growth critique. The work includes raising funding, supporting existing projects, and providing consulting and educational resources regarding growth and post-growth issues for activists, politicians, the wider public or academia. Supported projects must fulfill at least one of two conditions: either be critical towards GDP growth or be related to sufficiency issues.

The German Association of Ecological Economics, the VÖÖ, plays a central role for the existence of the NEWW and hence the FW. In fact, it was the first academic institution in Germany that explicitly declared itself critical towards (GDP) growth. Which was considerably influenced by the work and activism of Prof. Niko Paech, who is one of the leading scholars on sustainability and post-growth in German academia, and who coined the term “Postwachstumsöknomie” (post-growth economics)[101] in German. This decision of taking a growth-critical posture within the

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[101] According to Paech (2012) a post-growth economy has to overcome the structural and cultural drivers of GDP growth (already discussed in detail in chapter 2 and 3 of this thesis). And it has to be based on five general principles: the (re)localization of the economy (reduction of the distance between producer and consumers), material zero-sum games (steady-state economy), institutional innovations, subsistence (meaning the shortest possible value chain, including intensive common use, improved product life-spans and self-production), and sufficiency (intentional reduction of material consumption and property). Paech argues for these “reduction” strategies because there is no technical solution to the structural and cultural logic of growth. According to Paech these strategies would enable a return to responsibility and accountability considering our economic activity.

VÖÖ opened to association up for many young people who wanted to engage in political and theoretical critique of growth but did not have any institutionalized forum before. This engagement is based on a profound discomfort concerning the issue of economic growth, planetary boundaries, social injustices, and economic instability. A discomfort created, to a good extent, by the contradiction between all these collateral effects and the continuous insistence on GDP growth as the most important political and social objective. This is both the motivation for the existence of the FW and also the smallest common denominator of the post-growth/growth-critical community in Germany.

Compared to other organizations in Germany that are concerned with post-growth and degrowth issues, the FW is not based on and less influenced by political activism. Although several individual members of the FW are activists, the FW itself is more oriented towards academia and education. Ultimately, that might be considered activism, as well, but the FW as institution does not engage with political demonstrations or interventions. It is also a rather small association with around 90 active members (in 2017) and a small financial budget in terms of membership fees – which obviously limits the FW's possibilities. However, the FW raises additional funds from private or public institutions (e.g. political foundations like the Heinrich-Boell foundation or the German ministry of environment) for the funding of specific projects. These projects currently include the management and maintenance of the online platform “wachstumswende.de” which aims at connecting people who are interested in creating solutions for a post-growth society. Eventually, this platform will be integrated in the meta platform “WECHANGE” which the FW helps to develop. The FW organized the 2014 Degrowth Conference in Leipzig, Germany and supported the organization of the 2018 Degrowth Conference in Malmö, Sweden. Unsurprisingly, one of the main partners of the “wachstumswende.de” platform is “degrowth.info”, the main channel for information and announcements around the topic in German. The FW also supports a local degrowth alliance in Bremen (Aktionsbündnis Wachstumswende Bremen) which connects over twenty organizations from the civil society working on practical solutions towards degrowth.

And there is a variety of smaller groups/initiatives that need a formal structure – which the FW provides – to carry out their projects.[102]

Most of the projects and events the FW organizes have some elements of and potential for interaction with the wider public – discussions panels, conferences, workshop, etc. Especially the project in Bremen organizes several projects that are actively engaging with the public. This work of raising awareness and promoting degrowth and post-growth ideas, literally on the streets, is crucial. Because with the relatively small degrowth community people are already convinced. Meaning that engagement with the wider public and spreading these ideas is one of the main tasks and challenges for the degrowth movement in Germany and Europe, for that matter. Due to its small size and limited funds, there are limits in terms of resources and capacities for the work of the FW. Most of the work done by the FW is either financed through the acquisition of funds for specific projects or on voluntary basis. Few functions like the interviewed managing director receive some monetary allowance (in this case for only 2-4 days per month depending on the work load). Although there are some larger organizations concerned with degrowth and socio-ecological transformations in Germany, the community and the available funds for this topic are quite small. Thus, the acquisition of funds constitutes a major challenge for these initiatives. In the case of the FW, the size and growth of the organization has been sustainable in the sense that they established themselves in the last couple of years as a trustworthy and capable partner for realizing projects and events – that is, they carefully evaluate and choose the projects they support and try not to overstretch their own capacities.

This solid management approach that carefully considers their own limitations kept the FW on its rather small scale and has significantly contributed to the efficiency of its work. In fact, additional resources and an expansion of the FW would potentially reduce its efficiency which is also based on the fact that only 2 people (one being the interviewed management director) are responsible for the main load of bureaucratic work that comes with project management. Although the FW is working

[102] A complete list of former and current projects can be found on the FW's homepage: http://www.wachstumswende.org/projekte.htm (accessed 31 March 2019)

within its financial means, the amount of money available for growth-critical projects and education is quite limited. There is probably only a couple of institutions that are willing to fund such projects – being mainly limited to political and ecclesiastical foundations (dt. Kirchliche Stiftungen) and public institutions. This is very different from projects that run under the label of sustainability, which are capable of raising much more funds in general. For this reason, some projects within the FW avoid the label post-growth or growth-critical and rather emphasize the focus on development policy education (which usually applies for their projects). However, according to the interviewee, the willingness to fund growth-critical work has increased significantly in the last 10 years in Germany. This is very interesting as it suggests an increased awareness for the problematic consequences of economic growth and the interests for alternatives from institutions that are not post-growth per se. Yet, in the case of the FW and its funding, this increased willingness of support does not include the private sector.

In its form of a registered association (ger. Eingetragener Verein), the FW's day-to-day decision-making happens mostly within the elected board. Yet, the members' assembly – which happens at least once per year – is the highest decision-making organ within the FW and decides, for example, over the budget plan of each year and strategic decisions. In the assembly, methods of consensus decision-making are applied and all regular members (paying the annual fee of 40 Euros as of 2018) have the right to vote and bring in proposals. Due to the nature of the FW – being one of the hubs for growth-critical work in Germany but limited in its scale – many members are also active in other, similar projects. Thus, creating a well-connected network of scholars, activists and engaged citizens around Germany. Although the FW is a quite young community, the influx of members has slowed down and, as long as there are no significant events that would put the topic on the top of the agenda (e.g. the next economic crisis, new scientific knowledge, etc.), is not expected to grow much further both in terms of members and projects.

From an institutional perspective, it was emphasized that the German legislative framework really works well for non-profit organizations or associations like the FW. It enables, indeed fosters, civic and social engagement by a relatively generous treatment in terms of taxation (usually exempted) and incentives for private funding

(usually tax deductible). Despite having relatively high formal, bureaucratic requirements in terms of transparency and tax declarations, the institutional framework was considered as integral for the work and success of the FW. On the other side, there remains the main challenge of finding a more coherent common ground within the post-growth/degrowth community. While there is this general discomfort with the current development model and its premises, the analysis and consequently policy proposals vary a lot. Depending on whether people/groups consider, for example, money, property, the means of production, or representative democracy the most important issue to tackle, the discourse changes significantly. This creates the potential for a theoretical incoherence – some degrowers advocating the abolishing of money itself and others believing in the possibility of degrowth within a market economy. Although theoretical and conceptual diversity is desirable in general, at some point it can hamper the effective cooperation within the degrowth community, and thus also the political impact it can have. So, the main contribution and challenge for degrowth-related work in Germany at this point seems to be two-fold. On one hand, the (scientific) work on the content and proposed solutions that degrowth offers has to be advanced. On the other hand, it is crucial to “keep the issue alive” and create more visibility for the topic, especially in times of relatively low interest (mainly due to more favorable macroeconomic conditions). In this sense, the Förderverein Wachstumswende is an active part of the on-going and very plural search for solutions towards a post-growth economy and society.

The experience of the FW highlights several interesting points. The first being its scale, where the association is in the lucky situation that most of its work can be done with very few people and that it is completely sustainable financially. This means that there is no need to expand its activities simply for more resources and they can carefully choose which projects align most with their own vision. As opposed to organization that are not financially sustainable (or have access to grants like the SHRUB) and end up accepting projects that have nothing to do with their ideology. Obviously, for the FW this fact creates a strong internal coherence and a clear image for their partners – which is also beneficial for establishing trust. Despite its size, the FW contributes significantly to the debate about degrowth in Germany and to connecting the community through its (online) platform.

Figure 9 - Demonstration during the Degrowth Conference Leipzig 2014 (source: Degrowth, 2014)

5.5 Illustration 3 – Alianza del Cafe Justo y el Buen Vivir, Nariño

The third illustration that will be presented here is based on the interview with David Caicedo, one of the founding members of the Alianza del Cafe Justo y el Buen Vivir (ACB). This alliance was founded very recently, in 2018, by a group of five citizens of Nariño who share their concerns for the pervasive poverty, environmental degradation, and the highly unequal land distribution in their region. At the same time, the region is known for its high-quality coffee, which led to the idea of establishing an alternative model of development for the coffee farmers and Mother Earth. Based on a common conviction by the founding members – which also hold different functions in different partner institutions of the Alliance – principles of Buen Vivir were adapted from the beginning. The long-term objective is to create communities which live and produce on their collective land according to Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay principles and which are embedded in non-capitalist relationships. Being aware of the depth of this project the first step in creating these communities is to incorporate such BV principles into the production chain of coffee – the most important product for the Nariño department and the opportunity to increase the quality of life of local coffee farmers.

The idea for this project emerged as Alvaro Obando, the director of a regional NGO, the Local Development Agency of Nariño (LDAN) based in Pasto, decided to try out

a different approach towards development. In Pasto he found David Caicedo and his father, who were both working in academia (at the University of San Buenaventura and the University Javeriana, both in Bogotá), Bogota and on alternative development options and Buen Vivir. They were also joint by community leaders Alba Portillo and Guillermo Torres, both working for decades with coffee farmers and peasants from the region. The alliance was then completed by a local coffee roasting company, Ecomindala SAS, which agreed to process the coffee from the alliance. Until March 2019, around one year after the beginning of the project, already 10 coffee farmers have entered the Alliance as members, producing 80 different varieties of coffee. The very beginning of the project was to ask the coffee farmers of the region what they needed most – which was income – and think how to achieve this. Looking at the coffee production chain, which starts with the farmers, it became clear that very little value remained in Nariño with the farmers. Although the farmers are producing a high-quality coffee that can reach prices more than twice the Colombian average, the existing market power of intermediaries in Colombia enables those to extract all the extra value.

Therefore, the ACB decided that handling the processing and the commercialization themselves, that is in partnership with the farmers, could offer a solution to overcome this condition. With the help of Alba and Guillermo they started talking to farmers and explaining the benefits of becoming members of the alliance: immediate higher incomes and the long-term potential of a community based on a BV philosophy. By handling the roasting process and the commercialization in Bogotá themselves, the alliance can pay the farmers around twice the price they are usually receiving for their product (around 5,000 Colombian Pesos per pound of raw coffee beans, roughly 1.50 USD). But instead of paying the 10,000 Pesos directly to the farmer, around 40% of it is directed to a collective fund. That means that the farmer still earns an extra 1,000 Pesos for each pound of beans, but then another 4,000 is accumulated in the fund. The decision how to invest the fund money is taken by the farmers themselves consensually – first investments included education for their children, home improvements, and interest-free credits between themselves. With the expansion of the alliance, the idea is to use this money to purchase collective land to start to address the issue of land distribution, as well. But the fund in itself is already an important part of the creation of community, because it encourages

the farmers to discuss and decide together how to best use their collective resources. And by creating these communities (five as of March 2019), the Alliance additionally fosters the already existing dynamic of coffee farmer communities to help each other during the harvest once a year. Now, the Alliance members are not just helping each other in their local community but also other Alliance members that live in different municipalities.

Certainly, this can also be a challenge and, especially if the group grows in numbers, will require a lot of mediation which becomes harder if people do not know each other personally (which is mostly the case for the alliance at the moment). But the alliance is aware of that and hopes that further community building will facilitate the decision-making process even for larger groups. Which leads directly to another challenge the alliance has encountered in the region, the building of trust. According to David, due to the complicated history (including the issues around coca leaf production or disappointing experiences with corporations/NGOs) of the region, there is a certain culture of distrust and it is often hard for farmers to trust each other, let alone a newcomer like the ACB. Thus, many farmers initially had little interest in joining the Alliance, even if they could get a higher income by doing so. A step to slowly approach the farmers and enable them to get to know the Alliance, its model, and the people behind it, is the adoption of an inclusive business model by the roasting company, Ecomindala. The coffee farmer can either become a full member, benefitting from the collective fund and taking an active role in the community, or just opt for roasting her/his coffee with Ecomindala. The Alliance and Ecomindala let non-member farmers use their trademark, “Dulces Milagros” (eng. sweet miracles), if they chose and if the quality of the coffee beans can be guaranteed. So, for a farmer that might not be convinced at first, Ecomindala and the Alliance can at least provide a quality roasting process, help with the logistics, and create personal contacts ad trust.

The Alliance also carries out and supports workshops and educational events around Buen Vivir and coffee production (e.g. organic farming). These workshops on fair trade, organic coffee farming, and sustainable practices have been attended by over 130 coffee farmers in five different municipalities of the region, potential future members for the alliance. Another step towards community building is on the

side of commercialization of the coffee, which is done mostly in Bogotá. Here, the ACB is organizing two Buen Vivir inspired activities, the “gratiferias” and the “tertulias”. “Gratiferias” refer to swap and exchange fairs, expansions to the already existing weekly organic fairs at San Buenaventura University. People can use this space for non-monetary exchanges of objects, ideas and knowledge. The “tertulias” are informal conversations or talks, addressing issues around Buen Vivir and community well-being, where the Alliance invites people to have a cup of coffee. Both activities are trying to create (urban) communities around education and conscious consumption of coffee, while at the same time helping the commercialization of the Alliance coffee. In the future, the plan is to create a more permanent space, in form of a coffee house or shop, probably starting in Bogotá.

The part of commercialization remains a major challenge. To be financially sustainable, the ACB needs to sell more coffee. In 2018 they managed to sell around 300 pounds in Colombia and Europe, which is not even the whole production of their members. Thus, creating a stronger presence of “Dulces Milagros” in the market and new business relationships will be necessary to increase their sales. A more structural problem, indeed contradiction, is that the initiative is all about alternative spaces and relations. Thus, the “capitalist” part of selling coffee is considered a necessity that does not receive the enthusiasm that the other parts of the project receive (“We do not like selling, we like people”). Something that might help here in the future are further partners, both in Colombia and abroad. The Alliance is already talking to coffee buyers in Spain and Germany to discuss the possibility of working directly together. Although the project is still at the beginning and in terms of how much coffee they sell still small, that seems impressive considering that it has been running for only a year. The Alliance has already created a network of local/regional scale and aim at developing a comprehensive alternative development plan for the department of Nariño in cooperation with the regional governments. In late 2018, the ACB already started working with another partner, the “Red de Guardianes de Semillas” (lit. Network of Seed Guardians), which contributes with additional knowledge and capacities in the area of seed diversity and organic coffee farming and certification. Ultimately, the Alliance wants to certify all their coffee as organic and fair-trade, but only if BV principles are guaranteed. At the moment, most of the

members coffee production is already organic (not using chemical fertilizers or pesticides) but does not have the costly certification, yet.

The ACB is a really interesting case, because they try to create non-market or even non-capitalist spaces by tackling several issues along the production chain of coffee. But, at the same time, their success depends on the insertion into the global coffee market and the income it generates. It is too early to say how this will affect the project in the mid and long-term, but it seems like a contradiction that will affect them. A crucial element for this project is the composition of the founding members of the ACB in and around Pasto (the capital of Nariño). On one hand, they already had a base of trust for each other (and in each other's capacities) due to their already existing personal relationships. On the other hand, because they brought with them the direct contacts to the LDAN, to Ecomindala and to the local coffee farmers. This also helped fundamentally with the reception of the Alliance's approaches towards the (sometimes distrustful) coffee farmers of the region. And the initial trust in each other and each other's abilities also facilitated the horizontal structure that BV implies: each member is heard by all others, each has an equal vote in the decision-making process and can bring in proposals or suggestions. For the moment, the Alliance has not been formally institutionalized and remains a loose network. However, they are planning to register as a non-profit organization under Colombian law to facilitate more formal partnership, for example, with public or foreign institutions.

Another plan of expansion is to get (international) funding to increase the number and impact of projects they can do around sustainability issues. Recently, the Alliance got another member, the regional Associations of Coffee Farmer Women ("Red de Mujeres Cafecultoras del Norte"), which created the plan to have workshops and projects specifically for women (in the coffee production chain). Getting more members and more partners, including from abroad, who are interested in alternatives to development, will be a main focus of the ACB in the future. A critical mass of coffee farmers as Alliance members – thus, eventually taking processing and commercialization into their own hands – will enable and then facilitate the export to foreign partners and markets. A potential partner here for the future of the project are the local and regional governments of Nariño. At the same

time, including new partners with different agendas can easily lead to the appropriation of the Buen Vivir philosophy; something the Aliance is aware of. Therefore, they have opted to try to consolidate their project first and then approach new partners. The mid-term goal (within 3-5 years) is to be ready to present a project (to regional/national policy makers) that exemplifies the benefits of a collaborative, inclusive, and sustainable coffee production.

Figure 10 - Cafecultoras del Norte (left picture) and David Caicedo farmer (far right) with coffee (source: ACB, 2019)

5.6 Illustration 4 – The Landless Workers' Movement (Movimento Sem Terra), Região Metropolitiana de Belo Horizonte

The story of the MST – the Landless Workers' Movement ("Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra") – in Brazil is a story of struggle. It is widely considered as one of largest and most effective social movements in Latin America. It is active in 24 Brazilian states and has helped already more than 350,000 families to gain access to land. MST farmers are organized in over 100 cooperatives and combines close to 100 food processing plants/operations. Today, it is one of the

largest agricultural producers in the country. The MST emerged in the 1970ies in the South of Brazil, where the modernization of agriculture (meaning increased mechanization and creation of large, export-oriented farms) left large parts of the famers without work and/or work. These farmers could either try to make a living in the city (or the rapidly expanding agricultural frontier in the Center-West and North regions of the country) or resist this process. This social context of its origin helps to explain the readiness of the members of the MST to resist colonization and fight for the right to land, especially if it is in their native region. Although the main objective of the MST, a radical land reform with the opportunity for self-sustained life for the rural poor, remains a focus, the movement expanded its activism to a variety of social issues. Especially education is seen as a priority for the struggle of a social transformation towards a more just and equal society. Since the national convention of 2014, the MST included the principles of organic farming ("agroecologia") in their program as crucial elements for agrarian policy and the broader social transformation (Stedile/Mançano Fernandes, 2005; MST, 2018)

This resistance and perseverance are certainly very present in the case of Antonio Ribeiro's family and the Ho Chi Minh settlement in the metropolitan area of Belo Horizonte. A group of initially 42 families started occupying the abandoned "fazenda" (farm) in the municipality of Nova União in 2005. It took them almost a decade, until 2014, to get the full legal recognition and turn the occupation into a permanent settlement. In the case of Antonio and a couple of other families, this struggle already started early with several failed occupations. They were already evicted from 5 different occupation before, sometimes within few months. Beyond the emotional and physical burden these evictions – not seldom they involve police violence and outright discrimination – mean for the people involved, there is a serious economic issue here. Because staying only a few months does not allow them to plant and still adequately harvest the fruits of their work. This uncertain legal situation often leads to people not planting at all, because of fear to lose all of their work. Another consequence of this stressful process is that many people simply give up at some point, leading to much fluctuation regarding the members of any given occupation. From the 54 families that formed Antonio's initial group and that wanted to start a new occupation back in 2002, after the first eviction only 22 families continued in the struggle to occupy another plot of land.

