Beyond growth, capitalism, and industrialism? Consensus, divisions and currents within the emerging movement for sustainable degrowth

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Abstract

Under the banner of "Degrowth", recent years have seen the emergence of a new strand of emancipatory critique of economic growth and the search for social-ecological alternatives beyond capitalism and industrialism. Some even speak of a newly emerging social movement for Degrowth. While much has recently been written on Degrowth ideas, we know very little about the social base of this spectrum. The article presents results from an empirical survey among 814 of the 3000 participants of the 2014 international Degrowth conference in Leipzig, Germany – the largest Degrowth-related event so far. After introducing the reader to the history and some of the core ideas of Degrowth debates, it draws on the empirical results to argue that Degrowth can indeed be seen as an emerging social movement in Europe. It is shown that the Degrowth spectrum is united by a basic consensus for a 'reductive' turnaround in the societies of the Global North, as well as by consensual support for universalist, feminist, grassroots-democratic, and anti-capitalist ideas. Results of a factor analysis indicate a series of internal tensions and points of contention, the interplay of which is illustrated with reference to a cluster analysis. We conclude that, despite inevitable tensions and fissures within, Degrowth does provide the degree of consistency and shared identity needed to become a rallying point for a broader social movement addressing some of the most important challenges faced by European societies today.

Keywords: Degrowth; ecology; global justice; anti-capitalism; social movements

1) Introduction

As many older activists will recall from their own memory, the 1970s and 1980s saw a surge of broad-based debates about the *Limits to Growth* and the negative social and environmental consequences of economic growth (Muraca/Schmelzer 2017). Influential as they were for the formation of environmental movements and the thinking of activists in those years, this discourse mostly fell into oblivion only a few years later, making way for the concept of "sustainable development" (World Commission 1987), which was to dominate ecologically-minded debates for the following decades. In recent years, however, following the realization among many environmentalists that sustainability and development never were reconcilable in the first place, the more fundamental strand of opposition to growth has resurfaced in critical

academic debates and social movement discourses (see Latouche 2006; Martinez-Alier et al. 2010; D'Alisa et al. 2014). Despite the political and economic elites' insistence that Europe's crisis could only be overcome through strong and continuous growth, more and more Europeans now doubt that more growth will actually further global justice, preserve the planet, or even improve their own living conditions. Even Pope Francis has recently addressed the problem in his ecological encyclical "Laudato Si", calling for an end of growth in rich countries:

> "We know how unsustainable is the behavior of those who constantly consume and destroy, while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity. That is why the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth" (Francis 2015, 141).

What was translated as "decreased growth" here reads "decrescita" in the original Italian. Francis thus consciously used a political neologism that has been at the forefront of both a broadening academic and societal debate and an emerging social movement. Over the course of the last 10 years, it has spread from its origins in France ("décroissance") and other Southern European countries ("decrecimiento", "decrescita") to the rest of Europe and the English-speaking world ("Degrowth").

It is the spectrum of people currently rallying around this idea of sustainable and globally just economic Degrowth that we turn to empirically in this article. Our starting point is the surprising success of the Fourth International Degrowth Conference in September 2014 in Leipzig. This event attracted more than 3,000 participants from academia, social movements, political organizations and alternative economy projects, making it the biggest Degrowth-related public event so far. This colorful, even festive gathering assembled an exceptionally broad, organizationally and ideologically diverse spectrum, ranging from environmental NGOs through Transition Town initiatives to urban gardening projects and anarchist groups. Around and beyond the Leipzig conference, its three predecessors and its follow-up event in Budapest in 2016, academic work on Degrowth has multiplied. Simultaneously, practitioners and activists have linked the guiding idea of Degrowth to a multitude of practical projects and experiments, from urban gardening to eco-communities, as well as coordinated actions and struggles such as the 'Ende Gelände' anti-coal protests in Germany.[1]

Empirical research on Degrowth as a spectrum of practitioners and activists or as an emerging social movement in Europe is only starting. While Degrowth as a concept and the various intellectual currents within it are well studied (see for

[1] On these multiple links see the final publication of the two-year networking project *Degrowth in Movement(s)* at https://www.degrowth.de/en/dim/degrowth-in-movements.

example D'Alisa et al. 2014; Schmelzer 2015), little is known about the attitudes and practices of the people that identify or practically associate themselves with Degrowth by participating in projects or actions, engaging with Degrowth literature, or attending Degrowth events. Much of the existing work focuses on the academic strand of Degrowth and its function as an "interpretative frame" for various social movements and their practices (Demaria et al. 2013; see also Martínez-Alier 2012; D'Alisa 2013; Muraca/Schmelzer 2017). In addition, a handful of qualitative case studies on local Degrowth projects (Cattaneo/Gavaldà 2010; Kunze/Becker 2015; Burkhart 2015; Pailloux 2015) and on activist's perception of the Degrowth spectrum and its future (Holz 2016) have recently emerged. In Germany, in particular, there has recently been some debate about whether it is justified to speak of a German Degrowth movement – with no clear consensus emerging so far (Brand 2014; Adler 2015; Muraca 2014; Schmelzer 2015; Eversberg/Schmelzer forthcoming).

In this article, we aim to empirically substantiate the debate over whether the interpretative frame provided by Degrowth can actually be seen as providing the rallying point for a new social movement, or a new coalition of hitherto separate strands of movements. We analyze the common concerns, framings and narratives that hold this heterogeneous spectrum together, as well as the (potential) fault lines, strategic and ideological differences and underlying conflicts that run through it. And we draw out some implications for what activists and activist-scholars can learn for their struggles for alternative economies, global social and ecological justice, and for overcoming the capitalist system.

To do this, we draw on the results of a survey we conducted at the Leipzig conference, using a four-page standardized questionnaire handed out to all participants with the program booklet on arrival.[2] It was filled out by more than a quarter of those in attendance.[3] The questionnaire contained a series of 29 statements concerning growth, Degrowth and related issues that respondents were asked to rate by ticking one of five boxes on a scale from "completely disagree" to "completely agree". Most of the findings presented in this article are based on the responses given in this part, which we analyze both for individual statements and using multivariate methods, namely Factor Analysis and Cluster Analysis. The results, we hope, can provide important insights for Degrowth activists and practitioners, as well as their potential allies, since they enable a better understanding of the internal logics, dynamics and fractionings within this dynamic and heterogeneous spectrum of social and political activism.

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2 The paper questionnaire was provided in both a German and an English-language version, an online version that was offered as an alternative was also available in Spanish. The latter was only used a single time, while the German version was, at 669 (82%) by far the most widely used. The remaining 144 respondents answered the English version.

3 The questionnaire was returned by 814 participants, of whom 685 grew up in Germany, 127 in other (predominantly European) countries, and 2 made no statement. For details on sample demography, see Eversberg 2015.

A few words on our theoretical concept: We argue that what we call "the Degrowth spectrum" can adequately be analysed using Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *field*. Using this term does not presuppose anything about how internally heterogeneous, how highly organized, or how strictly or loosely bounded our object of study is, nor actually whether it is justified to speak of something as coherent as the term "Degrowth movement" would suggest. Conceiving of Degrowth as a field implies taking stock of the actors present in this 'structured space of forces and struggles', reconstructing the relations of proximity and distance, cooperation and conflict among them, and trying to identify the underlying 'forces and struggles' that shape these relations. The key 'force' to look out for is what Bourdieu termed the 'field effect': As in a magnetic field, this effect creates invisible 'lines' introducing discernible regularities into the heterogeneity of the social agents. The field effect cannot be directly observed – it must be read off indirectly from the orientations or 'position-takings' of those affected by it (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 243, 86; Bourdieu, 1996).

In this context, 'Degrowth' is, on the one hand, a code word for the common ground created by the field effect: The common belief or *illusio* ('sense of the game') that everyone in the field shares and that makes them consider growth critique and Degrowth-related activism worthwhile in the first place. On the other hand, it also establishes relative regularities within the relations among the actors affected by it: Seen as a field, a movement is always a space of struggles and disagreements about the *meaning* of the common goals and the appropriate *strategies* for achieving them. These ongoing arguments end up in lines of division or splits between different camps that individual actors then tend to more or less align with.