This fluctuation is considered a great challenge for any occupation and for the movement in general, because the strength of the movement depends to a large extent on the internal unity and solidarity. And this is also challenged by the dynamic of the occupation process itself. In the case of an eviction or new people joining the MST with the intention to occupy land, the search for an adequate place begins and usually the new group for an occupation has a different composition than the one before (people leaving and new people coming in depending on the size of the land). To create a dialogue and internal coherence is a serious challenge, especially considering that some occupations are huge (up to 250 families/households). At the initial moment of the occupation of land, there is a strong motivation to stay united and face this process together. However, when the process takes a long time or when the occupation turns into a settlement, this motivation can deteriorate. And then there is the issue of financial insecurity, which is usually common to most of the families and which often does not help in encouraging cooperative behavior.

In the case of the current settlement the whole process was facilitated because the land was already in the process of being expropriated by the government. Hence, the group of MST settlers did not have confront private landlords, which usually act far more aggressive, but “only” comply with government regulations and persist through the bureaucratic process. For the Ho Chi Minh settlement, the negotiations with the government led to an agreement that 25% of the total land (roughly 780 hectares) has to be designated as a natural reserve (“Área de Proteção Permanente”, which does not allow any construction and planting). This meant that the 42 families that were initially planned to receive a plot of land, had to be reduced to 37 families in order to have enough land for each plot. And this is already the result of week-long negotiations because the government’s first offer was to 50% as natural reserve. Then, the group had to internally reduce the number of families that were going to settle, using criteria established within the MST such as who has spent more time trying to get land and who plans to actually stay in that specific regions.

After moving to Nova União, the group faced another bureaucratic hurdle. According to Brazilian law, the moment it becomes a legal settlement, they should have also gained access to credits for rural development. This is crucial not only to buy

equipment, tools or seeds for the production, but also to buy food and other essentials while the own production is not generating food and income. Although these sums are already small (around 2000 Brazilian Reais per person and year), the application criteria are rigorous. It took a year to gain legal access to these credits and then another year to receive the money into their bank accounts. Two years in which the settlement depended on themselves and the supporting structures of the MST – indeed many tools and larger acquisitions were bought collectively to be able to produce something already. Yet, the access to money was not even the main consideration. The whole process of dispossession and recognizing the new settlement took almost 7 years, from 2005 until 2012. A period in which the group did not have certainty whether the plots they were living and working on would eventually be theirs or not. To overcome this uncertainty, the movement tries to encourage families to plant anyway, so that even when they have to move to another plot there is a chance that something is already planted. Although this can potentially be an exercise in solidarity, this proposal can also create internal conflicts such as what and how much should be planted.

According to Antonio – for himself and for most of the other members of the settlement, coming from the city – the objective to plant in an organic way – the importance of "agroecologia" (organic/permaculture farming) is emphasized throughout the interview – was, and still is a learning process. To understand what grows well and how to grow it in a specific context, often in a trial-and-error approach, was both a challenge for the settlement and a chance to learn. Leading, for example, to the creation of a medicinal herbs production that was established to take advantage of the possibility to extract herbs from the natural reserve (where no plantation activities are allowed). In the case of Nova União, due to its altitude and soil conditions, the best crops are bananas and coffee (and mandioca to a lesser extend). In fact, the municipality has one of the biggest banana productions in the state of Minas Gerais (which in turn is the 3rd largest producer nationally). Besides these cash crops, which are designated for sale or processing into other products, virtually all the members of the settlement are involved in subsistence farming.

To be able and to know how to grow your own food, to produce a surplus for sale (thus, having some monetary income) and the insertion into nature – contrasting

with the often violent and polluted city-life and considered as more quality of life – were the main reasons for Antonio to decide to live in the settlement. Thus, his engagement with the MST was not only motivated by political reasons, but also by the fact that starting without money or property on your own the Brazilian context seems close to impossible. The organizational and legal structures that the movement provides are fundamental for projects like this. But the objective of land reform certainly is a huge motivation for members of the MST (and related movements), because it addresses various issues. By occupying land and starting to live and produce on it, the issue of housing and food security can be solved. If the production is organic and the commercialization of the surplus produce works, it can also address health, environmental aspects and income. Especially the environmental issue has become perhaps the most central argument for land reform as small, family farms have a huge potential for conservation and organic practices – especially, when compared to the large-scale agrobusinesses in Brazil. In Nova União, the effect is quite visible as the settlement is one of the few spaces in the municipality where there is still native forest and the river margins covered in vegetation as the national forest laws ("código florestal") demands.

In the case of the Ho Chi Minh settlement, the partnerships with organic farmer markets in the city of Belo Horizonte, where almost all commercialization happens, were crucial in terms of income. The connection and relationships between the rural and the urban were emphasized as very important and not always well-succeeded. While the connection to the urban center of Belo Horizonte worked well, the relationship between the settlement and the small towns near them in Nova União is more complicated. Even after 12 years living there, the settlers are often judged as lazy and suffer other forms of discrimination. During the harvest season, for example, local farmers demanded additional labor force but were not willing to pay them the usual wages. Also, the former owners of the settled land had planned to develop a gated community there, which probably would have created an increase in income for parts of the local population. Although this income would have been mostly temporarily (in the form of construction work) and at the cost of high environmental impacts, this did not help to improve the local perception/acceptance of the settlement. According to Antonio, the social context of these small,

countryside towns is permeated until today by relations of “coronelism”[103] and social conservatism that rejects radical changes.

In sum, the continuous existence of the Ho Chi Minh settlement in Nova União seems like a huge success considering the challenges and obstacles this group of settlers encountered. Besides the bureaucratic obstacles and the highly unfavorable socio-economic and political circumstances, the perhaps biggest challenge seems to be education and information. According to Antonio, the general population has very little understanding of the implications of a land reform as proposed by the MST. And this does also include many of the settlers who are less politicized and coming from conventional agricultural traditions. Thus, educating themselves and the wider community about a social transition through land reform and agroecological practices (including principles such as “becoming a guardian of the land”) remains a permanent and challenging project. And even when the community is convinced about the benefits of organic/agroecological farming, there are further challenges in the commercialization process.[104] A step that helps the settler community in Nova União was the foundation of a producer cooperative together with 5 other settlements in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte. This enabled them not only to get better prices for their products – which formerly were often sold through intermediaries and with little or no gain for the producer – but also to foster the political organization of the community.

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[103] In Brazil, Coronelism (Portuguese: coronelismo) describes the complex, local power relations that emerged since colonial times. Mainly due to the absence of central state power structures, power got concentrated in the hands of a local oligarch. This coronel would then exercise power either through exchanging favors or through intimidation and violence. Although the dominant presence of coronelism in Brazilian politics has diminished since the 1930ies, its legacy remains. Until today Brazilian politics (and social relations) are considered highly patrimonial, oligarchic, and personalistic (Martins et al, 2011).

[104] A common problem for small-scale organic farmers are the high costs of getting their produce certified according to organic standards. This certification was usually done by private companies involving a costly process of external auditing and monitoring, which made it expensive. Fortunately, a new mechanism is emerging that involves the farmers themselves and very little external help, driving down the costs. It a system based on trust, where the farmers themselves work a catalogue of criteria in a group of up to 10 families. Already working in several countries, in Brazil it is called “Organization of Social Control” (Organização de Controle Social, OCS) and enables organic certification for direct sales or to institutional buyers (schools, universities, public companies, etc.)

Figure 11 - Antonio and his partner Narli harvesting papaya at their plot (source: https://cultivandosaberes.wordpress.com/assentamento-ho-chi-minh/)

6. Conclusion - Converging themes for our future

We have come a long way. We have discussed the unsustainability of development, a critique of a mode of civilization which led us to the current crises we are in. And then two potentially different “development” models and practices. Now we would like to use this conclusion to briefly discuss the converging themes between Degrowth and Buen Vivir, to perhaps build some bridges between them and to offer some final thoughts. As both Degrowth and Buen Vivir are a critique of the conventional development model and also proposals for an alternative, it is unsurprising that they share some common ground. But, coming from very different realities, there are also differences. However, we do not consider them to be an obstacle. The diversity of ideas and practices that can be found in both Degrowth and Buen Vivir (and other transition discourses or projects) might be a challenge (e.g. for coherence) but they are certainly also an advantage – because, as Charles Darwin has taught us, diversity is key to survival. Indeed, their difference could offer a potential for dialogue, mutual learning and further, complementary evolution.

6.1 Building Bridges between different worlds

Returning to Escobar's (2015) argument that building bridges between transition discourses and practices – in the case of this thesis only Degrowth and Buen Vivir – offers a potential to get a better understanding of effective and radical policies and politics for transition, we are going to look now at converging themes, shared positions and challenges of those frameworks. At this point it is important to clarify some potentially controversial points. The effort to build bridges, for example, does by no means imply to neglect the context of Degrowth and Buen Vivir, meaning their historical, geopolitical and epistemic specificities. As we discussed, it is often argued that while Degrowth makes sense in the Global North, the South certainly still needs economic growth (in other words, development) to meet its basic needs, or the other way around. That would be a hard position to hold from both a Degrowth or Buen Vivir perspective, because one of the key criteria in both frameworks is that economic growth and the economy as a whole should be subordinated to 'the good life', the rights of nature, and, generally, to social and ecological objectives within given boundaries (see Kate Raworth’s Doughnut in chapter 2).

Now, before we talk about the common ground, let us summarize the differences and particularities of BV and DG. Regarding the difference, we can observe some intellectual sources that are present in DG but not (or only marginally) in BV, and vice versa. We have, for example, discussed bioeconomics as a major influence for Degrowth, but this concept is strikingly absent in the Buen Vivir literature. On the other hand, there is, unsurprisingly, a strong influence of post-colonial and decolonial theory in Buen Vivir which is a lot less relevant for Degrowth (although it enters a bit through the imaginary decolonization debate). Although Degrowth has strong ecological roots, it seems more anthropocentric than Buen Vivir which is arguably one of the most ecocentric visions in the transition discourse. In other words, both are about justice – yet, DG is more focused on human justice while BV explicitly includes nature and other beings. Escobar (2015) suggests that Degrowth's more anthropocentric view might be tied to its focus on rethinking the (human!) economy and its less developed critique of modernity (which puts man and his reason at the center). Certainly, the status of being peripheral within global capitalism and thus having less access to its 'benefits' is also contributing to a more radical critique of development from the South and from BV.

We can also observe that Degrowth and Buen Vivir work through different practices. For former academic practices play a central role, perhaps even more than activism. In the last decade, several international conference and journal publications have contributed to create a whole research program on Degrowth including universities, grants, and teaching (Demaria et al, 2013). There is also increasing research published around Buen Vivir, yet non-academic practices are probably more important. Community workshops (span. "talleres communitários") on Buen Vivir are often organized by political or social movements and the outlets of publication are more often declarations or booklets - instead of peer-reviewed papers. That does not imply that Degrowth is purely academic or that there are no academic publications on Buen Vivir (Walsh, 2010). Although both approaches argue for disrupting the existing (capitalist) culture, the main pillar and strength for Buen Vivir is fundamental cultural subversion and transformation. For Degrowth, this main pillar is rather a fundamental transformation material-structural base of society (which also implies cultural transformation). The table 6 below summarizes the main

features and highlights the 'differences' between Degrowth and Buen Vivir – that have been discussed throughout this thesis.

	Degrowth	Buen Vivir
Origin	1970ies, revival in early 2000s Western Europe	ancient cosmovisions, revival in early 2000s South/Central America
Main message	Infinite growth on a finite planet is ecologically unsustainable and socially undesirable	Living well rather than living 'better'
Main goal	Challenge the hegemony of growth and propose alternatives to it	Living well in harmony with other humans and the rest of nature
Means and agents	Grassroots alternatives, oppositional activism, academia	Andean communities (and governments), grassroots movements
Ontology	Certain dualism/anthropocentrism (but call for change) Individual and collective level are regarded as complementary	Holism (humans are not distinguish-ed and separated from the rest of the world) Predominance of collective level
Perspective on growth & development	Growth is THE problem and growth-driven development should be abandoned (yet development is rarely completely rejected)	Growth is A problem and positioning in regard to development is ambiguous (from total rejection to more conciliatory attempts)
Natural Environment	Limits of biosphere require reduction in production/consumption and voluntary simplicity	Intrinsic value and Rights of Nature Spiritual relationship with nature
Culture	Definition of a 'good life' is culturally diverse, but must have ecological sustainability and social justice as common goals	Culture as the key driving force of history (acknowledgement of diversity and interculturality) Importance of spirituality and indigenous/ancient knowledge
Role of state	Nation-state and social welfare but with more democracy Community experience might prefigure a post-growth society	Multi-cultural and plurinational state Centrality of community level
Role of market	Markets as one means (not most important) of socio-economic organization among others (commons, reciprocity, public sector, etc.) Advocating de-commodification	Stronger emphasis on de-commodification of the world Solidarity economy
Governance	Diversity of positions: from parliamentary democracy to bottom-up governance	Participatory and bottom-up governance

Table 6 – Main features and differences between DG and BV (source: adapted from Beling et al, 2018)

Despite these differences, we are convinced that the overlapping themes, demands and strategies are far greater. So, what can we identify as a common ground to advance a dialogue between DG and BV (and potentially other alternatives)? As extensively discussed in chapters 3 and 4, both DG and BV share the objective of changing the political and cultural imaginaries in order to achieve a substantial, arguably a radical, societal transformation. Both frameworks offer broad philosophical, cultural, ecological and economic critiques of capitalism, the market, growth and development. And both movements are explicitly arguing that market or policy reform alone will not accomplish the needed transition. Linked to their critique of capitalism is the shared skepticism towards capitalism's and liberalism's adequacy for advancing sustainable Degrowth or Buen Vivir. They also share some intellectual sources, such as Illich's critique of industrialism and expert institutions or Polanyi's view of the disembeddedness of the economy from social life (Kallis et al, 2012). Finally, both movements present a bias for a local and small dimension in the context of re-localization – a point that might offer the perhaps most productive perspective for formulating policies. This common approach is also connected to the emphasis of both schools of thought on local autonomy, something that could indicate a certain predilection for anarchism as political imaginary and form of organization (Escobar, 2015, D'Alisa et al, 2015).

To different degrees and with different strategy proposals, both Degrowth and Buen Vivir are advocating to displace markets as the primary organizing principle of society. In the case of Degrowth this implies the creation of new social institutions which will adequately work in a Northern context, whereas in the Buen Vivir context more valuation and space for still existing (yet marginalized) social institutions are in the focus. Reducing the importance of markets and empowering social and political organizing is considered in both movements/schools a requirement to increase (global) ecological justice. These issues, like climate or water justice, ecological debt and others, could prove as one of the strongest links to create a common global political agenda (Martinez-Alier, 2002; Bond, 2012). Both DG and BV (and most other TDs) want to move away from the dominant orientation towards economic values, abstract numbers of production (GDP) and the logic of productivism and efficiency. Instead, the focus lies on a "good life" for all and the concrete needs that it requires – in the case of DG, with more emphasis on the

material aspects and, in the case of BV, with a balance between material and immaterial needs. In either case, our actions for change should be oriented towards the actual and unmet needs.

And there are many more common themes within the Degrowth and Buen Vivir discourses and practices. As we have repeatedly argued, they both share a systemic, holistic perspective in their analysis of our conditions and regarding their proposals. That includes an integral vision of the human and our behavior. We are not merely rational utility maximizer but complex social and emotional beings that are embedded in a web of social and ecological relationships. This vision leads to a rejection of “greening” the economy and purely technical solutions (including a skeptical vision of their side effects. Both approaches argue that a transformation towards social justice and ecological sustainability is not only possible, but necessary and – with certain cultural adaptations – even desirable. Both also imply a transition towards a post-carbon society, based on less aggressive (both towards nature and humans) convivial technologies, relying to a far greater extent on renewable energies, and inhabited by more moderate, self-conscious, respectful, and caring citizens. This concrete utopia, or better utopian paths, towards an ecologically uncompromising and socially emancipatory society – which already has roots in experiences around the globe – will require much political effort; hence the urgent need of repoliticization and more autonomy, especially on the local/regional level. The common denominator here is the rejection of a culture of “the more, the better” and a proposal of a “culture of sufficiency” or “living better with less”. Not necessarily understood simply as minimalism, but as a “full life” or a “life of plentitude” where material and immaterial relations are balanced (Garcia, 2004; Sempere, 2009; Garcia, 2012). A potential “docking point” for both discourses and their practices might be the common theme of environmental justice, which is getting more traction as the ecological crisis is advancing (Beling et al, 2018).

Something that also unites these two approaches are the common challenges they face. Perhaps above all the danger of being subverted or even appropriated by the state, corporations or other vested interests. In the case of Buen Vivir, for example, we have already discussed the concerning use of the concept by the Ecuadorian state, that argues that invasive extractivism is helping BV. Additionally, communities

or single activists often suffer repression and sometimes are forced to agree to ‘conventional’ development projects. And Degrowth could certainly be subverted by the green growth/economy discourses which do not want to change basic structures of the growth economy/society. As discussed in this work, the main challenge for both approaches is that they imply a fundamental cultural shift and a whole new (and/or renewed) set of social, political, and economic institutions. Indeed, there is a growing understanding that the existing institutions will not be able to solve the existing problems. In this context, we must keep in mind that change of such a scale is certainly not something that is completely controllable or manageable.

So, the changes in our society and culture, necessary for a transition towards DG or BV are perhaps uncomfortable, difficult to achieve, and dramatic. But so is the systemic crisis we already discussed in the introduction and throughout chapter 2. Beyond this precondition of crisis, Buch-Hansen (2018) identifies three other crucial preconditions for any socio-economic transition: an alternative political project, a comprehensive coalition of social forces promoting the project in political struggles, and broad-based consent. As we have argued here both Degrowth and Buen Vivir are not only social movements or theoretical/intellectual paradigms, they already are also political projects that present an alternative vision of society, and a set of policies and approaches as a solution to the existing ones. Certainly, both projects need refining regarding their policy proposals but that will be true for any new approach. We discussed the potentials of social policies such as the universal basic income, work-time reduction, and redistribution (combating inequality). We pointed out the need for political and economic reform towards more direct democracy and consensus-oriented structures. We discussed the importance of non-monetary spaces, education (critical thinking as educational practice), and moderation (respecting social and biophysical boundaries). What is missing to enable such a new “Great Transition” are a broad-based consent and a comprehensive coalition. We would argue that there already is an emerging consensus about the depth and gravity of the ecological and social crisis we are living in. However, this has not yet translated into a consensus about radical changes and policy shifts. But given the

recent Friday-for-Future strikes[105] or the discussion about a “Green New Deal” in the United States (both addressing issues of DG or BV), there seems to be hope that such ideas will become a broader consensus.