After a brief introduction to the core ideas and intellectual traditions of the Degrowth debate (Section 2), we will proceed to focus on the *unifying* aspect of the field effect. This is outlined by presenting what we decided to call the *basic consensus* among Degrowth activists (statements an overwhelming majority agrees on) (3.1.), as well as some issues on which clear majority positions are countered by relevant dissident minorities (3.2.). We then go on to investigate the divergences, splits and fractionings that the field effect creates on the basis of that common ground. The results of our Factor Analysis (4.1.) reveal several clearly identifiable tensions in the respondents' thinking, among which the most notable is between a romanticizing *critique of civilization* and a *rationalist progressive* position. Finally, we briefly introduce the five subcurrents identified in our Cluster Analysis, highlighting their positionings in relation to each of the tensions elaborated on beforehand (4.2.). In Section 5 we conclude by summarizing our main findings and drawing out some conclusions for future activism as well as for further research.

2) The Degrowth debate: origins and intellectual traditions

The critique of economic growth is almost as old as the growth paradigm and its precursors reach back at least to the 19th century, when social movements in

Europe and beyond – both progressive and conservative – fought industrialization, acceleration and alienation. The critique of economic growth and GDP as the cherished indicator of capitalist accounting became more explicit and highly prominent during the 1960s 1960s and 1970s, not only in the context of the global revolution of "1968", but also in established institutions and government circles. However, it receded to the background with the triumph of the concept of "sustainable development", which from the 1980s onwards dominated societal debates about ecology and development for decades (Fioramonti 2013; Dale 2012; Schmelzer 2016).

The Degrowth debate is the most radical strand of the new wave of debates on the need for a social-ecological transformation of high-income societies that resurfaced after the capitalist crisis of 2007/8. The term derives from the French "décroissance", which, although having risen to prominence only recently, was already coined in the early 1970s, amid heated debates about the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* and about what was then perceived as a crisis of the growth paradigm. In 1972, French political theorist André Gorz first used the term in a positive and normative sense, posing right away the question that remains fundamental until today: "Is the earth's balance, for which no-growth – or even degrowth – of material production is a necessary condition, compatible with the survival of the capitalist system?" (cited in Kallis, Demaria, and D'Alisa 2014, 1; Asara 2015, 25). In the following years, the term "décroissance" sporadically appeared in French debates (Duverger 2011). However, it was only in 1979, when the French translation of a collection of papers by Romanian-American ecological economist Nicolas Georgescu-Roegen – another important founding figure – appeared under the title *Demain la Décroissance: Entropie – Écologie – Économie*, that the term was established in its more specific meaning: as an alternative to the ideas of "steady state" and "zero growth" (on the history of Degrowth, see Muraca/Schmelzer 2017).

These French origins reveal the twofold conceptual tradition that the term has carried from the outset: It merged a scientifically based ecological critique of growth and of mainstream economic thought with a strand of socio-cultural criticisms of the paradigmatic escalatory logic of late capitalism. Among its foundational elements were the influence of the *Situationists,* a specific variant of heterodox socialist thought marked by a strong awareness of ecological issues (Cornelius Castoriadis, André Gorz, Ivan Illich, Herbert Marcuse), a strand of French personalism (Jacques Ellul, Bernard Charbonneau), and, finally, neo-rural movements inspired by the French tradition of left catholicism (D'Alisa et al. 2014; Martinez-Alier et al. 2010). These elements continue to provide the groundwork for the revival the term has seen since about the turn of the millennium – combined with one novel element that has its own roots in the antagonistic discourses of the 1970s: the critique of the Western model of development that found its medium of mass expression in the no-global, or – as it was called in France – the *altermondialiste* movement (Latouche 2006).

After its revival in France, the term and the ideas associated with it soon gained a foothold in other Southern European countries, facilitated by close cultural

proximities and some common inspirational sources. In the past decade and a half, *décroissance*, *decrescita*, or *decrecimiento* has developed not only into a core concept of vibrant intellectual and scholarly debates, but also into an interpretative frame that provides an intellectual link between the activities of grassroots initiatives for car-free cities or food cooperatives, anti-globalization mobilizations, protests against advertising or large-scale infrastructural projects, and environmental campaigns (Demaria et al. 2013; Martínez-Alier et al. 2010). The academic collective *Research & Degrowth,* founded in 2007, has initiated a series of international conferences that have since helped further internationalize and institutionalize Degrowth both as an academic concept and as an activist slogan. These gatherings started out with an initial two hundred participants in Paris in 2008, grew continually in the course of the follow-up conferences in Barcelona (2010), Montreal (2011) and Venice (2012), and culminated in the 2014 Leipzig meeting, attended by 3000 participants. The 2016 conference in Budapest, the first to be held in Eastern Europe and much more academic in style than the enormous Leipzig event, was intentionally limited to 500 participants. The international Degrowth community that has emerged around these conferences constitutes a heterogeneous platform summoning different academic disciplines, social movements, practical experiments and more or less antagonistic initiatives. What unites them is a common critical view of late capitalist societies' fixation on economic growth in both its structural (economic and institutional) and socio-cultural (modes of subjectivation, social imaginary, colonization of the lifeworld) dimensions.

While the critique of the escalatory fixation of capitalist modernity has a long tradition in Southern European countries, it has only recently gained traction in those Northern European countries that still exhibit noteworthy rates of economic growth – especially Germany, with its export-led growth regime based on stagnating wages, flexibilization, precarious jobs and high productivity. What unites 'Degrowthers' (as adherents of Degrowth have come to be called) across their national or regional varieties and internal divergences is, firstly, their rejection of the technological optimism of the 'sustainability' discourse dominant in the 1990s with its promises of 'decoupling' growth from environmental destruction. One key argument drawn from the critique of 'green growth' ideas is that ecological justice can only be achieved by ending the "imperial mode of living" of the Global North with its unsustainable levels of affluence at the expense of the South and the environment (Brand/Wissen 2013). This, the argument goes on, implies an end of economic growth in the global North and a reduction of the biophysical 'size' of the economy (D'Alisa et al. 2014).

The rejection of a policy focus on economic growth does not imply the dogma that nothing in the economy must expand. Rather, it opposes a specific narrow-minded understanding of economic growth that equates increases in Gross Domestic Product with greater social well-being, along with the corresponding societal institutions and imaginaries, ranging from capitalist accumulation to consumerism and acceleration. In the Degrowth vision, certain fields of economic activity may very well expand (such as the care economy, renewable

energies, sustainable agriculture etc.), while others that are socially or environmentally objectionable (such as the fossilistic sectors, individualized traffic, luxuries) should be phased out. The point is that these are to be conscious democratic decisions based on a thorough assessment of the social and ecological consequences.

The second commonality lies in the specific relation between theory and practice that Degrowthers aspire to, namely the attempt to develop "concrete utopias" (Muraca 2014) as alternatives to the growth diktat and to connect these to disobedient practices and alternatives modes of living (Burkhart et al. 2017). Degrowth activists argue that new, less resource-intensive modes of living that are sustainable in the long term and allow for a convergence toward equal possibilities for everyone on a global scale will not be invented by political elites or enlightened theorists. Rather, they must be found practically and in a grassroots democratic way. This, at least, is what proponents of Degrowth mostly argue when, drawing on such different sources as ecological and feminist economics, the critique of development policies, and debates about the "good life", they seek to conceptualize a social-ecological transformation for highly industrialized countries. But is this more than just the self-portrayal of a few intellectuals? And is there a similar understanding of the goals and aims of Degrowth among activists at the grassroots level of this collective search for paths toward transformation?

3) The 'common sense' of Degrowth: consensus and majority positions among activists

3.1. Some notes on the survey

The following sections are based on analyses of our survey participants' responses to the 29 statements on growth, Degrowth and related themes, which we asked them to rate on a scale from 1 ("completely disagree") to 5 ("completely agree") (or "don't know/can't say").[4] We designed these items to capture respondents' political beliefs, values, and moral convictions concerning a number of key questions that we regarded as particularly important for identifying relevant divisions as well as points of agreement within the Degrowth spectrum.