It also creates hope and the potential for a more comprehensive coalition of social forces working towards a socio-economic transition in the sense of DG and BV. Connecting and expanding the networks between Degrowth and Buen Vivir (and other alternatives) could potentially nurture and enhance this effort. Considering the unfavorable context of the multiple crisis on one hand, and still clinging to a dream of capitalist development on the other, this (political) alliance between Degrowth and Buen Vivir seems fundamentally necessary. To achieve more visibility, dialogue, and ultimately significant social change, a convergence of alternative sets of ideas/ideologies seems to be vital. And such an alliance is, by no means, limited to the DG and BV alternatives presented here. This should rather include all approaches that strive to imagine and create a more sustainable future – such as Ubuntu emerging in African nations or Radical Ecological Democracy (or Ecological Swaraj) in India. In fact, a proposal for such an alliance have been made and discussed recently at the Degrowth Conferences in Malmö (August, 2018) and Mexico City (September, 2018). It was proposed a Global Confluence of Alternatives that aims a mutual sharing between alternatives, envisioning futures together, building collaborations, and strategizing for advocacy and action. Participants in these discussions expressed the need to be grounded in local actions and to connect with already existing platforms (such as the World Social Forum). This will be a complex process with still many open questions (e.g. how to keep it inclusive or what strategies to prioritize?), but it demonstrates efforts of building this coalition together.

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[105] The recently emerged global movement of students for climate action was started by 16-year old Swedish Greta Thunberg in 2018 by protesting in front of the Parliament each Friday morning instead of going to school. The core demand of the youth movement (already gaining support from several others social movements) is “Act now, so we can have a future”.

6.2 Some final thoughts

Throughout this thesis we have tried to argue for a holistic perspective and the need to consider the inherent interconnectedness and, using Arturo Escobar's (2017) words, radical interdependence of all beings and processes on this planet Earth. This is obvious when we think of climate change, which is merely one of the manifestations of an ecological crisis – an example of reciprocal cause and effect with multiple layers of feedback that eventually affects everyone and everything. Every organism on this planet depends on and, at the same time, affects the composition of our atmosphere – it truly is a web of life and humans are arguably not at the center (microbes and bacteria might be). These interconnections are a little less obvious when it comes to other aspects of our life like, for example, food. While many people – especially those that have never been to the countryside or tried growing their own food – might still think of a traditional farm with free-ranging cows and lush meadows when they buy food in the supermarket. That is certainly the image the food industry (including large-scale "organic" farms that operate with an industrial logic) wants us to have. But the truth is that we have a global industrial food chain that connects the oil from the Persian Gulf (secured with military force) with the soy bean plantations in the Amazon and the cattle feedstock in the Midwest of the United States. And the nitrogen runoffs from industrial farming's fertilizers then affects the rivers and oceans, which in turn affect the atmosphere – just to highlight some of the interconnections we often tend to forget.[106]

[106] The story of these interconnections regarding the food industry and our daily meals is in much more detail described by Michael Pollan (2006) in his book "The Omnivore's Dilemma". He shows that, from an ecological perspective, everything is connected. The economic policies that heavily subsidize high-yield corn production in the United States, created a surplus of "cheap" corn that is now being used to provide the energy for meat production. However, a grain-based diet is not natural for cows (which are evolutionary designed to eat grass) and created a more acidic bacterial environment (similar to the one in humans) in the rumen of millions of feedstock animals. This change favored the evolution of new, acid-resistant bacteria, such as Escherichia coli, that are lethal for humans. Yet another example of how a supposed solution (feeding surplus, high-energy corn to cows) has turned into a problem. By acidifying ruminant's intestinal environment, we broke down one of our food chain's most important barriers to infection. It is also an excellent example of the radical interdependence we are talking about. Unsurprisingly, the capitalist, industrial solution for this problem is the wide-spread use of antibiotics and pharmaceutic, another heavily subsidized and highly lucrative "solution".

So, why is this important? We have already argued for the need to decentralize and re-localize food, energy, and the economy. In this case to small-scale organic/permaculture farming. Yet, always considering all the consequences – which could make the import of some food products desirable under certain conditions. But we think, the approach of radical interconnectedness and interdependence, which can be made visible by systemic, holistic perspectives can be applied elsewhere. Indeed, we should consider applying it everywhere. Considering academia, for example, it is a strong call for inter- and transdisciplinarity and, more generally, to design an environment that nurtures system thinking and exchange beyond the departments. For example, it seems like a good idea to have common courses on ecology, considering the countless links and feedback loops between human action and nature, in any under-graduate program. Students in economics that would have to defend GDP growth to a biologist or a physicist might probably have a greater chance of critical questioning their own concepts and learning beyond their discipline. The same as an engineering student who knows about the ecological and social implications of concrete as a building material might perhaps rethink its wide-spread use in the construction industry. In other words, we need each other and are often too far in highly-specialized niches within our field – which are legitimate and necessary as well, but not enough. And we also need the help of “common” people, meaning that academia should always be engaged with the wider society beyond policy suggestions and expert talks. The implicit hope here is that ecological economics might lose its need for an adjective, and all economics would become ecological. This corresponds very much with the idea of returning to the original sense of the word “oikos”, as in economics and caring for the household, only that our household today would have to be the planet.[107]

If we take such a holistic perspective, it is very clear that GDP growth is not the answer to our crises. It is one (and perhaps the most severe and damaging) of the problems – which was one of the main assumptions we departed from and we tried to argue in its favor throughout the work. It seems save to claim that the awareness

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[107] Inspired by a round table with ecological economists Roldán Muradian and Eric Gómez Baggethun at the Second Conference of the Andean Society of Ecological Economics on Environmental Justice and Alternatives to Development in Lima, April 2019.

regarding ecological issues is rising, including the understanding that continuous insistence on growth is not leading us anywhere. This awareness manifests itself in climate summits such as the Paris Climate Conference in 2015 or the increasingly radical language and recommendations of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports (both certainly not suspicious of holding revolutionary positions). However, this awareness has not led to any significant steps towards transforming our growth economies. Besides the obvious reason of vested interest of powerful agents that want to maintain growth, there is a fear that ending the "growth machine" (Garcia et al, 2017) will trigger chaos. And, this fear is not unreasonable. After all, we are addicted to GDP growth and stopping it (especially briskly) will likely cause withdrawal symptoms. But, as we have argued (especially in chapter 2) the end of growth might already have begun and is eventually inevitable – either when we reached unacceptable ecological or social conditions (which will very probably happen before we can exhaust all the natural resources) or when our social throughput of material and energy is reduced to a sustainable scale. So, instead of giving in to fear of likely uncomfortable change, we should start to consciously embark on that way towards a (materially) more modest, slower and more local society. If this way proves to be also more egalitarian, co-operative and democratic – as proposed by DG and BV – then it might not be that terrible.

In our illustrations many of the elements discussed here came to life in concrete initiatives and projects. It is interesting that despite the huge differences between their respective realities, all cases share some common points. For one, it is very telling that the conditions to start and then maintain such kind of initiatives are not very favorable, even for the European cases. It apparently always needs a group of very engaged and motivated people/citizens. The initiatives in the North have the advantages that there are often public resources available for funding and, more generally, that their members are beneficiaries of the social systems (education, health, social security, etc.). In contrast to both initiatives from the South where success depends almost entirely on the persistence of their members. Although we might think that these huge benefits (compared to the Southern reality) would translate into much more probability of success, it does not seem that way. We can only speculate whether formal education is not very emancipatory – perhaps much less than existential struggles – or if the processes of alienation and separation

(from ourselves and the wider community) are more advanced in the North. Apparently, the main challenge in both worlds is how to come together as individuals to form a community that is inclusive, respectful and harmonious. But, at the same time, a community that does not lose its ability to decide and act as soon as the community grows larger. Each initiative is addressing this challenge (and many others) in its specific context. But they are all ongoing experiments and experiences of creating communities for sustainability – the arguably best strategy for the task at hand.

There are obviously always new questions and more will appear if we transition towards new modes of being and a new model of civilization. An open question and one of the main challenges will be to establish mechanisms of dispute resolution and decision-making that reach beyond the community. Shifting from representation and majority rule to more direct democracy and consensus-decision-making seems very plausible. But for this not to become a tool for the most powerful or charismatic we have to maintain the respect for alterity and the individual self. BV and DG are not a call for imposing harmony or eco-authoritarianism, but for embracing difference and plurality. We think Buen Vivir and Degrowth are more than regulative ideas in a Kantian sense – paradigms that are necessary and desirable, yet hard to approach. Our illustrations demonstrate some ways and possibilities how this utopia can become concrete and operational in practice. That is not to say that it is easy to construct futures that are opposing many aspects of the present. Indeed, this kind of virtuous behavior against many obstacles and challenges can be considered heroic and those stories truly deserve to be told. Thus, these islands of sustainability become more visible, encouraging the emergence of others which might form an archipelago and, eventually a new continent.

It seems that we, as a global society, are at a crossroad today. A crossroad where each of us and we all together collectively must make choices on which paths we will continue into the future. We cannot say with certainty where any of the paths will lead, but we do have some evidence and indications – many of them discussed in this thesis – of where they might end. On one set of possible roads we continue with our existing assumptions and ideas about development and perhaps adapt our institutions and culture slightly. These roads, if following the current tendencies, will

lead us to a more socially unequal and ecologically degraded world. They might even lead into a dead end for humanity and countless other species on the planet. The other set of roads seems a lot more difficult and rougher from where we stand at the moment. They will require changes that many people might consider uncomfortable (like connecting us to ourselves and others) and even stressful (like letting go of old beliefs and values). Although we have already mapped parts of the paths, the destination(s) and the way forward on these roads are not yet (completely) visible, which can be frightening. We will have to adapt and evolve on our way. But every step away from the old paradigm and onto these alternatives paths is significant, courageous, and valuable. Considering that they might not only enable our survival as species but actual human flourishing in all its dimensions, such steps towards the sustainable futures of a pluriverse seem certainly worth trying.

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9. Appendix

Note: The interviews have all been produced by the thesis' author himself and recorded as audio files. The transcripts were all produced in the original language of the interview. In the case of inaudible parts, background sounds or non-related talk rectangular brackets were used to indicated such. Three dots in rectangular brackets were used in cases of pauses or when the person started a new sentence before finishing the last. Orthography and sentence structure were not corrected but kept the same as the original recording.

Note: The questions below are a general orientation for the interview and, in practice, were never asked in exact that order or content. The interviewees usually already anticipated many questions and/or answered them within the context of a different question. Also, there were several follow-up questions that do not appear in this structure but that seemed necessary at the moment of the interview. Those can be followed in the transcripts below.

9.1 Questionnaire

General procedure:

1) Thank the interviewee for her/his participation and emphasize that her/his contribution is a valuable part of your work

2) Disclaim that the personal information given by the interviewee is absolutely confidential, only used for the academic research and that the data will be published anonymous, if the interviewee wishes

3) Explain a little bit about your research and background (be brief and precise!) which led to this interviewee

4) Explain briefly the structure of the interview and ask if it is okay to start or if there are any further questions, doubts, etc.

Questions

1) Content and Objective of initiative/project

1.1) Could you please describe the initiative or project you are involved in? What are you exactly doing? How is it done?

1.2) What is the main objective (and what are other objectives)?

1.3) What do you think were/are the motivations to reach these objectives?

2) People/actors involved

2.1) How many people are involved in the project?

2.2) What are their different functions?

2.3) What are the different investments (time, energy, money, etc.) they did into this project?

3) Challenges/obstacles

3.1) What do you think was/is the biggest challenge this project had to overcome? What about other challenges/obstacles?

3.2) How did you overcome this/these obstacles?

3.3) Did you have help from outside?

3.4) What was the role of the government (which level?) and other actors/groups (corporations/civil society/etc.) in overcoming the obstacles?

4) Facilitators/positive influences

4.1) What or who from outside your group help you to establish/institutionalize/fortify your project?

4.2) What do you think help you most inside the project (intern dynamics, mechanisms, etc.) to get where you are today?

5) General evaluation

5.1) Where do you think is this project today?

5.2) How do you think will this project continue?

5.3) Would you like to add something?

9.2 Interview Transcripts

9.2.1 Transcript Illustration I – SHRUB Coop, Edinburgh, Scotland

Date: 31 October 2017

Interview with Olivia Nathan, founding member of SHRUB

Interviewer:

Could you in a very general matter the Shrub project, its content, its objective, mission or aim, if you will?

Olivia:

I might need to look up the aim, we got three. The shrub is a waste reduction cooperative. So, we have a cooperative structure, although technically we are a [limited?] company. It started 5 years ago. It was an initiative by friends who didn't like to see things that have been used left behind by students. So, students would come and leave behind lots of things, books, furniture, cooking stuff and that like, you name it and it was there, and usually it would go to the landfill. So, we started a partnership with Uni [University of Edinburgh] and said we would just go and get together and collect it and store it and then at the beginning of the academic year open a free shop. And that would not only provide people with second-hand stuff and prevent them from buying new stuff but would also raising awareness and move away from consumerism. So that is where it came from [the project] and then we decided to open a shop, so now we have a Swap Shop. And then somebody came along and said why don't we have a bike kitchen, so now we have bike activities. And then, food sharing came along and then we started doing workshop on basically anything environmental. And that's where we are. So, our aim is to provide a community hub for waste reduction and promotion of swap economy and moving away from consumerism. So that are our key area: swap shop, bike kitchen, workshops and food sharing. And then we have the free shop once a year [at start of academic semester], and we do another collection for Christmas, and the [swap] shop is open three days a week. We have a token system, so if you are a member you can come in and swap things through tokens, but you can also sell/buy with money, so being like a normal second-hand shop as well.

Interviewer:

Going back to the origins, you said it was a group of friends who didn't like to see things wasted. So, was there any official initiative or just students, private persons?

Olivia:

Yeah, it was just us. And only when we partnered with UNI it became official and they would let us occupy [university] space. We made a deal with them [UNI administration] Basically we were doing them a favor, getting rid of things they would otherwise have to collect [and transport to the landfill]. So they gave us a space for

free in the first year, and then in the second year it would be a a third of the costs, and in the third year two thirds and now we are in the final year which is the full rent for that space [which contains the swap shop, bike kitchen – which are also used for meetings and workshops, if possible]. And it is because of that arrangement that we made [with UNI] that we had to set up Shrub as a company, although we maintain cooperative structures.

Interviewer:

So, now you are a company. That means a different legal framework, like do you pay taxes or what does that imply for Shrub being a company?

Olivia:

Yeah, the tax thing. This where my gaps of knowledge might come up. So, we talked about becoming a charity to not pay taxes. At the moment we do pay taxes, but only on the things that make profit. If Shrub does not make profit, then it does not pay any tax. I think the limited company aspect means that it [Shrub] is kind of an active entity but can be liquidated. And member are like shareholders. That's as much as I know regarding this.

Interviewer:

And you mentioned to me earlier [before the interview], that it also takes the risk away from members?

Olivia:

Yes, exactly. So, if it would go wrong it wouldn't affect anyone.

Interviewer:

You said that waste reduction was one aim of Shrub, but also raising awareness, right? Could speak a little bit about that aspect? Like educational campaigns, I remember that someone mentioned that you had an event on High Street [Edinburgh's main shopping/pedestrian street].

Olivia:

I think we don't do that much campaigning. We do more of community events, a lot of cultural events like poetry slams, but we don't go out on demonstrations. It is more about the day-to-day work within the community, collecting food, having pop-up stores [for the food], having the shop open, doing workshops on the ground. That does engage with the community and disseminate these values that we have. So that's on the events I can tell you about.

A key word for us is creative. Creative reuse, you know, how can we do things differently. It is very much a learning space. It is a “doocracy”, but before it was only 6 of us in the space doing stuff, and now four years later we are over 400 members and we have even more people as volunteers, that is they do not want to be

members and take part in the formal decision-making structure but support the ideas and want to help. We actually had to change our membership status, and now if you volunteer for a certain amount of time you become automatically a member, without having to pay the membership fee [12 Euro per year minimum]. So, you get all the benefits [like swapping stuff without money] because we don't want that [the membership fee] to be a barrier for people who are actually contributing. But you can also just be a paying member. But what we found out, over the years, is that so many volunteers couldn't pay for membership, or didn't feel like they should pay. So, that made sense, it shouldn't be necessary [to pay] and we changed the membership statute.

So, our purpose is to provide a welcoming space for rethinking our relation to waste, reduce consumption and develop effective use of resources. We want to support community empowerment in Edinburgh. That means sharing skills and also practical equipment [like in the bike kitchen]. Enabling living well in the community. [inaudible part]

Interviewer:

You talked about the start with a few friends and now over 400 members. How did that come about and what do you think were the main reason that you grew so much?

Olivia:

Yeah, I think the climate change fund cannot not be mentioned. The climate change fund is a government initiative that funds projects across Scotland for climate change. I think it was three years ago that we first applied for the grant and that allowed us to implement some stuff. Because a lot of the work we were doing was voluntary and then, you know, the shop wouldn't be open. So, making that bid for that money and get some regular [paid] staff, doing accounting and finance, to coordinate the Swap Shop. Free up that work allowed for other working groups to form. From the get-go it was very much like you coordinate a working group, you're facilitating and enabling for other people to come in and get involved. You could form a working group and state your purpose and get other people excited about it. And it is also ups and downs, we might have 400 members, but then at a given time only 35 are active. But as soon as more people got involved it kinda snowballed. People found that it was a very open and inclusive space where they could do what they want to do. And we have the means to do that, so that has been very attractive for people. Having funding for the last three years and have key staff, I think, has made a huge difference.

Although it has brought up some tensions as well, that is another interesting point to talk about. Like who is getting paid and who not, how much and it is volunteer-led or member-led? [...]

So, to answer your question, the key things are the funding and staff. And that this is the only space, there is no other space in Edinburgh where you could do the stuff we do. It is quite unique, and there is a lot of interest.

Interviewer:

Could you speak a little bit about the people involved in Shrub, the composition? Would you say that you are representative of the wider community in Edinburgh? So, you started as a student-led initiative, right, what about the demographics now, like are you seen more elderly people getting involved, for example?

Olivia:

That is an interesting point. We were initially mostly students from Edinburgh University. But that has changed a lot, we actually had a survey recently. And it is mostly people under 35, I'd say. But we do have older people getting involved as well. So, the survey said more young people, and more women than men. And if you look at it, we have people working in international law and people cannot read and write and we all there working together. So, that's something I am very proud of, that we are diverse and really inclusive – our top banner might be inclusive - and that every kind of difference and struggle has something to teach us. So, people who struggle or have disabilities can come to Shrub and it's up to all of us to find solution how they can participate. I think that is what the majority of us really embraces.

Interview:

That is a good link to the things that foster or are fostering the initiative. So what are the factors that helped you in the process of creating this project?

Olivia:

So, something we always do in Shrub is that nobody does anything alone. We always do things in pairs. Because we are a big project and doing fairly new stuff, so no one gets lost and has to do something new alone.

Also, the partnership we have made. Collecting foods and waste, having the space [from UNI]. That has been a great support. And we have other partnership with volunteer organizations and [inaudible]. And every person that comes brings something and we encourage them to speak up and see what they can share.

And then there are individuals who really pour their heart and soul into it. And I'd say that I am one of that people. Helping to institutionalize the knowledge and structure of Shrub, so people can come and pick it up..so that's the point we started it but we do not have to carry it own forever.