To reduce selection bias, we took a number of measures to make participation in the survey as easy as possible.[5] We remain cautious concerning the

4 For the full questionaire, see Eversberg 2015.

5 The questionnaire was handed out to all participants equally together with other conference materials, extra copies to replace lost ones were available at the registration desk, and we provided an on-line version that could be filled out after the conference. To increase the return rate, we reminded participants on several occasions (in plenary sessions, at lunchtime) to fill out and hand in their questionnaire. The comparison of our sample with available data on all those registered for the conference for some key attributes (gender, nationality, country they arrived from) does not suggest any strong distortions (see Eversberg 2015).

representativeness of the sample for the totality of conference participants (for example, we suspect that people with a background of academic education may have been more inclined to fill out the rather lengthy questionnaire), let alone for the Degrowth spectrum as a whole. Nevertheless, we are confident that the results provide an adequate picture both of some core beliefs that most of the participants share and of the tensions, divisions and disagreements that exist among them. We assume that the *range* of views present within the Degrowth spectrum is by and large fully and accurately captured by the results, while some uncertainty remains especially about the relative *strength* of the 'subcurrents' we will introduce in Section 4.2.

In a first, descriptive step, the remainder of this section focuses on those issues most respondents broadly agree on. We distinguish between two levels of agreement: First, we will present what we call the *basic consensus6* among Degrowth activists, consisting of the statements that only small minorities opposed (3.2.). After that, we discuss several statements on which clear majority positions exist, but are countered by relevant dissident minorities (3.3.).

3.2. The basic consensus: without economic contraction and the renunciation of amenities, capitalism and domination cannot be overcome

Taking stock of the responses given on the individual statements, we find that, despite a lot of controversy about many issues, there is a set of core ideas that were affirmed by an overwhelming majority. This consensus results from those seven statements that less than 100 respondents (12%) had rated contrary to the majority position (Figure 1). In essence, it is based on two central pillars:

The first is the belief that the promise of "green" or "sustainable growth" is dismissed as an illusion, that further growth is not an option for early industrialized countries, and that a reduction in material affluence will be inevitable. This results from overwhelming agreement to the statements

- "Growth without environmental destruction is an illusion",
- "Let's be honest: In the industrialized countries, shrinkage will be inevitable", and

6 The way we use the notion of 'consensus' here must not be confused with its common use in activist circles, where it refers to a mode of decision making intent on finding solutions everyone can 'live with'. Since a survey is not about decisions, and there was indeed no debate about the statements, there will never be a 100% agreement on anything. Instead, using the somewhat arbitrary criterion of less than 100 diverging answers, we singled out those positions that would likely have ended up 'actually consensual' in this or some similar form if they had been subject of debate and decision among the social core of the spectrum assembled here.

- "In the future, we will have to abstain from amenities that we have become used to".7

The second pillar concerns the contours of the transformative vision put forward against the fixation on growth: It is to be pro-feminist, pacifist, grassroots-democratic, and rooted in a critique of capitalism. An overwhelming majority

- *rejected* the statement that "*It's pointless to oppose capitalism* as long as there is no realizable alternative societal concept",
- supported the view that "*Female emancipation* needs to be an important issue for the Degrowth movement",
- took a strong stance *against violence* as a means for reaching a Degrowth society,
- and claimed that "*The change must come from below*."

The high degree of agreement reveals two things, even though the motives for refusing or agreeing to these statements might have been quite diverse: First, it testifies to the degree of unity in the perception of shared concerns and attitudes, which is central to the formation of a social movement (della Porta and Diani 2005). Second, it demonstrates that a large majority in the Degrowth spectrum shares a vision that is anti-capitalist (or at least skeptical of capitalism), pro-feminist, peaceful and grassroots-democratic in nature.

7 We were particularly surprised that this last item – although deliberately strongly worded – was affirmed by such a large majority.

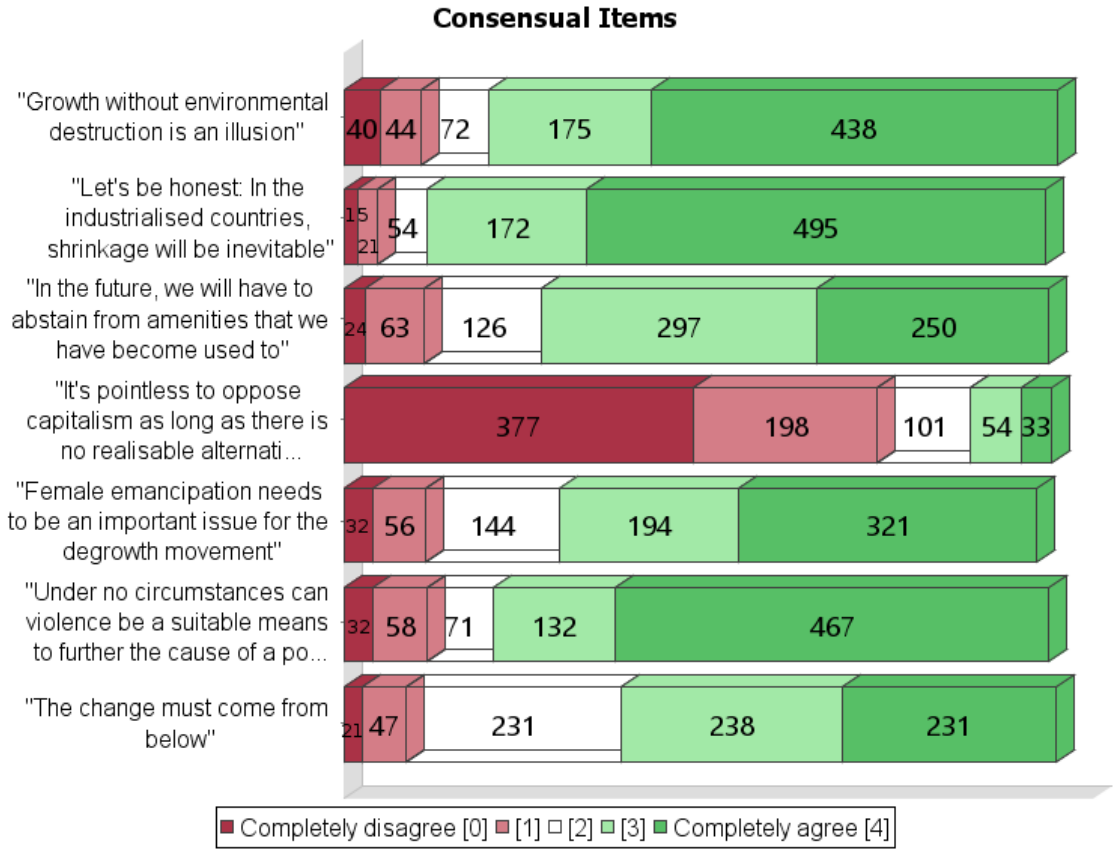

Fig. 1: Response patterns on the consensual items. Difference between the total for each item and the 814 respondents overall yields the respective nonresponse rate.

3.3. Contested majority positions

Next, there is a series of propositions that clear majorities support, but with sizable minorities disagreeing. We present three groups of such statements, relating to three broad aspects of Degrowth, and try to provide some interpretation concerning the implications of these results for the Degrowth spectrum. These interpretations should, however, be taken as more of a heuristic exercise that provides the background for the more detailed factor and cluster analyses in Section 4.

3.3.1. Lifestyle changes and self-transformation as starting points of transformative practice

Clear majorities favor several statements referring to the importance of personal lifestyles and everyday practices as points of departure for societal transformation. The motivations for supporting this transformation are not merely ecological, but rooted in an eco-social global justice perspective.