So, in terms of decision-making structure. Me and a couple of others started a governance and policy working group, about 6 months ago. And we do use the Hub-Spoke [?] Model, we have board meetings and main meetings and then the working groups feed into that, kind of a sociocracy model. But that dissolved a bit. And the government and policy working group drafted up a structure saying that each working group has to have a representative or two, hopefully two, who have to come regularly to the main meetings, which happen every two weeks. We use consensus-decision making and enable proposals. And we have time frames for proposals, so

like every proposal needs at least one or two weeks, so everybody can get updated and then we have updates from the working groups so everybody kind of knows what is going on in the different working groups. The idea is that those in the working groups do the work and know what needs to change. And that is the difficult thing about governance, who decides what. You know we are constantly figuring out who decides what and although there is this general principle that people on the ground know most about their work, but sometimes things they do [in the working groups] are irreversible or affect other working groups. So, this can be a bit of a hazard. But solidifying the decision-making structure and getting people to participate is positive and has been demonstrate in other organization to work. So, we are still piloting this, but more and more people come to our meetings. And as long as people from the working groups are coming and we get this forth-and-back information exchange, then we are functioning.

Interviewer:

And what would you see as other challenges?

Olivia:

So, at the moment we were awarded 300 Thousand pounds by the Scottish government to expand food sharing, and a food waste supermarket, so we actually will have a hub where people can come [formerly it was only pop-up stores]. This will include a 6-month block of material and organization of a series of workshops on the topic. And get people to grips with certain material and create networks with people who have similar visions as us. So, that is going great.

But then it is also a challenge because it is a very new area. Employing people for this, we have a supermarket coordination posts and 20 application. And try to implement a zero-waste town in Edinburgh. And unfortunately, kind of nobody is fitting to take that role. The pay is not that high, and demand is high in terms of what is asked in such a massive and unknown project. So, we do have issues with finding people to take leadership in this project, having the right people.

And I would say that one of our challenges is leadership. In an organization that is aiming for non-hierarchy, what does leadership look like? And how does leadership have to move when its needed and at the same time fold away make sure it does not encroach people or disable them. Like when you have very strong leadership people do not stand up and let the leader do it. But that is not what we want as Shrub, but that doesn't mean that people don't need leadership that refocuses them, that inspires them. So, what I am saying is that one of the challenges for Shrub is to figure out how fluid leadership can emerge and guide us. It's become clear to us, that having systems that people agree on is integral and then this balance between having leadership but not getting hijacked by it.

Another challenge is that we did apply for the climate challenge fund grant, but we might not get it. So as much fun as it is, [the Shop?] does not pay for the space the Shrub as we know it, the shop. The university asks us to pay rent which is not that much money, but it is some money. And our finances are not that solid, which has to do with the people involved with Shrub, they don't like money.

Shrub is unique because it's without money, you come and swap, you foodshare...it's not about profit, it's not even about covering our cost, but that's something we have to cover...which will take some time. And if we get the funding that will help us to afford the space and cover the overhead and figure out how to make enough money that is acceptable with our values that Shrub is not about money. So, this is a major shift in Shrub where money and finances have never been the focus but now it is really important that they become the focus.

Interviewer:

So basically, what you said, it is not about creating profit. You are creating non-monetary space?

Olivia:

Yeah, exactly, right.

[...]

The way we used to price our stuff [in the shop] was to ask the person how much would you pay for it and then we looked it up on the internet. And it brought people back to ask how a market is formed, how is value created. For me that was really an important process because it brought people back to ask what is it worth to me? What is it worth to you? [...]

Interviewer:

[…] You talked about government funding. How would you describe the Shrub's relation to the public sector and also to the private sector?

Olivia:

At the moment we have partnerships with around 50 business in and around Edinburgh where we collect food waste [for the food sharing project], so we have good relationships with the private businesses as it stands.

A month or so, we had […?] come to visit the Scottish's government head of environment and sustainability came to visit the projects and we had a good day, she wrote us a nice letter. So, we do have good relationships with both government and private businesses.

We also get a lot of visibility, like through the climate challenge fund awards, we have been nominated and might win, so we are quite visible.

Interviewer:

So, there haven't been any tension so far? Like the services you are providing might push out private businesses?

Olivia:

In terms of conflict, as far as swap shop is concerned there really is none. The only conflict I am aware of is with a bike shop which has a section where you pay for the hour and use their tools to repair your own bike. And of course, we offer the same service but for free. Perhaps we don't have the same expertise, but we try to make people feel secure.

But we have tensions with them. What we try to do is to say we are not here to compete, so we would never sell bikes below market rate. Because we want to in harmony with them and there is demand.

There have been tensions because there were people who worked in both places or worked in one then in the other. And even though we reached out, they were not interested in any dialogue. But that's the only conflict so far.

Interviewer:

Could you elaborate a bit on the reach and impact of Shrub?

Olivia:

In terms of personal stories, it is just amazing. Like there is a woman in her 60ies who doesn't speak that much English, she's from East Asia and she has never cycled before but at the Shrub has built a bike and taught herself to ride it. And that is just a heart-felt story. People who would never have felt confident enough to cycle would learn and then go on bike tours. And people who have been unwell, come to volunteer and building up their confidence. There have been lots of stories.

In terms of reach, we have been covered in a magazine in California. And we don't know how that happened. There's a lot of stuff going on we can't monitor. So there around 36 thousand people through social media reached and then there's also people getting expose through the shop. Then there is around 10 thousand people we are actively involved with. And around 40% of those are non-student members. However, from the active members around half are students.

Interviewer:

Last question is like your general evaluation. Where is Shrub headed, how does it continue and what are the challenges on the way there? Basically the future of Shrub.

Olivia:

So, the funding we just got means we will open a new site, the food waste hub, which is a food supermarket. And the bid we just put in for CCF actually requires that we get a new shop, which will be on High Street, so we move the [swap] shop to a bigger space, more visibility. And then we move the bike stuff upstairs [at the moment of the interview the bike kitchen was in cellar of the swap shop on Guthrie Street]. If that really happens [getting the new funding] we will dramatically increase

the number of volunteers, we might even got to 1000 participants and we will have way more people actually engaging in activities.

If we don't get the funding we will still do what we do, somehow. We've had times when we didn't have resources and, you know, activities decrease but the Shrub does not die. And I think now we have so many people who are more embedded, and so much more policies, and kind of resources that help people to understand what Shrub is. You could probably take this information put it somewhere else, drop it, and make it happen. And indeed we have a Portuguese, a volunteer, for about 6 months now. And she asked if we can come to Portugal and set something up, because the blueprint is there. So, I definitely see the Shrub, shrubbing around, you know, planting these seeds.

And there are other initiatives in the UK. We have spent a lot of time in the last couple of years to get stronger internally, so we didn't reach out as much as we would like, but that will probably increase now as well, make more connections.

Interviewer:

What would say are obstacles on this way?

Olivia:

The main obstacle might be to get a coherent volunteer team because there is such a transience in the student community. People come and then they go to study abroad or go to their jobs. And like 50% of our members are students, which is a significant number. The main thing is continuity, it's so dynamic..like people come for three month do amazing things and then go away. So, a coherent team that is sustain is the most important thing. I don't know if we have cracked that one, but we definitely got people who want to do that.

Interviewer:

Great, I think we are done. Do you want to add something? You can also write this a later point via email.

Olivia:

I think it's there, I think the Shrub is very much like home for many people. Some people identify us as being a family. People really care about the Shrub. And one of the challenges is that it is not straightforward. Solving these issues about waste and sustainability are not straightforward. And it asks a lot of people, to step out of the box, to use consensus, take ownership and be accountable for, take responsibility for what we are doing and be joyful enough that's a key. So, I think that can be really hard, because we are kind of trying to help with a social movement and some people really connect with the project in that way and some people really don't. [inaudible part] You know it's up to you as much as it is up to all of us, in fact, it's probably more up to you. And people find it difficult to get their head around. And that sometimes can be very disheartening for me, because people are doing the work and giving their lifeblood but many of them haven't yet got their head around how it

really can be different, how they [themselves] can play a role in that. So, that's my hope…I mean for me it' doesn't have to be about waste reduction, obviously I care about waste reduction, but I care more about people doing things differently and taking care of their communities and foster sharing.

[chatter not related to questions]

9.2.2 Transcript Illustration II – Förderverein Wachstumswende (FW), Berlin, Germany

Date: 20.11.2017

Interview with Andreas Simoneit, managing director of FW association

Interviewer:

Kannst du bitte den Ansatz und die Zielsetzung vom FW beschreiben?

Andreas:

Also, letzlich geht es Bildungsprojekte, das ist unser offizieller Vereinszweck, wir machen Bildungsarbeit. Und die Gründung des Vereins hatte einen Anlass, nämlich die Gründung des Netzwerks, des sozialen Netzwerks Wachstumswende im Jahre 2010, das war im Kielwasser einer Jahrestagung der Vereinigung für Ökologische Ökonomie (VÖÖ), wo sich mehrere junge Leute, die auch neu im VÖÖ Umfeld waren, zusammengeschlossen haben und praktisch ein soziales Netzwerk gegründet haben mit Hilfe einer gemieteten Plattform, die noch konfiguriert wurde. Und diese Netzwerk wuchs ziemlich schnell, so schnell, dass man yweo Jahre später, 2012, beschloss, dass das nicht mehr in privater Trägerschaft bestehen kann. Und das man ein von den Personen unabhängigen Träger braucht, einen Verein, der dieses Netzwerk betreibt. Und das war dann die Gründung von FW im Jahr 2012.

Und über den Betrieb diese Netzwerkes hinaus machen wir Bildungsprojekte im weitesten Sinne. Das heißt das sind Projekte die entweder Aktivisten-innen aus der Szene ansprechen, das sind Projekte die direkt die Bevölkerung in Anführungsstrichen ansprechen, oder das sind Projekte, die wissenschaftliche Bearbeitung des Themas Wachstum, Wachstumszwänge, Suffizienz betreffen. Für den Förderverein sind im Grunde, also wir bearbeiten nicht alle möglichen Projekte die uns interessant und förederungswürdig erscheinen, sondern die müssen mindestens eine von zwei Bedingungen erfüllen. Die müssen wachstumskritisch oder suffizienz-orientiert sein, oder beides. Das ist unser inhaltlicher Fokus.

Interviewer:

Und würdest du sagen, aus welcher Motivation sich das Netzwerk gebildet hat, in diesem Moment 2012?

Andreas:

Naja, das Netzwerk hat sich eher 2010 gebildet. Das war der Zeitpunkt, wo..also die VÖÖ spielt schon eine besondere Rolle in dieser ganzen wachstumskritischen Szene insofern das sie die erste wissenschaftliche Vereinigung war, die sich ein explizit wachstumskritisches Leitbild gegeben hat. Und das kam auch maßgeblich unter dem Einfluss von Niko Paech zustande und hat auch damals sehr viele, jüngere Leute, die im Grunde sich wachstumskritisch engagieren wollten aber kein richtige Forum dafür gefunden haben, angezogen, was damals auch der VÖÖ einen gewissen Schub gegeben hat. Insofern, dass ist die Motivation. Letzlich unser Verein hat keine andere Motivation als die vielen andere Organisationen, die sich in diesem Bereich tummeln. Es geht um ein tiefes Unbehagen beim Thema Wirtschaftswachstum, es geht um das Unbehagen bezüglich der planetarischer Grenzen, soziale Ungerechtigkeit, ökonomische Instabilität – praktisch dieser Wiederspruch aus weiterhin Wirtschaftswachstum als oberstes politisches Ziel und diesem ganzen nicht intendierten Nebeneffekten, das ist das Unbehagen, was, denke ich, auch der kleinste gemeinsame Nenner der wachstumskritischen Szene ist.

Und da spielt der FW keine Sonderrolle. Er ist halt nicht aktivistisch. Das ist ein bisschen anders, es gibt noch eine weitere Organisation, das Konzeptwerk Neue Ökonomie in Leipzig. Die sind ja auch relativ groß, größer als der FW, die sind, würde ich sagen, eher aktivitisch orientiert. Beispielsweise auch näher an Ende Gelände oder solchen Veranstaltungen, der Degrowth Summerschool. Der FW ist da, sage ich mal, konservativer bzw. wir sind eben auch einfach auch mit diesem Netzwerk, diesem sozialen Netzwerk an den Start gegangen und haben uns dann überlegt, was können wir denn sonst noch machen. Wir sind ein kleiner Verein, haben nicht viele Resource, bzw. könne nur mit den Gelder operieren, die wir von aussen aquirien. Als wir haben nicht viel Mitgliedsbeiträge und von sofern ist auch das Spektrum was man machen kann, an Projekten, begrenzt. Insofern, wir denken uns selber Projekte aus, die wir gut finden, und versuchen dann Mittel aufzutreiben. Oder wir sind praktisch Anlaufstelle für Leute, die haben vll schon eine Idee, haben vll schon einen Geldgeber, ne Stiftung, ein Minsterium, einen Verband oder sonst was, und sagen, wir brauchen eine formale Hülle, um das Projekt abzuwickeln. Und dafür ist dann der FW da.

Interviewer:

Das ist interessant. Du hattest gerade auch schon erwähnt, das Bildungsziel oder Bildungsauftrag, den ihr verfolgt und speziell interessant wäre den der Bevölkerung, also wissenschaftlich oder Aktivisten, aber auch zur generellen Bevölkerung. Wie funktioniert denn das bei euch?

Andreas:

Naja, dass ist dan praktisch Teil von Projekten, die wir fördern. Wir haben jetzt im August beispielweise, lief ein größeres Projekt aus Fokus Wachstumswende, das war vom Umweltbundesamt [dt. Ministerium für Umwelt] gefördert und beinhaltet eine öffentliche Podiumsdiskussion im Dezember letzen Jahres [2016], ein parlamentarischen Abend im Mai diesem Jahres, eine wissenschaftliche

Abschlusskonferenz im Juli diesen Jahres. Das sind also letzlich Veranstaltungen, die stehen für alle offen. Natürlich wird man mit seinen Verteilern und dem Interesse geht man an den Stellen nicht beliebig weit hinaus, über die Szene, sag ich mal. Wir haben jetzt ein neues Projekt, das gerade frisch angelaufen ist, das Aktionsbündniss Wachstumswende Bremen. Das ist größer insofern, das läuft länger, es sind mehr Bündnisspartner in Bremen und die haben tatsächlich auch mehr Veranstaltungen vor, die öffentlichkeitswirksamer sind, Tag des guten Lebens, Exkursionen, auch sowas wie parlamentarischen Gespräche. Also da gibt es ein bisschen mehr Möglichkeiten, wo man direkt - also klingt etwas blöd – die Leute auf der Strasse anspricht. Letzlich gilt für diese Arbeit, wie für alle anderen, du kannst die Hunde nicht zum Jagen tragen. Die Leute müssen sich irgendwie für das Thema interessieren, sie müssen schon selber einen Impuls mitbringen. Du kannst ihnen nicht, du kannst nicht auf sie zugehen und sie schütteln und sagen, los, werde wachstumskritisch. Sondern das muss schon ein bisschen indirekter erfolgen.

Interviewer:

Also das ist jetz ein toller Zusammenhang, der mir gerade auffällt. Das Aktionsbündniss Bremen mit denen seid ihr direkt im Kontakt und organisiert zusammen diese Sachen?

Andreas:

Also wir sind der offizielle Projektträger. Die Anträge liefen über uns, also es gibt zwei Geldgeber und der eine festangestellte Koordinator ist ein Angestellter des FW.

[Interviewer: Also ich treff mich morgen mit dem Lukas, ist der...?]

Ja, der Lukas, das ist ein Angesteller des Fördervereins.

Interviewer:

Ach sehr gut, super, dann habe ich diese Verbindung schonmal...Da wir schon bei Personen und Akteuren sind...du hast gemeint, dass der FW ein großes, du hast gemeint er ist kleiner als da in Leipzig...sind die verschienden Leute im FW, haben die konrete Funktionen oder wie ist es strukturell organisiert? Personell und habt ihr da deiner Meinung nach eine effiziente , funktionierende Organisation oder ist das was, was du als vll auch schon als Limitation oder Hinderniss für weitere Arbeit sehen würdest?

Andreas:

Ich würde sagen, wir haben eine sehr effiziente Organisation, indem wir uns auf das beschränken, was uns möglich ist. Vereine, die solche Arbeit machen, sind notwendig ziemlich vorstandszentriert. Das ist letzlich bei der VÖÖ nicht anders, das ist beim Konzeptwerk ein bisschen anders, weil die auch mehr Mittel aquirieren, die haben mehr Stellen. Aber der FW ist ein kleiner Verein, 85 Mitglieder, kleines Budget. Das heißt, was können wir machen? Wir können letzlich keine Massen aktivieren. Wir können auch den Vorstand nicht beliebig mit ehrenamtlicher Arbeit

überlasten. Ehrenamt kennt Grenzen, deswegen haben wir – das ist eine glückliche personelle Fügung – ich habe 2013 den FW als Schatzmeister angefangen und ein halbes Jahr später bin ich vom Vorstand praktisch offiziell als Geschäfstführer bestellt worden. Dafür erhalte ich auch eine Aufwandsentschädigung, das bewegt sich in der Größenordnung von 2 Tagen im Monat. 10, 15 Stunden, mal 20, je nachdem wir die Arbeit anfällt. Da fällt auch die Schatzmeisterei drunter, da fällt, vor allem auch der ganze viele Papierkram drunter, der bei einem Projektträger notwendig anfällt. Sobald du anfängst Projekte abzuwickeln, die diesen Namen auch verdienen, das heißt, da gibt es öffentliche Fördergelder, da gibt es Leute, die angestellt sind, da musst du abrechnen, nachweisen, belegen, etc, Berichte schreiben, da wird das Ganze schnell aufwendig. Selbst wenn jetzt Leute wie Lukas oder unsere beiden Projektmitarbeiterinnen im Fokus Wachstumswende Projekt diese Berichte schreiben, dann bleibt hier im FW immer noch, du musst Arbeitsverträge schreiben, du hast Korrespondenz mit den Beruffsgenossenschaften, mit den Krankenkassen, du hast Krankschreibungen, du hast Lohnabrechungen, du hast Buchhaltung, etc..letzlich ne kleine Firma. Und das ist nun das große Glück, das ich gelernter Betriebswirtschaftler bin und insofern diese Aufgaben mit erheblich weniger Aufwand wahrnehmen kann als die meisten anderen. Deswegen ist das mit dieser Geschäftsführerfunktion eben auch so günstig. Und wenn ich diese Aufgabe so nicht wahrnehmen würde, dann könnte der FW kaum noch Projekte durchführen. Das ist im Moment praktisch an meine Person geknüpft, weil das durch einen ehrenamtlichen Vorstand in dieser Form nicht zu leisten ist. Es gibt andere Organisationen, z.B. Forum Ökologisch-Soziale Marktwirtschaft – das ist jetzt nicht wachstumskritisch – aber die führen auch viele Projekte durch, aber da ist der Mitgliedsbeitrag gleich 10 Mal so hoch wie beim FW, weil die ganz andere Kapazitäten benötigen um die Projekte, die die durchführen, auch abzuwickeln. Wenn wir solche Mitgliedsbeiträge verlangen würden, dann hätten wir nicht mehr Geld sondern weniger Mitglieder und könnten dann eigentlich einpacken. Also die wachstumskritsche Szene ist also einfach so klein und letzlich, in Anführungsstrichen, so mittellos..da kannst du echt nur kleine Brötchen backen.

Interviewer:

Das ist spannend, da bist du, glaube ich, gleich schon bei einer der großen Herausforderungen oder auch Limitationen, Begrenzungen der Arbeit, die ihr macht. Die Größe der Szene, der potentiellen Mitglieder. Was würdest du als die größten Herausforderungen, die eure Arbeit behindern, sehen?

Andreas:

Also in praktischer Hinsicht, finde ich, gibt es eigentlich wenig Sachen, die uns behindern. Im Gegenteil, Harald Welzer hat das Mal in einem Vortrag so schön formuliert, er findet das sehr beeindruckend, in welchem Umfang der Kapitalismus auch seine Kritiker fördert. Also das muss man schon wirklich auch sagen, wir leben in einer ziemlich freiheitlichen Gesellschaft, die tatsächlich auch Gelder für solche Sachen übrig hat und erübrigt. Das größte Hindernis ist der schlechte theoretische Zustand der Wachstumskritik. Das ist jetzt aber meine persönliche Meinung, das ist nicht die offizielle Meinung des FW. Da würde dir wahrscheinlich jedes Vorstandsmitglied ne andere Antwort geben, weil das geht dann im Grunde schon in die inhaltliche Debate, was ist das Problem im Wachstum.

Interviewer:

Gibt es da eigentlich einen offiziellen Standpunkt, weil ich habe da online bei euch...?

Andreas:

Also es gibt einen offiziellen Standpunkt, aber der ist im Grunde so vage, dass man es nicht wirklich als einen Standpunkt bezeichnen kann. Wir halten Wirtschaftswachstum für ausserordentlich problematisch, weil es eben weder seine Ansprüche erfüllt in puncto soziale Gerechtigkeit, noch ökonomische Stabilität, noch ökologische Nachhaltigkeit, trotzdem intensiv weiter betrieben wird. Mit dieser Diskrepanz können und wollen wir nicht leben und dagegen machen wir Bildungsarbeit. Das ist unser Standpunkt. Und Projekte die wir födern müssen wachstumskritisch und/oder suffizienz-orientiert sein. Es gibt viel mehr Projekte, die toll sind...also was z.B. gutes Leben allein, Buen Vivir, sowas, also so ein Projekt, da müssten wir schon sehr genau gucken, ob wir das fördern wollen..also es gibt immer soviele Projektideen, wir müssen uns auch von unseren Resourcen sehr stark beschränken,und ein Profil auch behalten.

Interviewer:

Also ich höre da jetzt raus, dass mit mehr Resource, zusätzlichen Personal, könnte die Arbeit mehr Umfang kriegen, mehr Wirkung erzielen.

Andreas:

Also das ist aber eine Tautologie. Also dieser Satz ist einfach überall und immer richtig. Die Frage ist warum gibt es für diesen Bereich so wenig Resourcen? Und die Frage ist auch, ob tatsächlich Bildungsarbeit wirklich der Königsweg ist? Bzw. welche Art von Bildungsarbeit? Manchmal habe ich das Gefühl, dass die wichtigste Bildungsarb eiteigentlich innerhalb der Wachstumskritischen Szene zu leisten ist. Weil solange da Leute rumlaufen, für die Geld an sich ein Problem ist, für die Eigentum an sich ein Problem ist, für die repräsentative Demokratie ein Problem ist, für die Eigentum an Produktionsmittlen ein Problem ist, werden wir glaube ich nicht wirklich weiterkommen. Das ist aber wiederum meine Färbung darin. Ich arbeite seit mehrern Jahren mit Oliver Richters aus Oldenburg in dieser Arbeitsgruppe Wachstumszwang und wir haben eine ganz andere Sicht auf die Dinge als die meisten innerhalb der Wachstumskritik, weshalb wir uns im Grunde auch nicht mehr an die Szene wenden, weil – das ist jetzt nicht öffentlich – da ist Hopfen und Malz verloren.

Interviewer:

Also das ist zu wenig Offenheit, Toleranz?

Andreas:

Auch zu wenig Wissenschaftlichkeit. Da ist ein ganz starker moralischer Impuls, da sind ganz starke Intuitionen und Emotionen. Da sind sehrviele junge Leute, nichts

gegen junge Leute, aber die Jugend und extreme Haltung sind schon...also junge Leute haben häufiger extreme Haltungen, weil sie sich meistens eben auch noch in einem Suchprozess befinden. Ist auch okay, aber führt halt nicht immer weiter. Und also unglaublcih schwierig.

Interviewer:

Also die inhaltliche Inkoherenz in der Szene als ganz große Herausforderung. Was würdest du den umgekehrt, welche Faktoren haben denn den FW begünstigt im Laufe seiner Existenz?

Andreas:

Also schon auch eine zunehmende Bereitschaft von öffentlichen Geldgebern, von privaten Geldgebern, von Stiftungen, politischen Stiftungen, letzlich solche Arbeit auch zu fördern. Ich meine,wenn du mal vergleichst, wenn du dich mal mit Leuten vom Netzwerk N, um nur ein Beispiel zu nennen, die Nachhaltigkeitsinitiative an den Hochschulen, unterhälst..die können einfach noch auf ganz andere Fördermöglichkeiten zurückgreifen, weil einfach Nachhaltigkeit, da gibt es hundertmal soviel Geld wie im Bereich Wachstumskritik.

Also mit Wachstumskritik, unter dem Label, da tust du dich ganz furchtbar schwer wenn du Fördermittle aquirieren willst. Da gibt es im Grunde nur eine handvoll von Organisationen, die überhaupt dafür Geld geben. Deswegen ein Teil unserer Arbeit läuft dann eher auch unter dem Label entwicklungspolitische Bildung, was auch immer inhaltlich zutrifft. Denn letzlich ist Wachstumskritik untrennbar verknüpft mit Entwicklungspolitischer Bildung, aber dafür kriegst du Geld und für Wachstumskritik allein kriegst du kein Geld. Aber, ich würde mal sagen, so vor 10 Jahren, gab es sicherlich noch deutlich weniger Geld. Also es gibt Leute, die bereit sind dafür entweder eigene oder öffentliche Gelder locker zu machen, das ist für unsere Arbeit sicher förderlich. Die Frage ist eher, wo steckt man jetzt diese Gelder rein. Und ich denke, dass beim Bildungsarbeit im engeren Sinne ist, glaube ich, der Impact sehr begrenzt. Da erreichst du letzlich immer nur die, die schon überzeugt sind..preaching to the confessed [convinced?]. Deswegen bin ich froh, dass der FW auch ein Projekt hat, die wissenschaftliche Arbeitsgruppe nachhaltiges Geld, in dem tatsächlich wissenschaftliche Arbeit zum Thema Wachstum und Wachstumszwänge auch gemacht wird. Oli und ich sind da auch in der AG.

Interviewer:

Spannend, da habe ich ja auch schon ein paar Sachen von euch gelesen. Das ist ja ein interessanter Punkt, dass die Bildungsarbeit an sich wahrscheinlch ungenügend ist. Neben wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten, kannst du noch andere Bereich sehen, in denen sich der FW in Zukunft einbringen kann, um den Impact zu steigern.

Andreas:

Sehe ich jetz erstmal nicht. Also, wenn die Dinge so laufen, wie sie im Moment laufen, dann wird der FW nicht sehr groß werden, wird das Thema Wachstumskritik

nicht sehr prominent werden, wird das Ganze auf kleiner Flame weiterköcheln, sage ich mal. Bis irgendetwas Bedeutsames passiert. Entweder es kommt eine neue Krise, die wieder das Thema in den Fokus rückt, oder es kommen neue wissenschaftliche Erkentnisse, die plötzlich zu einem größeren Revival der Wachstumskritik führen, oder oder oder...aber ich sehe im Moment nicht, dass der FW ein stürmisches Wachstums kriegt [Lachen].

Interviewer:

Das ist ja auch schwer hier von Wachstum zu reden, auch wenn das schön wäre, wenn das Ganze noch größer wird. Wir sind auch schon bei der vorletzten Frage. Wir hatten gerade schon über Zukunftsmöglichkeiten gesprochen. Also wie würdest du den zukünftigen Impact und Möglichkeiten des FW einschätzen?

Andreas:

Also der FW ist ja insgesamt noch recht jung, wir sind jetzt 5 Jahre alt [Stand 2017]. Wir haben uns jetzt durch einige Projekte gewissermaßen einen Namen in der Szene gemacht, auch einen Name bei unseren Geldgebern. Also, ich denke, alle wissen, auf den FW kann man sich in mehrfacher Hinsicht verlassen. Der FW macht was, das was er macht kann er auch. Und, ja...das ist das Ergebnis von mehreren Jahren sorgfältiger Arbeit, sowohl was Vorstandsarbeit angeht, was auch Mitgliederarbeit angeht. Wobei das ist auch...also wir haben kein Mitgliederaktivismus, in dem Sinne, das beschränkt sich eher auf die Mitgliederversammlung. Bzw. die Mitglieder sind natürlich alle für sich irgendwo auch unterwegs inhaltlich, aber das ist jetzt weniger unter der Flagge des FW...und ähm ja, ich habe etwas den Faden verloren.

Interviewer:

Wo du evtl. noch..also wo ist der FW in drei oder fünf Jahren? Aber du hast das eigentlich mehr oder weniger schon beantwortet.

Andreas:

Also wenn sich nicht substanziell an den äußeren Bedingungen was ändert, wird der FW vermutlich immer noch ungefähr da sein...ich meine, angenommen wir würden jetzt anfangen aus irgendeinem Grund doppelt soviele Projekte fördern zu können oder dreimal soviel Geld kriegen würden, würden wir tatsächlich auch in ein Kapazitätsproblem reinlaufen. Denn ich kann neben meiner Erwerbsarbeit und meiner wissenschaftlichen Arbeit, würde ich echt in einen Konflikt kommen. Ich kriege es im Moment schon schwer unter einen Hut. Dann müsste man halt gucken. Wobei, ich meine, dann würde man es wohl schaffen Arbeiten auszulagern. […]

Interviewer:

Also schon bei der letzten Frage. Wie ist denn das Verhältnis des FW zu anderen Akteuren der Gesellscahft. Also du hast erwähnt, dass ihr mit Ministerien oder anderen wachstumskristischen Gruppen zusammenarbeiten. Wie würdest du denn das Verhältnis des FW beurteilen, inklusive der Privatwirtschaft?

Andreas:

Also mit Ministerien in dem Sinne arbeiten wir nicht zusammen. Es gibt bestimmte Fördertöpfe, die letzlich an der Zustimmung oder Ablehnung von bestimmten Ministerien hängen. Das sind insbesondere Entwicklungspolitisch Bildung, das ist das Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, bei Umweltsachen ist es das Bundesumweltministerium, bei irgendwas anderem ist es vll das Wirtschaftsministerium. Also da haben wir jetzt keine direkten Kontakte. Eher bestehen noch Kontakte zu anderen Geldgebern, die kirchlichen Bildungswerke, die politischen Stiftungen, aber ebenso auch private Stiftungen. Das ist keine inhaltliche Zusammenarbeit. Da gibt es Interessen bestimmte Sachen zu fördern, da arbeitet man eben punktuell zusammen. Da gibt's natürlich Anträge, da gibt's auch Diskussionen. Wir gehen dann auch mal zu Veranstaltungen, von Brot für die Welt oder zu irgendeiner Diskussion die da im Umfeld des [unhörbar] stattfindet oder solche Sachen. Aber jetzt von einer inhaltlichen Zusammenarbeit zu sprechen, das würde es glaube ich nicht treffen, auch mit den privaten Stiftungen. Da geht es um Projekte, die gefördert und abgewickelt werden müssen. Inhaltlich zusammenarbeiten tun wir dann noch eher mit anderen Organisationen aus der Szene. Da aber auch, dass sind dann punktuell kleinere Sachen, da wir dann mal ein Workshop zusammen mit anderen Organisationen organisiert, da wir ein wachstumskritisches Netzwerktreffen organisiert, von Verbindungen mit den Konzeptwerk [neue Öknomie] und dem FW. In der ganzen Szene hast du ziemlich viele Leute, die letzlich in verschiedenen Organisationen Mitglied sind und sich sozusagen wechselseitig mal den einen mal den anderen Hut aufsetzen. Ich bin manchmal als Geschäftsführer des FW unterwegs, manchmal als VÖÖ Mitglied, manchmal als Andreas Simoneit. Das hängt immer sehr stark an diesen Akteuren und wieviel Zeit und Resourcen in das Thema stecken können.

Interviewer:

Sehr gut, also wenn ich noch eine allerletze Frage ...und zwar zu dem institutionellen Rahmen, [der FW] ist ja ein eingetragen Verein. Nach deiner Meinung, könnte sich da aus gesetzgebender Sicht was ändern, was die Vereinsarbeit von euch stärker fördern würde. Oder seid ihr mit dem juristischen Rahmen, den ihr hier habt, zufrieden oder ist das auch ein evtl. Problem, gibt es Konflikte?

Andreas:

Also, ich finde, wir sind sehr gut bedingt. Ich finde, dass deutsche Gemeinnützigkeitsrecht eigentlich fantastisch. Es ermöglich sehr viel Engagement, durch letzlich relativ großzügige Behandlung von eben solchen Projekten und solchen Abwicklungen. Ich meine, die Transparenz Anforderungen sind ebenso hoch, man muss Steuererklärung abgeben..aber, ich finde, es ist echt ein guter Deal. Also das deutsche Gemeinnützigkeitsrecht fördert bürgerschaftliches Engagement. Und da kann ich mir jetzt eigentlich aus dieser formalen Perspektive keinen besseren Rahmen wünschen. Wo dann die Gelder herkommen ist dann noch mal eine andere Frage, aber die Tatsache, dass es die Möglichkeit gibt, solche Projekte über gemeinnützige Vereine abzuwickeln, dass mobilisert natürlich aus Fördergelder.

Interviewer:

Ganz kurz nochmal nachharken..weil du auch Gelder angesprochen hast, bei den Akteuren, ihr habt praktisch gar keine Verbindungen zur Privatwirtschaft, zu pro-profit oder es gibt ja non-profit orientierte Unternehmen in Privatsektor. Gibt es da irgendwelche Zusammenarbeit?

Andreas:

Zu Unternehmen, im engeren Sinne, nicht. Es gibt private Stiftungen, die Projekte in der Wachstumskritik, allgemeiner in der sozial-ökologischen Transformation, fördern. Und wo häufig die Gelder auch, im weitesten Sinne, aus einer unternehmerischen Tätigkeit stammen. Aber wie gesagt, das ist jetzt..also wir haben auch private Geldgeber in dem Sinne, private Stiftungen. Und arbeiten aber wie ich eben schon erläutert habe, es gibt da keine inhaltliche Zusammenarbeit, in dem Sinne, dass wir uns regelmäßig mit denen zusammensetzen und überlegen, was könnte man wie und wann? Sondern da gibt es ein Förderungsinteresse, da gibt es Geld, das ist letzendlich nicht anders als bei einem kirchlichen Bildungswerk oder einem Bundesamt. Also die Privatwirtschaft spielt für uns eine Rolle, aber keine andere Rolle als andere Fördergeber, weder qualitative noch quantitative.

Interviewer:

Super. Möchtest du noch etwas hinzufügen generell, oder fällt dir persönlich noch etwas ein, vll ein wichtiger Punkt in der Arbeit des FW ist, den man hervorheben kann?

Andreas:

Also, für mich, reiht sich die Arbeit des FW in viele andere Initiativen dieser Art ein, die auch zum Teil garnicht Wachstumskritik so im Fokus haben. Ich denk, da gibt es z.B. das Netzwerk Plurale Ökonomik, die sich ja insbesondere die Wirtschaftswissenschaften sehr kritisch betrachten, die Wiwi-Lehre sehr kritisch betrachten. Da gibt's auch viele personelle und inhaltlich Überschneidungen mit der Wachstumskritik. Aber letzlich alle diese Akteure, Konzeptwerk, Plurale Öknomik, der FW, die VÖÖ, wie sie alle heißen mögen...alle diese Organisationen eint, solange wir noch nicht ein gemeinschaftliches, ein gemeinsames Verständnis haben, was eigentlich schief läuft, versuchen wir wenigstens das Thema erstens wach zu halten und zweitens inhaltlich voranzubringen. Und viel mehr kann man schon auch nicht machen..und die Budgets dafür sind schmall, aber es ist ein großer gemeinsamer Suchprozess im Gange. Weil die Leute schon sozusagen Ideen mitbringen, wo denn das Problem wohl liegen mag, konzentrieren sie sich natürlich auf unterschiedliche Sachen, auf die Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Lehre, auf die Wachstumskritik im engeren Sinne, auf die Produktionsmittel und das Eigentum daran..oder sonst was.

Interviewer:

Vielen Dank, Andreas.

9.2.3 Transcript Illustration III – Alianza para el Cafe Justo y el Buen Vivir, Pastos/Bogotá, Colombia

Date: 03.04.2019

Interview with David Caicedo (founding member of the Alianza)

Interviewer:

Hello David and thank you for participating in this little research of mine. Could you just, in a very general matter, describe the project of Alianza para el Cafe Justo y el Buen Vivir? How it came about and describe the general objectives and motivations?

David:

Perfect. So, the project in Spanish is called Alianza para el Cafe Justo y el Buen Vivir (ACB) and in English we decided to call it the Fair Coffee and Sumak Kawsay Alliance. It started, firstly, you know, as a small alliance between two organizations in 2018, at the beginning of 2018. Because there was, there is this NGO called the Local Development Agency of Nariño (LDAN), working with coffee farmer for more than ten, fifteen years. And they decided that perhaps it is time to help the coffee farmer in a further way than the usual approach that had been used up to that point. Which was not a bad, but what I mean is that sometimes that the approach of the NGOs that are trying to help the farmers were most likely workshops or, you know, sometimes specific support for them.

Which was useful but at the same time, we all realized that in spite this help that has been going on for almost 30 years, there was still a lot of poverty in the department of Nariño which is where the initiative was born. And you can see that there is not only poverty, but also a huge inequality. That is true not only for Nariño but in the whole Colombian country. The GINI coefficient for land distribution is something around 0.86, which is something very...I know this is true for Brazil, too, for Latin America this is a reality but specifically in Colombia this is really important because it is a problem that has been there for a long time. So, of course, the farmers are oppressed by this and also the poverty is very embedded in the department.

[…]

So, I was telling you there these two problems, poverty and land inequality that have been going on for quite a while and still had not been solved. On the other hand, coffee in Nariño is a worldwide recognized type of coffee, because it is a very high-quality coffee. Especially acquired by [North] Americans, certain Europeans and Japanese that pay huge value for this. You know, sometimes we found cases, for example, where coffee farmers from Nariño produced a pound of a variety called Hacia, which could pay more or less 10.000 to 15.000 [Colombian] pesos, which is actually a lot, because sometimes they are paid 5.000 to 6.000 pesos. So, this is supposed to be a specialty coffee, they get paid twice the normal rate. But then we saw that these pounds of coffee were sold in Japan or Europe for prices of 100

Euros to 600 Euro per pound, imagine that. So, there is another problem which is the fact that there are a lot of intermediaries and a monopoly here in Colombia of intermediaries which extracts all the value from the commercialization of the coffee and in spite of being very good coffee, the farmers are still poor. So, it is a very unfair situation. So, this is the third motivation that started paving the way for the alliance.

This is on the side of the coffee, because it is very important because this is the practical way that we found very useful for us to apply what some of us were working, which is the Sumak Kawsay. So, mixing this…before I start talking about the Buen Vivir, at this point in 2018, you know, we started saying we need to help the commercialization and for that we can build an alliance. So, the LDAN established an alliance with a roasting company which is called Ecomindala SAS, which was founded by kind of a philanthropic person that decided to live..he was a director of a very important NGO in Colombia that worked with coffee farmers for almost 20 years..and he said, ok it's time to adopt an new, more practical approach to help actually with income. This, too, established the alliance. And then us [we] entered as a third and very important party. First a professor from the University San Buena Ventura here in Bogota who has been working with Sumak Kawsay topics for several years. Has published papers, done conference, and is an expert on environmental topics.