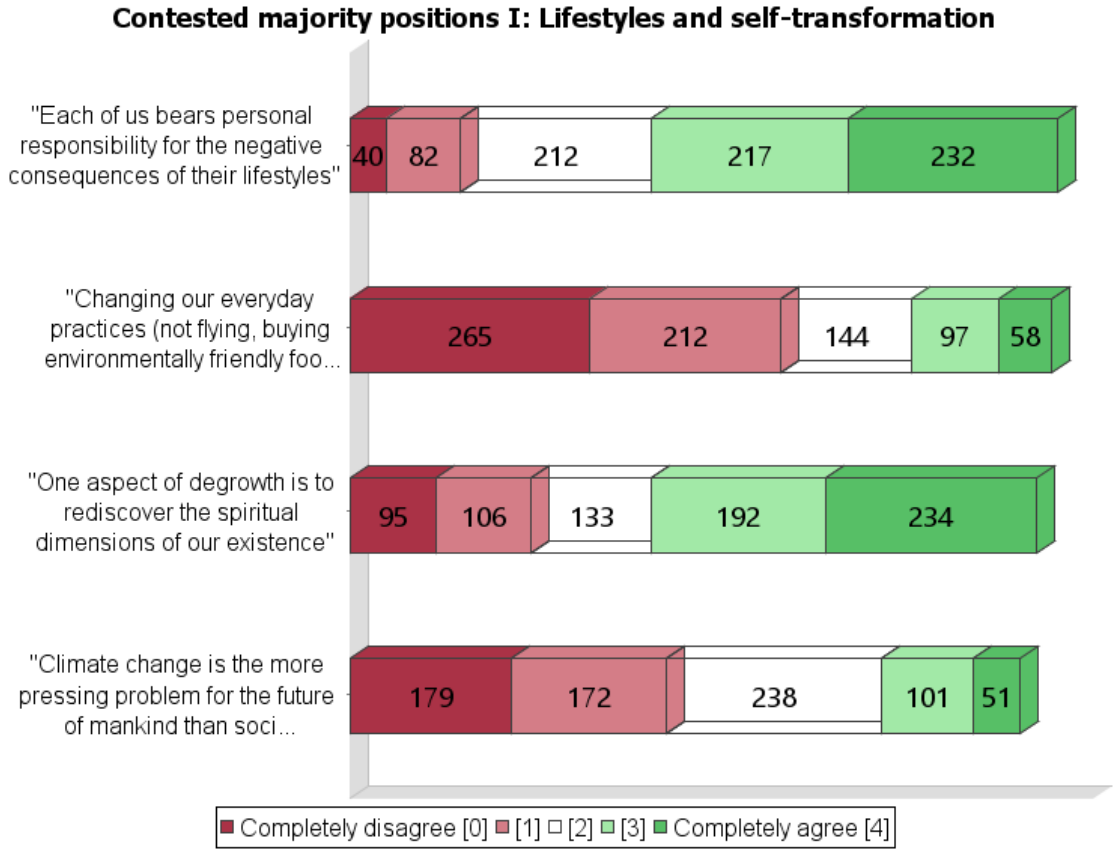

Fig. 2: Response patterns on items concerning lifestyles and self-transformation

More than half (55%) support the view that everyone is responsible for the consequences of their lifestyles, while an even larger majority (59%) objects to the statement that "Changing our everyday practices (not flying, buying environmentally friendly food) will not make the world a better place, since it does not question capitalism." This testifies to a refusal to simply blame "the system" or deflect questions of responsibility away from oneself by negating any capacity of the individual to contribute to change. However, this should not be taken to imply a belief that personal practices are the *sole* source of change, since, as we have seen, a critical view of capitalism and other structural factors of domination is part of the basic consensus. It may as well amount to a recognition of everyone's involvement in global structures of domination and injustice, of a degree of personal accountability and of the need to adopt the resulting responsibility. Instead of waiting for some future revolution to bring redemption, the large variety of small-scale and local transformative practices so characteristic of the Degrowth spectrum demonstrate that many want to start experimenting with change here and now and within their own lives. However, almost 20% of respondents reject the idea that everyday practice can be a starting point for real societal change. This points to a demarcation that is

highly typical of Degrowth debates, especially in Germany (Adler 2015; Schmelzer 2015) and that we will encounter again further on.

Interestingly, a majority of 52% also agree that Degrowth should be about rediscovering "the spiritual dimensions of our existence." 25%, reject this. Yet it seems doubtful that many of those agreeing to this statement gave it a narrow religious or esoteric meaning. Mostly, their understanding of "spirituality" seems to be accompanied by a critique of power and alienation, expressing a desire for a change in one's relations to nature and to one's own self. It provides an outlet for a fundamental critique of a disenchanted techno-capitalist society indifferent to one's emotional needs. Still, more in-depth qualitative research, such as focus group interviews, would be necessary to further clarify the meaning of this broad support for spirituality.

Furthermore, the majority's focus on practical self- and world-transformation is not merely ecologically motivated. Indeed, the fact that only a minority of 18% agree that "climate change is the more pressing problem for the future of mankind than social inequality" testifies to a broad, socially inclusive vision of what needs to change. For many, it seems to be a concern with fundamental global justice that requires economic contraction in the Global North, which is more in line with "just transition" conceptions (e.g. Brand/Wissen 2013; D'Alisa et al. 2014). Still, almost 19% do consider climate change more important than social justice – a tension we will return to later.