Interviewer:

What is his name [of the professor]? Sorry to interrupt.

David:

[laughing] I am just saying this because his name is Sergio Caicedo, he happens to be my father. […] Yeah, so he has been working with these topics for quite some time. He has an PhD in humanities. And he always had this approach, he created a research group in the university called..the Sumak Kawsay Research Group. And on my aspect, I also created my own group in the PUC Haveriana, called the Sumak Kawsay Political Economy Research Group. So, we first had the idea that Buen Vivir (BV) is an approach that allows us to address development issues from an alternative, local, and inclusive perspective. So, as we were working on this topic we found out that Sumak Kawsay (SK) is also very inclusive, in terms of how several perspectives, including indigenous, even critique coming from the Global North, you know, to capitalism dynamics, also approaches like Ecological Economics and Heterodox Economics can all be included into a very big framework, that addresses development and economic concepts from a different perspective. So, overall it [BV] can be considered a philosophy of life, if you will.

And the fact that it is very inclusive makes it very pluralistic. So, you can find several approaches within BV, you know, there is even a linguistic discussion because some people say that you can say Sumak Kawsay as they use it mostly in Ecuador, but you can also say Suma Quemana as they use it in Bolivia. And both countries have a different approach that has been institutionalized. But the thing is that in our case, we simply adopted the main three pillars of SK; three pillars as the basis of achieving an alternative and sustainable development for the people. So, the main pillars are the following: the human being, the community as a whole, and the Mother Nature

or the environment. The three pillars have to be there. Those are the three main pillars we have adopted. I mean it is based on theories mainly from Alberto Acosta, Linas, and Waldmueller, who have explained that maybe these are the three pillars that everyone has in common. So, we found it a very interesting alternative and most importantly a local approach for us to address the issues that have been happening in Colombia. And an alternative to start..paving the way for a new sustainable development, if you will. So, then we..this alliance was built upon this. These three components, so there was the NGO, the enterprise [Ecomindala SAS], and the academia, the universities, the research side. You know, the good point here is, the innovative point here is that SK has been theoretical philosophy that has been applied in several ways..some ways have even been criticized, for example, in Ecuador a lot of theoretic [thinkers] have critisized the way it has been implemented. But overall, it's mostly a philosophy, if you want.

[...call was interrupted...]

Interviewer:

[…] So, you were talking about the three pillars and how the project started.

David:

Exactly, so I told you it was a philosophy of life. And being a philosophy makes it impossible for anyone to say they have the right approach to Buen Vivir or Sumak Kawsay. There is no right approach and if anyone says they have the right approach then they have fallen into a trap. The whole basis of SK and BV is that it is an inclusive and pluralistic philosophy that allows for any perspective to contribute to this […] group of worldviews.

So, in the case of us, we adopted this approach as a way to give a very important underpinning to the coffee initiative. Because, you know, without this it would only be a very interesting project to help the coffee farmers, but it would be lacking the sustainability side, and most importantly, an approach that allows the initiative to address more structural issues. That are sometimes linked to deeper structures...and can be nurtured by SK to address and look for alternative solutions. And in the case of SK, the coffee initiative gives it a very important opportunity to apply these ideals to a practical matter. So, to show results, to show, in the real life, how SK can be used as a way to improve the well-being of the people, but also to attain a true connection with our Mother Nature, to improve our connection to our community, and to our surroundings.

So, on this basis the SK and Fair Coffee Alliance is created. And, basically our mission, our most important objective is to create communities for Buen Vivir in all the aspects of the coffee value chain. And that is our main target, to create this communities. We expect them to be on-going and to adopt principles of SK, but also to have and reflect actual results according to what the people and the nature need.

So, how we do this? How we create communities? Basically, we have adopted 2 ways. The first way is..we have several projects that are led by, sometimes two or one of our members. In order to impact a specific part of our whole initiative. So, we

work on different levels, in different cities, with different [inaudible]…you know. The other way is the commercialization of coffee. Because we realized this needs to be a sustainable initiative in time and for us not to be dependent on foreign projects, which we also are applying to or international cooperation...we find it very useful, but we don't want to be dependent on them. So, for this not to happen we have come up with a scheme [span. esquema] to be sustainable in time, which is attain through the commercialization of coffee and an equitable distribution of the profits. To benefit the coffee farmers but also the sustainability of the initiative, right. So, our practical goal of this is to improve the well-being of the coffee farmers. How? By allowing them to increase their income, because this is something they need…we still live in a capitalist world...they told us this and it is true. So, we cannot not listen to them...that has to be considered in the approach, to consider their reality and ask them what they need. And they told us, ok, at this moment we need to increase our income, because the poverty is something that is a reality. So, to increase the income we have 2 projects that have been financed by Ecomindala end the LDAN to build homes for them, to improve their homes. So, that's on the coffee farmer's side.

Interviewer:

That is interesting. Because improving homes is only indirectly linked to the coffee value chain, right. So, it goes beyond a little bit of the coffee value chain because one of the points [you mentioned] is BV within the coffee value chain. So, you're doing stuff beyond that.

David:

Exactly. So, I mean, our basis is the coffee value chain to find on which level we want to act...if we want to act on the producer's side, but also there is the roasting and the processing side, there is the commercialization part, and there is the consumer's part. And we try to act on the 4 levels. So, just to summarize my idea…one […] objective we have chosen as a main and important one is to improve the well-being of the coffee farmers. Second, to attain true sustainability by two ways, at this moment. One with projects, and two with consciousness.

So, which kind of project? The idea is to avoid having coffee as a mono crop, you know. It is not coherent if we promote coffee as a mono crop if we want to be sustainable. We want to slowly pave the way for it to be not a mono crop. There are several ways how we are doing this. […] There are several ways to promote this in terms of coffee growing strategies. But our goals is also to get the farmer to make at least 30% of their territories into a natural reserve. So, things like this.

And another project that we have created and that, at this moment, is being built is an observatory of birds in 2 farms. Because birds are a very essential indicator of bio-diversity. I mean, if there are more trees, than there are more birds. And if there are more birds, it means that the nature is slowly going back to a certain balance or equilibrium. So, that's how we do it.

And the other part is to establish a consciousness scheme. So, we want to share our knowledge and actually learn from the knowledge of the coffee farmers in terms

of consciousness and awareness of how the environment is important to attain our own development. And also, if we attain a better development of Mother Nature, we will be able to have a better satisfaction and a better well-being, you know. So, this includes educational projects that have been done with coffee farmers in Nariño. And there is a group of […inaudible...] called guardians of the environment. So, things like this.

Interviewer:

Sorry, just to better understand. Is this [education] happening in forms of workshops, or seminars, or is there a school or course the farmers can take? Or is it just through conversations, I mean this work of raising awareness and consciousness?

David:

Exactly. I mean, we have first done several workshops. Initial workshops to establish baselines, with which we can work and start acting upon. And then we collaboratively formulated a strategy with them. So, we said, ok...what you want to learn, what you already know, and how we can actually contribute with our knowledge as researchers, as NGO workers. And then the practical knowledge of people that have a special bonding to their territories, because they [the farmers] have actually a very high conscious[ness] of what they want to do and how nature is very important. So, with workshops, but yes...I mean mainly we have tried to institutionalize this, but it has not yet been done...I mean, creating a school would be a very interesting project to do...we want to get there, but at this point we are not there. We are for now doing workshops and that's how we are doing it. Okay, so that's one objective of the coffee farmers, right.

On the roasting and processing level, if you will, of coffee, this one belongs to Ecomindala, the enterprise, because Ecomindala has registered a trademark, called “dulces milagros” which it has kindly lent to the alliance for it to be the commercialization trademark of the whole alliance. And Ecomindala SAS has said, ok, with this trademark we can actually start commercializing coffee and create profits not only for Ecomindala but for everyone there involved. Ecomindala has, for example, financed collective funds, one of which is the “viviendas” or in English the housing project. It has invested more or less 25.000 to 30.000 USD in it. And, you know, there are other projects that are undertaken by one or two [members], but on this side, Ecomindala has created communities based on this sort of scheme, collective funds for projects that are aimed to help coffee farmers and, for example, to improve the quality of the coffee and sustainability.

Then, in the commercialization, which is mainly done here in Bogotá…I mean, some of the coffee is commercialized in Pasto, but here in Bogota is the biggest hub for commercialization. And this is our part. What we have done here is we have created communities for commercialization and conscious consumption of coffee by adopting a SK approach. What we have done here is basically leading events. Two types of events which we call first, “grati-ferias”...yes, which would be free fairs. And other events that we call “tertulias para el Buen Vivir”...tertulias would be like conversations or talks for BV. So we have friends or interested people here and we simply have a cup of coffee and we talk about how we can help each other as a

community. And also, we actually help coffee farmers by consuming this coffee. And this has been a very important aspects, because many people here in Bogota and Colombia they don't know the difference between high-quality coffee and other types of quality. And sometimes what we also want to do is to explain how consuming high-quality coffee is good for the health and how you can help to attain a different kind of development. So, here communities have been created for education but also for the conscious consumption of coffee. And it's not expensive actually, because we have explained to them that in order to consume high-quality coffee you don't need to pay a very big value. You know, we have chosen a market value, but it is still much cheaper than what other people charge.

So, here we create communities on the processing part of the coffee value chain. Communities are created, you know, from collective funds. And on the coffee producer's side, communities are created, for example as I told you, to have consciousness or we help between coffee farmers...I forgot to mention to you that social relationships have been shaped by coffee farmers that are no longer bound by market mechanisms. For example, several coffee farmers say ok..you know, coffee is collected once every year and when its collection time there is a lot of work to be done. And between them they help each other without charging each other. So, they say, ok..today I have collection and all the farmers of the community come and help me and the next day we go to the next farm and help each other. And they have also collective funds.

So, this leaves us to the last part, which is a practical one of how we can make this sustainable? In the commercialization of each pound, we distribute the profits in a very specific way. We sell each pound at a value of 25.000 Pesos. From those 25.000 Pesos, more or less 10.000 go to the farmers but they go in a different scheme. Usually the market value pays 5.000 for them, right. But we pay them to each more or less 6.000 to 6.500 Pesos and the remaining 4.000 we don't give to them individually but in the form of collective funds. So, 4.000 of each pound goes to a collective fund for the farmers. Then, more or less 5.000 Pesos go to cover the costs, or up to 7.000 for the costs of transportation, fixed costs we are calling them. And then Ecomindala SAS as the roaster and processing element gets more or less 3.000 to 4.000. And the commercialization gets between 3.000 and 4.000 Pesos in the way of collective funds. So, here when we commercialize coffee we get…ok, maybe 1.000 or 2.000 individually to the person that sells it, but then 3.000 Pesos as a collective fund for the commercializers and the consumers.

Interviewer:

Could you specify a bit on this concept of collective funds you are using? So, this goes into a fund that is collectively owned and collectively decided what happens to the money, how does it work?

David:

Yeah, it is collectively owned and the decision how to invest the money is taken by the community. So, for example, the farmers…their fund has reached about 5.000 or 10.000 USD like the quantity of it...and they have used it for the education of their children, to improve their homes, to lend money between themselves without

interest. And our goal in the end, this is a long-term goal, is would be ideal for these collective funds to buy collective territories. And then these collective territories start paving a more community-based part and start addressing the problem of land distribution, because we have to address this, too.

Interviewer:

And the decision of how this money is being used is based on consensus or majority or how do you do that?

David:

Yes, that is very good…actually we have tried to adapt a consensus way…so a really horizontal scheme of decisions. Because, you know, we don't have too many people in the funds. One funds has around 10 farmers, let's say. And the idea is for them to agree entirely on what they can do...and usually we haven't had this problem by far [?]. And, I guess, if it was a bigger size of groups then we would have to adopt different schemes. But we hope that we can achieve decision by this mechanisms, completely horizontal and consensual. Because, you know, that comes from traditional and ancestral knowledge. There are several communities here in Colombia that have adopted this kind of decisions for groups of 2.000 people...so, it is possible, it is not easy, but it can be done and we believe that it can be done.

Interviewer:

[…] Going to a next part...so, you have several different levels...the farmers, the roasting, the commercialization, consumers…how is the project inserted in the different realities? How are the relations, for example, of the farmers with the rest of the community, with private businesses, with public institutions? Some farmers perhaps don't want to participate or go different ways. […] How are the relations with the other actors in the wider society?

David:

Ok, that's a very interesting question and actually something we would like to work with. So, to answer one of the questions you asked...yes, there are some farmers that don't want to participate in this scheme. Because in Nariño, you know, there are several dynamics that have been established because of the culture. So, usually people are not very fond of trusting each other...it's hard for a farmer to trust another one. Because of the history, you know, these are cultural factors you can find...I mean not only in this department [Nariño] but they are there.

Yeah, so we have a lot of farmers that have their own trademark, they are commercializing to other parts, they are even exporting. And it ok, it's good like this. On the other hand, we had people that said this at first but actually after a couple of months started to get involved in the scheme [of the ACB]. Very important is also that Ecomindala handles an open business model which means the farmers can enter in several ways. So, if they want to enter fully into the alliance, I told you, then they would get access to collective funds, they would get a better value for their coffee, they would be benefited by the projects. But if they don't want to get involved

with this it's alright...we say, “dulces milagros”is a trademark that is inclusive. So, sometimes what they want to do is...ok, I want you to help me with the roasting of the coffee, you know, we make sure that you have a good quality and an impact for the society. And then Ecomindala allows […]

[call got interrupted again]

David:

[…] So, we give them a better product for their coffee. And we can even help them with the packaging. But the idea is for trademark to be specifically for the farmers that are involved with the ACB.

Also, in terms of relationships with other actors, I forgot to mention that there is a civil society actor that got involved with us. Which is called the Network of Seed Guardians. In Spanish, “red de guardianes de semillas”. Which is an international organization, I think, they are active also in Brazil and other countries in South America. And they are basically promoting sustainable practices, but mostly preservation of native seeds...also against the use of transgenics. And they got involved with us because the founder of the network in Pasto, in Nariño, also happen to be coffee farmers. They have fully organic coffee, which is a very good addition to our coffee scheme. We want to be organic, but these guys were already organic for quite some years. […]

Publicly speaking, the public actors have been indirectly linked to us. So, we have had support, for example, from public companies in Pasto. Just to mention an example, the public water company of Pasto which is charged with the provision of water, helped in one event. They actually they hosted one event in which they explained the importance of water, but they also commercialized our coffee in their events. So, we have had support of certain actors in specific events. Also, we have had support from one newspaper that has published our story locally in their paper edition. But…yeah, up to this point we have not actually endorse[ment] from the major or the governor. We have an indirect support from them as the LDAN is partially funded and support by these two organizations, the government of Nariño and the townhall of Pasto which are also part of the founders of LDAN. So, more or less it has been like that. […] Actually, we are thinking about how we can get [more] support from this organizations, public actors. But we want to make sure, that before we reach them, that we present it as a beneficial project which we intend it to be for the whole department. I mean, we can create a trademark, we call it an umbrella trademark, for the whole department of Nariño. It would be an ideal, I mean...it would be very helpful to, you know...competition is not bad, but in this case, it is actually because everyone is fighting for what we could sadly call crumbs. Because, in the foreign markets this coffee is very pricey bought, and here it is not very pricey remunerated. That is also why we are on the verge of exporting. We have exported indirectly, but we have sold the coffee in Bogota...I mean, foreign companies have come to Bogota and they take the coffee to their home countries. But, at this time, we are exploring the possibility [to export] to Germany and to the US. To get it started working…you know, given the costs it entails...because it is something we have to take into account. We have possible investors, but this is still something we want to be sure about because when we start exporting, of course…it means that

the profits will be very high and evenly distributed between the members that something that we never had, you know. If we manage to sell our coffee for something like 100 or 200 Euros in Europe, this would mean that actually at least 50% of those would have to go to the coffee farmers. And this is why we think we are involved in a fair-trade mechanism. But we are very careful, we have seen how some fair-trade mechanisms all that they do is that they pay, for example, only 500 Pesos more per kilo, per pound for the coffee farmers, and then they sell it abroad 30 times more than that and then they keep the profits. So, this is not really fair, you know. Yes…you are paying a very small value of the market value, but […] if the coffee sells at 200 Euros and then you subtract the cost and you get like 100 Euro of profit...then this 100 Euros should be distributed evenly between all the elements. And, of course, with a good bias towards the coffee farmers. Maybe if you want to adopt...I forgot the name of the justice approach...[John] Rawl's approach that the only inequality that is acceptable is the one that is in favor of the most unfavored ones. So, if you biased to help the coffee farmers more, than that is an inequality in the distribution that we are able to accept, if it benefits the coffee farmers.

Interviewer:

So, on this level of commercialization, you are trying to expand those relations in the future by going abroad? Exports and partnerships abroad, right?

David:

Exactly, right.

Interviewer:

Great. So, David, what would you say are the main challenges or obstacles for the project to continue successfully, you know, and to work and function in general?

David:

Ok, it's a good question. And we have had several challenges. One is in the commercialization of coffee. It is not very easy to sell coffee, especially in the quantities we would like to be selling. Especially, because that is not what we like to do...we want to be in contact with people but if we feel that selling this coffee is helping the people than we are more than glad to do it. But a very huge challenge in terms of economic sustainability is having enough profits to be sustainable. At this point we are financially stable because of the support of [...] because of the contributions of the members of the alliance. But our goal is for this to be sustainable only by commercializing coffee. The other [contributions?] would be something additional. Yeah...so this on the economic side.

On the organizational side, sometimes it is hard for people to be cooperative at first. As I told you, trust is a very important thing to have in Nariño. And when you get to this it is very nice, but before you get to this point where people are trusting each other it is a very hard way. The good thing is that people in Nariño have been very receptive to us. They have been really willing to do things. But, of course, they have been affected before by corporations' schemes that really solved things as they

wanted to, or even NGOs that have gone there and said they want to contribute and all, but after they leave...they leave them in the same state they were before...and they feel that this is something that was not good. So, we have seen, for example, when we arrived at some municipalities that they received us with a lot of skepticism. Because they say, yes...we have had 20 NGOs coming here, even national, international ones, and we haven't...well, we get what we want from them but that's it...we are still poor, we are still having [the same] problems. We have seen, for example, indigenous communities that have had, you know, there was this example actually...that was founded by...sorry, they were funded by an NGO from Holland, I think. And the NGO from Holland basically came and did their own studies and made their own judgment from outside, which is something that is very counterproductive. What they said is, OK, there is a part of sanitation we gonna give them toilets…to this indigenous community. And they gave them toilets and they left. And after a year, nobody was using the toilets, imagine that. They didn't even know how to use them and also, they thought it was a waste of water. So, you know, there are this kind of problems you should be taken into account before you come into a territory. These people have been affected by this and it has been a problem at first. But for now, we have it solved. It will continue a challenge if we want to expand. Because our idea is for more farmers to join our scheme. The more farmers we get, the more farmers we get to benefit. […]

So, another challenge is in terms of projects. We also want to get funding for projects. But yeah...there is a lot of competition there...the international cooperation is more likely done when you have a very stable ally in the cooperation country. This is something we are trying to aim [at]..we see this as a challenge. Hopefully…we have seen some options...I mean, in Spain there is one ally of LDAN, but we are exploring more. In Germany and Canada, we have seen some options, but it would be a challenge to get them to help us, right. But we are hoping that...

Interviewer:

Sorry for interrupting, just to understand...for projects, you mean additional projects? What would that be?

David:

Yeah, for example, we have seen international cooperation projects for women. Also, I didn't tell you, but our farmers are based in 5 municipalities of Nariño. Well, one [municipality] has the highest numbers of farmers, but we work a lot with women. That is the reason why the trademark is called “dulce milagros”. “dulce” means sweet in English because the coffee of Nariño is actually sweet, but “milgros” is because lots of the coffee farmers' names are Milagros and which happen to be women. […] Yeah, so this kind of projects...funding for women or environmentally sustainable projects from the European Union. Yeah, so we hope to get funding for that kind of thing.

Interviewer:

[…] On the other side, what would you describe as factors that help you to get the project to where it is now and that are beneficial for your success and reaching the objectives?

David:

[…] Ok, so for us beneficial has been that our members have all the same conditions, we trust each other..I mean, previously we have known each other for a long time, you know, as friends actually. And this has been a very important factor, that we trust each other, it has helped us a lot. And, the fact that we are willing to recognize each other's abilities and to contribute from our own perspective. This openness to collaborate and acknowledge each other’s capabilities has been, on the human side, a factor for this to be sustainable.

Also, on the other hand, as each member and each founder know its tasks and roles...it's very important because, I mean, we work as a community and we are all very positive. Each proposal from one is heard by the others and we are always talking between each other. So, the fact that we can propose around and that we are very horizontal in decision-making is very important. Because if we had a hierarchy or that kind of thing, more like an enterprise hierarchy than it would be much more difficult, it would be a different kind of struggle. That is why we have chosen it to be...you know, the alliance, as a non-for-profit initiative. We haven't yet legally formalized the alliance in Colombia...I mean, it is a network for now. We think in the future we need to get to this point, but yeah...I mean, those are positive factors.

Also, cultural factors in Nariño have been positive. Because I told you, the farmers have been very receptive to us because they have worked previously with some of the members. They already knew them and they knew that they were willing to do this. Even the ones that we didn't know before, you know, when they saw the other farmers actually were getting benefits, were learning new things, they decided to join us. One of them, for example, is this coffee farmer that has the national record of quality of coffee. […] He has less than a hectare but he won this price in 2010 with a punctuation of 94,6. You know, coffee is rated between 0 and 100 and if you got a punctuation of 80 or above it is already considered a very high quality. And getting over 90 is almost impossible, but this guy got 94 and nobody has ever been able to improve this punctuation.

Interviewer:

David, could you just quickly elaborate a bit, because you talked about members and founders, and the legal structure of the alliance. So, you have to still formalize that and what […]

[interview got interrupted and David told me that he had only 5 more minutes left]

David:

Yes, so I can answer very quickly. Every member is a founder, to be precise. For now, the members are the LDAN, the Ecomindala, the research group at San Buena

Ventura, the Guardians network, and the regional association of coffee farmer women, that is called “red de mujeres cafecultoras del norte”.

Interviewer:

So, each of these organizations has a representative or all members of all these organizations come together and vote horizontally?

David:

Exactly, so yes...there a few members in each organization. The Adel [commercialization part?] has…actually we have a representative. In Ecomindala, the enterprise is mainly only three people, and the 3 attend. The research group has one representative which is my father who was like the leader of the group. I, on the other hand, am handling the whole scheme of the alliance here. So, I would be the one connecting everyone. I act as kind of a representative of the group of Haveriana, but since I am not a student anymore, it's not anymore like that. But […]

Interviewer:

Okay, David, let us stop for here. There would be a last question about the future, how you see the project evolving, the next steps and perspectives of ACB. But we can do them later or via whatsapp if that helps you.

[…]

NOTE: This last part was recorded via Whatsapp voice messages as the interviewee was traveling and could not connect otherwise anymore.

Interviewer:

The next question of the interview would be how you see the future of the project? Where will ACB be in 2 or 3 years? What would you say are possible obstacles that could hinder that process or further success?

David:

So, to answer the first question. I see our alliance, you know, in 5 years as a platform to connect people, not only in Colombia but all over the world, who are interested in a different kind of development. Who are also interested in a human connection that is found by acquiring more inclusive and pluralistic, and especially locally based perspectives. But also, at the same time, it would see the organization as a platform for other perspectives from different countries, to start inputting information...you know, this in terms of, perhaps our mission. The communities, I mean if things go the best way of course...get the communities established in collective terrains [territories]. You know, with small local communities...I am not going to say that, isolated from capitalism, but I mean maybe with different types of relationships that are bound by different patterns. Not only market mechanisms but different ones, collaboratively speaking, horizontally shaped. I believe that is something we would aspire definitely in 5 years from now.

Also, well…in terms of coffee, we really have a lot of expectations, like seeing ourselves in 5 years exporting to countries like Germany the US, France...we have seen a lot of opportunities there. Because there is a growing demand [for] sustainable, fair trade and community-based initiatives. Also, we would see ourselves also with a round [?] cafeterias, sharing the profits completely with the coffee farmers. We would see ourselves as a recognized alliance, where we no longer see the coffee farmer simply as a provider of coffee, and we buy it and that's it...no, actually we would like to be seen as an alliance where the coffee farmers have become a direct part of the initiative. And not only that but even more…a shareholder of the profits, you know, the farmer would be considered and actually seen as a partner of this project. This is why I said that we like the idea of fair trade to actually help farmers, but we think more things should be done. It's not only buying their coffee, even at a fair price...it's more. It's actually including them in this initiative, making them participants of the profits, which is the most important thing because the profits are ceased mostly by intermediaries still. So that, and cafeterias in Bogota, in the world...of course, we like to dream big, but why not? I mean, if hopefully things go right […] we are on the verge of starting a small pilot project in Bogota in this sense...and you know, we would see ourselves in this sense in 5 years or maybe a little bit more...a consolidated project in that sense. Definitely, with collective funds that are able to provide for sustainable livelihood for all the people that are involved in the project.

And finally, you know, sharing our happiness. It's important. It's the concept we work with and we would see ourselves as happy people immersed in our own communities that we have helped to create and consolidated on the base of trust which is something that is very hard to acquire but we are very optimistic about this point. I mean if we haven't gotten there yet, we are very close and hopefully we can get there very firmly in the future.

And for the challenges [in the future], I would say that connecting with other organizations in the world is definitely not something to be done easy. And also getting to work on the base of trust with other people, other networks would be something interesting, but it would also be a challenge, as well.

It will also be a challenge to see how the SK ideas, you know, the philosophy is not turned into an ideology. Because we don't want to turn it into an ideology because...you know, I believe what Hegel, the philosopher says in terms of that, because the moment you marry to an ideology you lose a sense of common truth because then you are looking only for arguments to support your own ideology and, instead of listening to other and actually trying to reach a common truth, which is a common understanding.

So, to keep this [approach of SK] inclusive and, of course, not saying that this is the only way. It is also important to explain that SK is not the only way and it's not the truth either. And it is also not the only solution...and even, it has several flaws, of course and people will point it out, and we hope to be working with them. Still we have chosen this philosophy because these values are the ones we accepted and adopted for us in order to reach a common happiness. Which doesn't mean that it is an exclusive way of reaching an alternative development in that sort of sense.

And economically speaking of course, the commercialization of coffee is a factor that is a determinant here. You know, if we get investors would be a challenge so that it doesn't become something that where money gets in the way of what we want…so, we have to keep track of that. And for us to sell more coffee, to export it would require a lot more personnel, to open an actual office here...for now we have an office, but maybe a bigger one [would be needed]. So, it would take a lot of planning and if that goes wrong it could be a major obstacle. Of course...I mean, mostly the economic factors, for this initiative to be sustainable, especially because it is non-profit…of course, we are giving wages to the people but the profits are collective, so it's more close to a collaborative economy or a collaborative initiative. Because, yeah…I mean we are still understanding that each person needs a minimum income and that's what we are aiming for. But we are not having the profits ceased by a person or a company because [...] And hopefully the more coffee we are selling, the first cafeteria we are opening...you know, expanding and still keep those values that we want. I guess that's it.

9.2.4 Transcript Illustration IV – Movimento Sem Terra (MST), Nova União, Minas Gerais, Brazil

Date: 12 December 2018

Interview with Antonio Ribeiro, founding member of the Ho Chi Minh settlement in Nova União

[introducing chat]

Interviewer:
Antonio, pode contar um pouco deste projeto, deste trabalho, como começeu, o que estão fazendo aqui, tipo dar uma introdução a este trabalho?

Antonio:
Oh Jakob, é o seguinte. Quando a gente...como eu já te tinha falado quando eu morava na cidade, fui criado an cidade até bem pouco tempo, ne. E quando as pessoas vem falar com a gente e costumo dizer que sou agricultor do seculo vinte e um, porque tem só doze anos que eu moro na terra, o tempo que tenho com o assentamento..antes morava na cidade, entendeu. E por causa disso aí, a vantagem da gente vendo novo é que vem meio assim de barriga verde, ne...o termo seria assim, barriga verde porque a gente não sabe nada, não sabe quase nada. O que aprendeu, aprendeu com o pai ou a mãe, meu pai e mãe eram agricultores antes de morar na cidade. Minha mãe tem um quintal dela em Laranjeiras, em Betim. E essa quintal é menor que essa área aqui da minha varanda [aproximadamente uns 20metros quadrados], mas tinha mais que 80 variedades de plantas lá que ela mesma cultiva. Desde plantinha pequena até árvores maiores. E quando casei ainda morei um tempo na cidade, mas sempre com a vontade de morar na roça, sempre tinha essa vontade desde antes de casar..um dia, ne. Beleza, tudo bem. Trabalhei na prefeitura de Betim, uns 8 anos como comissário e tudo, antes disso tinha outros trabalhos, trabalhei na área de construção..mas

sempre pensando na ideia de..tanto que hoje me pergunto porque não se tornou pedreiro..primeiro na minha época pedreiro não era uma profissão muito valorizada, hoje tá um pouco melhor mas aindo é pouco valorizado..então não me interessava. E também tenho o problema de altura. Pedreiro tem que subir em alguns lugares e eu nunca tinha essa vocção de subindo na árvore e lugar alto. Então o negocio é mais horizontal mesmo. Pé no chão.
E aí, eu peguei..já tinha ouvido do MST porque da militância nos direitos humanos e tudo, e nesse período conheci o pessoal do movimento sem terra [na cidade ainda]. E a gente só ouvia do MST...mas como mexia com direitos humanos sabia dessa questão como trabalhar com os exluídos, o trabalho com as pessoas discriminadas em geral, ne. E quando sai do meu trabalho da prefeitura me questionava deixando esse trabalho da prefeitura e vir pra roça para fazer o que? Mas vim para roça inclusive para ganhar qualidade de vida. Qualidade porque você está num ambiente mais tranquilo, qualidade porque você saber produzir seu alimento, entendeu. Isso é importante, isso gerar satisfação para a gente. Dinheiro é importante, ne..a gente não vive sem. Nos vivemos no sistema capitalista onde o dinheiro dar troca para outras coisas que você precisa. Infelizmente, da terra a gente não consegue tirar todo o que precisa..precisa dinheiro para comprar. E a gente veio para roça com esse objetivo de plantar um produto diferenciado. Diferente do que tem no mercado, para saber a origem do produto, a origem dos alimentos, ne.
Muitos nem sabem...Alguém perguntou um dia, uma estudiante lá do Rio no estágio aqui viveu alguns dias com a gente aqui. E ela perguntou assim: nos ganhamos um grão de café, ne...sem ser torrado, café bruto...aí ela viu a gente preparande o café e falou “gente não sabia nem da origem do café”. Mas também já vimos agricultor que acha que pode plantar arroz branco do jeito que vem no saco. Isso é normal também. A gente não pode estranhar se vem uma pessoa de nível de educação superior que não sabe da terra porque também sabemos de gente do nosso meio que não tem esse entendimento, que tem essa dificulade de entender. Para nos é muito tranquilo.
E aí a gente chega aqui com esse objetivo. Mas não é só isso também...a gente veio com um proposta diferenciada porque a gente acredita muito quando a gente participa do MST do movimento, a gente não luta só para terra. Se for só para terra a gente nem precisava de organizar, ne. Porque terra tem muito e tem muitas formas de trabalhar na terra que não sejam através do modo da organização. E aí a gente veio para terra com o objetivo da reforma agrária. Uns 4 anos ou mais ficamos acampados, desde 2012.

Interviewer:
Posso te perguntar que você já falou que veio com a ideia de um produto diferenciado. O que é isso e de onde vem essa ideia?

Antonio:
Porque a gente já entende como produto diferenciado um produto onde a gente pode entender a origem do produto, o processo todo do alimento desde do inicio...na verade, para enteder um pouco a cadeia alimentar. Porque quando você vai lá no mercado e compra, você está pegando a ponta, ne..e o processo anterior daquilo?
Então um pouco isso. E é tanto que já experimentamos com coisa que não vinga aqui. Mas precisavamos para entender tentar. Hoje já não faço mais isso, já sei que

tem determinados produtos que nçao vai funcionar aqui porque o clima é diferente, o chão é diferente, a topografia..então a região é diferenciada. Por exemplo, mamão..não vingava de jeito nenhum porque aqui é frio. E mamão não gosta de frio. A maior parte do mamão aqui vem da Bahia ou do Espírito Santo. Aqui é mais temperado, estamos a 1000 metros de altura aqui, até medi no aplicativo isso. Então o que vinga muito aqui é café ou banana. Aqui é bom demais para banana, aqui é a região que produz mais banana catuba do pais. Com outras bananas compete com outras regiões, tipo vem banana prata da Bahia também.
Mas não é tudo banana agroecological aqui. É banana mesmo com adubação quimica ou com veneno. Agora estão correndo um pouco do veneno porque estão percebendo que o veneno faz mal tanto pra os usuários quanto para o produto. Agora estão fazendo o que a Europa está fazendo, caminho da volta, ne. Mas Brasil nesse aspecto está depreciando muito..porque essa discussão do agrotóxico das flexibilicações do uso do agrotóxico no congresso não vai ajudar nisso. […]
Agora o curioso é que os grandes benficiários das coisas dessas são lá na Europa e Estados Unidos, eles tem outra postura. Postura de terceiro mundista..a mesma postura que os português tiveram, que os holandes tiveram, todos esses que tentaram colonizar esta terra aqui, que o pessoal do agronegocio tem hoje..interesses exclusos.

Interviewer:
E aí meus pais comprem uma fruta exótica e fazem parte dessa cadeia alimentar.

Antonio:
A gente nem pode dizer..a culpa que está aqui na terceira ou quarta genereção, infelizmente é o modo que foi educado. Eu costumo dizer que a gente não tem a culpa do que aconteceu no passado. O passado não posso mudar, mas o presente eu posso mudar, o futuro nem sei, mas posso pensar daqui do present para um futuro diferente, é por aí, ne.

Interviewer:
Quando você chegou aqui, do assentamento, como que era a estrutura aqui?

Antonio:
Nos mudamos por aqui em 2005. O acampamento HCM, quando chamava Ho Chin Ming, nos já mudamos 5 vezes antes de chegar aqui. Estavamos primeiro em Campo Cajurús, já ouviu falar, fica lá por Divinópolis e foi a primeira ocupação, fomos lá por 2002. Eu era parte dessa primeira ocupação. Só tem eu e os Heros [?] aqui e o Adão da primeira ocupação quem ficou o tempo todo. E tem o Rafael que tá lá no assentamento hoje que é desde então.[…]
Começamos com 54 famílias, e já teve muita mudança, muita gente que saiu e colocou outras pessoas no lugar. Ao todo já passaram mais que 500 pessoas aqui. No primeiro despejo ficaram 22 famílias, cairam 32 famílias não conseguiram ficar. Aí nos fomos em Betim, e nesses 4 meses ficamos lá resistindo, embaixo da lama, baixo de lama o tempo todo. E nesse tempo agragaram outras pessoas para fazer uma outra ocupaçõa. A gente já tava guardando uma nova ocupação. A direção nos chama para conversa e a conversa vai e vem, vai e vem..e 2 acampamentos juntos na mesma área é um problema. Se você tem um área do jeito que estava lá..já tinha um acampamento e a comunidade cheia de vícios, ne. Ficamos lá só 4 meses, mas até plantamos muita coisa..aquele serra de Betim é espactacular, é muito fertil.

Colhei milho, feijão, colhei muita coisa lá. […]
Aí a gente começou o trabalho de base para fazer outra ocupação. Aí ocupou em Santa Helena, aí em Jubatuba, vicino de Betim, ao lado. Fomos 240 famílias. Entramos de madruga, mas ficamos só 6 meses lá. Fomos despejados e tivemos que sair. E teve n problemas nessa ocupação, qualquer coisa que você imagina. Quando você junta muita gente, cê sabe como funciona, ne. Um colega meu disse que o problema do homem com a natureza começa com o homem mesmo. […]
Aí fomos para Esmeraldas, numa fazenda, chama Samburá. O dono morava lá nos Estados Unidos e tinha um monte de terra. Esmeraldas hoje é o maior municípios na grande BH e tem o maior indice de latifundios. Até teve um professor da UFMG que fez um levantamento sobre isso e o poder do latifundio. Teve uma pesquisa também em Betim, onde tem 3 assentamentos e só um deles é do MST. Aí ficamos na Samburá 1 ano e 7 meses. Lá teve muito enfrentamento com polícias, helicóptero baixou lá para tentar tirar a gente na marra. Esmeraldas tem muito problema, a questão fundiária lá é muito séria, muito séria. Até um tempo atrás o [?] foi afestado do cargo por esses problemas lá. Esse casamento do latifundio com agronegocio é um trem danado, ne.
E a ordem de despejo aconteceu as 3 horas da madrugada que a juíza deu, assim que funcionou lá. A questão do conflito, do latifundário é tão prioritário que ela levou o processo enfrente de não sei quantos porcessos para levantar as 3 da manhã para fazer o despajo da ordem. Aí se ve, as relações obscuras que são atras disso. Mas os advogados do movimento recorreram, o ministerio publico, a procudaroria e o INCRA para a gente não sair. E ficamos e fomos plantando, plantamos muita coisa lá. Arroz, feijão, mandicoa..um clima favorável. Eu tinha minha horta. E fiquei trabalhando no escritório do movimento lá em BH.
Final de 2004 eles entraram de novo com reintegração de posse, falaram que estavam interessados na área e tal. Aí teve a negociação, teve uma audência para discutir a situação e foi decidiou que a gente tinha que sair, mas eles tinha que pagar o produto que a gente já tinha plantado. Eram vários hectares de plantio. Acabaram fazer um valor simbólico que não dava para indenizar as famílias. Pois a ideia era da gente colher, mas como eles falaram que tem que sair não deu tempo par colher e rolou um valor de 33.000 Reais e quem plantou recebeu algo disso.
Beleza, aí essa área [Novo União] já era desapropriada aqui. O governo já tinha desapropriado, aliás no processo de desapropriacião. Era os donos, ligados ao America, o time. Então tinhamos que sair de lá, aí voltamos para Betim para mais uns 9 meses (sem plantar muito) antes de chegar aqui. Em novembro 2005 fomos legitimzados e em Janeiro de 2006 nos fomos para cá [Nova União].

Interviewer:
E como está a situação jurídica aqui?

Antonio:
Nossa área já foi parcelada, se não tivesse a gente nem teria luz. Mas demorou demais, o parcelamento nosso saiu só em 2012 e a luz demorou mais 2 anos para chegar em 2014. Aí agora entramos no PRONAF [?]. Na época tinha só um gato.
E aí aconteceu o seguinte...a gente conseguiu e estamos morando 4 anos aqui. Plantando aqui nós últimos 4 anos. Porque infelizmente, as políticas brasileiras são muito ruins, principalmente quando é para beneficar os outros, a gente da clase mais fraca..nem falo pobre, porque tem muita pobreza de espírito pobre além do material.

Interviewer:
Quais políticas dessas que você falou que são ruins, você acha mais complicado?

Antonio:
No projeto da reforma agrária assim, se as coisas funcionaram como deveriam funciona o que que deveria acontecer..no momento de assentar o governo deveria imediatamente liberar um crédito para começar a trabalhar. Esse o critério inicial. Só que demorou mais que 2 anos para liberar, 2000 Reais na época. Esse crédito para que? Para comprar ferramenta, semente, comprar comida..não pode ficar sem comer, ne. Esse demorou um ano para ganhar e depois mais um ano para accessar o dinheiro porque as regras são muito criteriosas. Então fica muito complicado atender as taxa de juros quando o dinheiro não é liberado. E também é um valor muito baixo, não rende muita coisa. Nós compramos muitas coisas coletivamente para ter um dinheiro maior para comprar caixa de agua, motor e tal. Mais aí o principal para nos nem era o dinheiro, era liberar os documentos para parecelar a terra e poder ir para o lote.

Interviewer:
Antonio, só para entender, você com o parcelamento viram dono da terra?

Antonio:
Nos não somos dono, não. Nos só passamos a ser donos..como funciona. A parte da ocupação, começã com um boleto de occorência. Se o dono não chama a polícia, a gente chama a polícia. Aí o negocio vai lá pelo INCA, pelo ministerio público. Se os órgãos públicos tiveram interesse também poderia acontecer que o estado pega. Até antes do Lula entrar era assim: quando entramos numa terra e entramos no processo de desapropriações podiamos ficar na terra continuar plantando. Aí entra Fernando Henrique e ele criou uma medida provisória prohibindo qualquer tipo de ocupação. Para abrir um processo de negociação primeiro a área tinha que ser desocupada, depois tinha que ficar 2 anos sem ser ocupado se não para o processo. Isso foi um retrocesso para os movimentos das lutas pela terra. Mas não acabou com a luta. Aí entrou Lula e não acabou com a medida provisória nos dois mandatos e a Dilma também não. Então essa medida provisória continua até hoje.
Mas a gente entende, o movimento entende que no momento quando abre a negiciação, aí […] faz um laudo técnio geral que avalia a terra, vegetação, etc. Assim é uma regra que vale em todo o Brasil. A partir desse momento do laudo técnico, o estado vai ver se tem interesse. E aí vai ver, olha..aqui cabe 10 famílias. Aqui por exemplo cabem 44 famílias, mas o INCRA não liberou as 44, liberou 42 famílias só. Aí abriu o processos e o movimento tem uma empressas que entra e tirar os PDA (planejamento de desenvolvimento de assentamento), que fez e tirou a 42. Mas aí tem a burocracia e vai e vem e demorou muito e nessa época os advogados do INCRA, do ministerio publico entraram em processo contra a gente porque estava engarado [?] tanto. Foi que na hora de liberação de reserva legal, o técnico não quis assinar. E a situação não foi resolvi nesse momento. Na reunião com os órgãos públicos foi negociado, o instituto IEF [?] queria que 50% da área aqui seria reserva legal (onde não pode tocar nada e nem entrar na verdade). O INCRA então falou que não e queria 20% mais uns 5% de área remanesence. Então a advogada do instituto fez uma última resposta de 25% de reserva e mais 5% de

área remanecente. Ou vocês aceitem essa proposta ou...[?]. A conversa vai e vem, e então tá bom. […]
Ficou então com essa solução, está valendo..190 hectares, foi para 200 e tanto hectares de reserva, depois mais 130 hectares de APP, mais uns 15 hectares de estrada..mais não sei que. Mas vamos bater o martelo. Hoje são 42 lotes, mas na verdade o IEF [esse instituto] está dando pau em 9 lote, queria baixar de 42 para 33 lotes..isso, não, 33 não. Como vamos tirar 7 familias, não tem jeito. Então fela falou assim, vamos fazer assim...nem Chico nem Francisco. Ela propos então 25% de reserva, 5% de area remanescente – não pode fazer corte ralo, não pode fazer nada, pode fazer colheita, extractivismo..mas não consegue fazer muito colheita na mata fechada, ne. Não sei..só planta medicinal que serve..o resto não consegue colher não. Nas áreas remansecente pode fazer isso, criar [?], criar animal, mas só isso, nada mais do que isso. Então fazer o que...aceitamos, fechou.
Só agora o seguinte: vamos fazer um acordo aqui e o INCRA vai mandar imediatamente um equipe lá e refazer o projeto tudo de novo. Esquece o projeto e fazer de novo, vamos ver quantos lote vai dar. O pessoal do INCRA falou que ia fazer em uma semana, ficaram uma semana toda aqui no assentamento e mediram todo. Aí tá, sentamos quase dois dias aqui no galpão para fechar, olhando no GPS, no notebook e tal. Aí fechou em 36 lotes. Então era para tirar 9 lotes, mas ao final tirou só 3 lotes. [...] Tem uma área mínima por lote, ne. O que eles fizeram. Criou tres lotes grandes lá, porque a terra não dava para criar um lote..os lotes ficaram todos espalhados, uma pedaçinhos aqui, um mato aqui no meio e tal...deixa ver...aí bom, ne..fechou. Criou 37 lotes, aí o problema ficou aqui interno. A gente tinha que tirar 5 nomes [de famílias que ficam sem lote]. Temos alguns critérios, geralmente tem coisas que acontecem, tem gente que vem tem gente que fica..mexe aqui, conseguimos tirar e ficamos em 36, ficou até um lote sobrando.

Interviewer:
E nesse processo todo, quais seriam os maiores desafios para vocês e o que ajudou vocês? Ou seja quais obstaculos e que fatores ajudaram vocês

Antonio:
Olha, o principal obstáculo que a gente teve aqui..aliás teve o obstáculo da parte estadual e teve obstáculo nossa também..da questão orgânico e tudo, ne. Mas um dos principais obstáculos que tem é a danada da burocracia do estado. Porque essa burocracia atrasou o acesso aos recurso aos quais tivemos direito. Essa burocracia por causa disso, prejudicou muito internament a gente..porque gera diversas problemas...fica nessa história da pessoa “nossa, trabalho no meu lote, mas não sei se é meu lote”. Então, gera uma espectativa negativa nas pessoas, esse é um problema. Esse deveria ser um motivo para estimular a gente se organizar, mas tem um embate muito garnde ideológico nessa questão. Porque? Porque se em um lado temos um desafio com a qusetão dos meios de communicação social..porque as familias, o grupo não tem objetivo claro..não tem..tem uma dificuladade na questão de unidade. É um desafio, ne. Conseguir unidade num grupo de 40, de 37 familias, ne..na verdade pessoas são mais, ne..são mais que 100 pessoas, então você não tem um problema, você tem 100 problemas.

Interviewer:
E como você criar unidade?

Antonio:

Como que cria...num ambiente de muita dificuldade, dificuldade financiera das famílias. Porque mesmo estando na terra, as pessoas sabem assim “nossa não estou plantando minha terra aqui e amanhã não vou saber se minha terra está lá no outro lado e não sei se meu vizinho plantou lá também e se ficar para mim”. Ou seja, o certo seria o que..vamos plantar! Vamos plantar a área toda. Então amanhã a área que plantei fica para outro mas ele também plantou e eu vou ficar com a plantação dele. Então tem esse problema, não pode plantar qualquer coisa. Aí as pessoas não plantam e ficam na dependência do estado. E isso não é bom, a gente não defende essas coisas. A gente quer que as pessoas crescam, que as pessoas produzem o proprio alimento, que as pessoas tirem deles a proprio subsistencia.
Quando a gente fala em política de reforma agrária, não fala em política de reforma agrária para que as pessoas tem terra para morar. Para morar também, especialmente para morar, mas para produzir alimento, para garantir o propio susteno, para qualidade de vida..e para garantir diversas outras coisas. Porque a gente entende o seguinte. Quando o movimento ocupa uma área, entendemos que resolvemos o problema de moradia, resolvemos o problema de emprego, o problema de saúde, entendeu..teoricament resolvemos o problema de dinheiro. Estou lembrando agora esses 4 aqui.
Porque quando você produz de forma adequado, ahh...o problema ambiental, ne. É o quinto elemento que a gente resolve. Porque quando vc produz da forma certa, sem agrotoxicos e tal, vai ter um produto saudável. [...] Preserva as águas e tal. Então você consegue martelar 5 problemas com uma coisa só [ocupação de terra]. Mas então você fica com outros problemas. A questão do egoismo das pessoas, ne. Quando falo da questão do egoismo é o que? Na Europa – você sabe mais do que eu que é nativo de lá – a questão corporativista que surgiu principalmente na Italia, Espanha, Portugal..que são os paises mais pobres da Europa. Em nosso caso isso deveria ser um estimluo para as pessoas aprenderem a cooperar, aprendeream a ser solidário. Um grande potencial que tem na política da reforma agrária seria que a inclusão da cooperação, da economia solidária, a questão ambiental, dentro de outras coisas, ne. Mas quando você tem um grupão com essa política que temos aqui no Brasil, essa política que é..esse sistema muito egoista, infelizmente os meios de communicação social tem essa questão. Não estimula..a cultura brasileira, nem por cause dos meios, a propia nossa cultura não estimula as pessoas a cooperarem entre si, estimula muito mais o individualismo, a questão do eu, “eu em primeiro lugar, você no segundo”. Não é essa a metodologia capitalista?

Interviewer:

E no outro lado, que fatores ajudaram vocês nesse projeto?

Antonio:

Na verdade o projeto não tá realizado ainda. Está em andamento. Para nos é um processo. E quando a gente fala de processo, ele está cheio de altos e baixos, ne. Um elemento muito importante na minha avaliação são as parcerias. As parcerias, não só nesse caso, são super importante, as parcerias entre o campo e a cidade. Essa relação campo-cidade é muito importante. E aí nos perdemos em alguns aspetos aqui...a gente não conseguiu alinhar varias parcerias aqui na cidade. Porque não conseguimos alinhar? Aqui é uma cidade pequena, entendeu..onde tá muito enraizado, profunda a questão do coronelismo aqui. É muito profundo. É tanto que moramos 12 anos aqui e nem conseguimos quebrar os receios na cidade até

hoje. Se você chegar no Luisinho, no vizinho aqui, ele vai falar que o pessoal do assentamento é gente boa e tal, mas isso não é a maioria da população da cidade. Se chegar em outra pessao vai falar que o pessoal é todo preguiçoso e tal. Mas quando precisam de alguem para trabalhar muitos deles vem aqui procurando gente para trabalhar. Porque? Para pagar mais baixo que os outros.
E outra coisa. Um ganho que teve para todo mundo, foi o ganho da questão ambiental. Porque quando chegamos aqui em 2005, quase não tinha passarinho. Porque o pessoal cacava e pescava muito aqui, até hoje ainda tem só que agora diminiu muito. Porque a gente começou a falar com o pessoal na região que “olha, aqui não é para cacar, aqui não é para pescar”. Mas a gente entende que é um benefício que hoje tem tucano passando aqui hoje.
E porque aqu tinha um projeto de condomínio residencial e iam chegar uns 500 pessoas morando aqui, ia criar um problema ambiental enorme. Porque isso que o dono da fazendo queria fazer. 780 hectares de condomínio, que é nossa área aqui. Imagina 500 lotes de um hectar e meio cada um, 500 famílias, teriam que fazer banheiro, com estrada e todo, ia ser um impacto ambiental muito maior. Então se não for por o assentamento, ja seria desmatado tudo aqui. Você viu aqui no outro lado da estrada o cara plantou banana dentro da APP, até no beira do rio ele plantou. Aqui dentro não, aqui a maioria respeita as regras da APP e 90% dela está preservada. Pode ser que alguem colocou um animal, mas a maioria dela está preservada. Isso é bom. Por causa do assentamento aqui, muitos corregos lá embaixo não vão secar.

Interviewer:
Ajudou esse argumento [de preservação] para vocês ficarem aqui?

Antonio:
O grande argumento da reforma agrária, é a questão da proteção ambiental. E como o pequeno propriedade de agricultura familiar, o agriculturor familiar preservar mais a agricultura [?meio ambiente] que o grande produtor. Porque o pequeno por ter a relação mais próximo com a natureza, ele consegue entender a relação com os animais, as relações com uma serie de coisas. Não quer dizer que não mata cobra, ne..as vezes nem mostra, mas mata cobra, sim. Mas a questão é que preserva-se muito mais. Mata muito menos que mataria em outra condições. Caso por exemplo passa trator mata tudo que passa encima, ne. Aqui no caso da reserva [e com menos mecanização] preserva muito mais.

Interviewer:
Antonio, [...] para finalizar, tem alguma coisa do projeto que você gostaria destacar? Alguma coisa que ainda não foi falada e que você acharia importante de colocar ou adicionar?

Antonio:
Tem ,sim. Tem um desafio. Talvez seja o desafio maior da reforma agrária. Acho que é o desafio da informação. A gente aprende muito, mas infelizmente ainda tem um nível de analfabetização muito grande ao respeito da reforma agrária. Então o desafio da educação, ele é um desafio permanente na verdade.
Porque as pessoas tem um certa resistência a aprender. Infelizmente – quando você falou do Guilherme, ele foi na primeira ocupação nossa. Lembro dele assim

falar “Eu fui na primeira ocupação e tenho maior orgulho de dizer isso”. Aí ele, por meritos proprios, conseguiu estudar, se formar na academia, foi aos Estados Unidos, morou lá um tempo. Quando ele veio pra cá, ele resolveu voltar. Aí nesse tempo fora..eu acho interessante, sabe o que que é..muitas pessoas falam assim quando eu estou no meu cantinho, eu consigo enchegar só meu ninho aqui onde estou. Mas se não consigo sair da caixa, não consigo entender, não consigo ver os problemas. Aí a gente sai fora para sul de Minas, Vale do Rio Doce ou Jequitionha. E lá a gente ve os problemas delas, e eles chegando aqui vem os problemas da gente. [...] Então o desafio é tirar a gente da caixa. Abrir o cazulo....sair da zona do conforto.
As vezes acho que plantar um pedaçinho de roça aqui, e isso aqui está bom para mim. Mas não é só isso..quais são as consequências que isso vai ter para mim. Então vejo o desafio permanente da educação, da informação. E também acho que tem esse desafio de que as pessoas não entendem as questão da natureza, da preservação ambiental, essa relação do homem com a natureza. Porque mesmo que a pessao talvez fala assim “eu defendo a natureza” mas ele chega e acha que pode tirar..chega e quer tirar um coco aqui, mas tem que pensar nas consequências, ne. Uma árvore as vezes precisa 100 anos para chegar na altura onde ela estava. E nos sabemos que tem um grande potencial, de agrofloresta. Inclusive a gente tem essa proposta aqui, de produçãoi agroflorestal aqui na região. Mas tem que abrir a cabeza do povão, ne. [...]

Interviewer:
[continando falando sobre a questão agroflorestal, falando da historia de um produtor agriflorestal quem é conhecido em comum, não relacionado diretamente as questões, chegando na questão da certificação orgânica]
Vocês também estão querendo tirar uma certificação orgânica aqui no assentamento? E qual seria o custo?

Antonio:
Sim, estamos no processo. E é caro. Mas a legislação brasileira avançou nesse aspeto, só nesse, ne. Ela é rigida demais, mas a gente tem que se adaptar. E aí, agora [...] foi pensando um sistema de certifiação por sistema de participação e garantia [?]. Você conhece já? Então com a mudança da legislação agora isso em Minas tem, já tem no sul. [...] Chama Organismo de Controle Social, junta um grupo de 3-4 familias, no maximo 10 familias podem fazer. Então eu junto com meu vizinho ou até posso fazer com um cara lá em BH, longe. Então nós propios, entre os agricultores, podemos nos certificar. Tem uma lista de critérios e tudo para seguir. [...] Tem que ver a cadeia completa do alimento e anotar tudo, nota fiscal que temos que guardar agora para frente.
Então esse é um grande desafio para a gente também, porque é dificil conseguir orgânico. No contexto em que desfavorece, em que estámos discutindo liberação de veneno [no congresso], o orgânico é um desafio, mais um potencial também.

Interviewer:
Podemos fechar aqui e entrevista. Muito obrigado pela participação, Antonio. [...]

9.3 Consent Forms

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Jakob Sparn, M.A. from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) . I understand that the project is designed to gather information about academic work of faculty on campus.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.

2. I understand that most interviewees in will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by researchers from Century University. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be make. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.

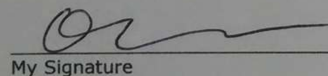
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

5. Faculty and administrators from my campus will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Behavioral Sciences Committee at the Century University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted through [information of the contact person at IRB office of Century University].

7. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.



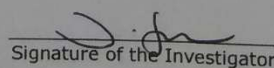
My Signature

31/10/2017

Date

OLIVIA NATHAN

My Printed Name



Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:
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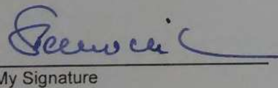


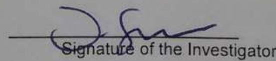
My Signature

18/12/2017

Date

Andreas Siemoneit

My Printed Name



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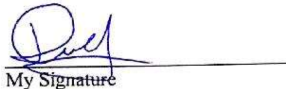


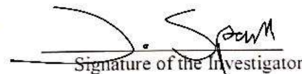
My Signature

03.04.2019

Date

David Caicedo Surralde

My Printed Name



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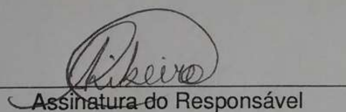
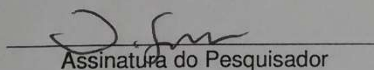
TERMO DE CONSENTIMENTO LIVRE E ESCLARECIDO

Concordo que ANTONIO RIBEIRO participar, como voluntário, do estudo que tem como pesquisador responsável o aluno de pós-graduação JAKOB OTTO WILHELM SPARN, do curso de economia da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), que pode ser contatado pelo e-mail jsparn@cedeplar.ufmg.br e pelos telefones (31) 98396 4250. Tenho ciência de que o estudo tem em vista realizar entrevistas com alunos e professores, visando, por parte do referido aluno a realização de um trabalho de tese de doutorado. Minha participação consistirá em conceder uma entrevista que será gravada e transcrita. Entendo que esse estudo possui finalidade de pesquisa acadêmica, que os dados obtidos não serão divulgados, a não ser com prévia autorização, e que nesse caso será preservado o anonimato dos participantes, assegurando assim minha privacidade. O aluno providenciará uma cópia da transcrição da entrevista para meu conhecimento. Além disso, sei que posso abandonar minha participação na pesquisa quando quiser e que não receberei nenhum pagamento por esta participação.



Assinatura do Responsável



Assinatura do Pesquisador

Belo Horizonte, 12 de dezembro de 2018