3.3.2. The necessity and difficulty of a social-ecological transformation

Some majority positions concern the characteristics of the envisioned transformation. Half of all respondents agreed that "If things don't change, western societies will collapse within a few decades", while 22% rejected this idea. And a relative majority sees the necessary transformation as very fundamental: 46% support the statement that "anything short of revolutionary change will not suffice to overcome our society's fixation on growth", with only 22% disagreeing.

Both claims demonstrate that participants conceive of Degrowth less as a purely ethical critique and more as an attempt to contribute to a far-reaching transformation that is seen as a necessary condition for future human well-being. The general tendency among Degrowth activists is to envision this transformation by starting from one's own social position and subjectivity as a site for experimenting with emancipatory ways of overcoming the fixation on growth. The alternative seems to be: 'Degrowth by design – or by disaster'. And to a relative majority, averting disaster amounts to nothing short of "revolutionary change"...

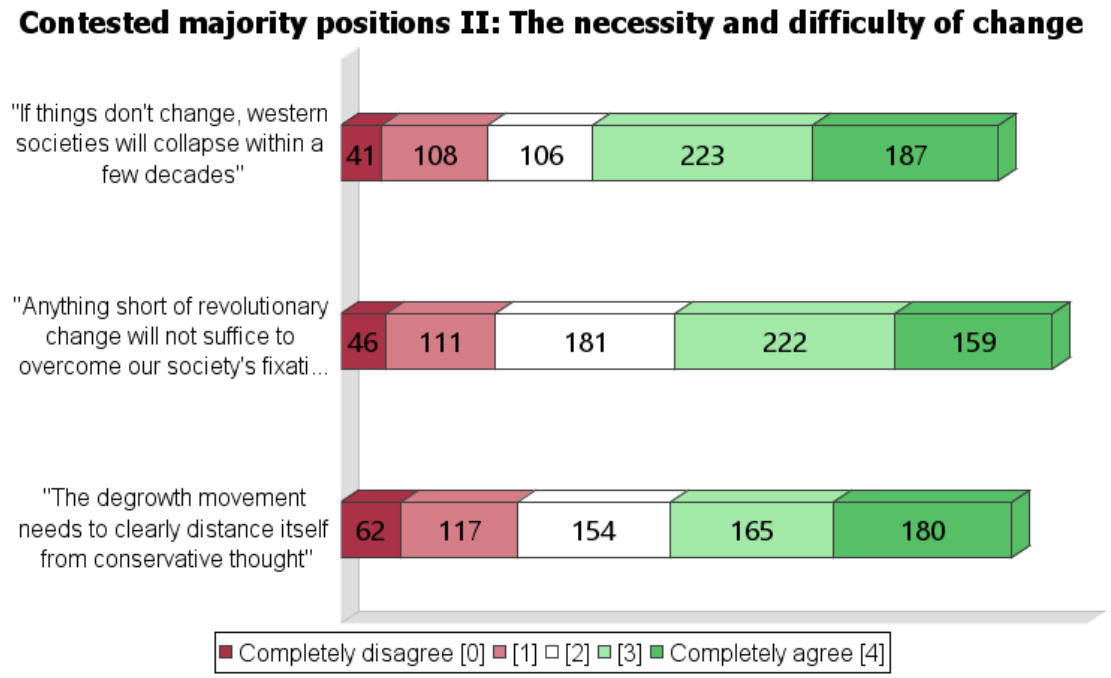

Fig. 3: Positions on the necessity and difficulties of the transformation

The ambition to prevent catastrophe through revolutionary change has implications for the self-positioning and the willingness for coalitions within the political sphere: A relative majority (46% of all respondents) champions a clear distancing of Degrowth from conservative ideas, while 22% object to such a clear demarcation. This is evidence that the larger part of the Degrowth spectrum tends to situate itself within the political left, although there is a sizeable current that, while not necessarily sympathizing with conservatism, objects to drawing such clear boundaries.

3.3.3. Type and direction of the transformation

Other contested majority tendencies concern the visions of the type and direction of the transformation toward a society without growth. While a narrow overall majority (just over 50%) reject the notion that the automobile industry will still be around 20 years from now, almost as many respondents (48%) contest the proposition that cities will have to be "largely dismantled". Both views – seeing car traffic and large industrial infrastructures as expendable and wanting to preserve urban settlement structures – may be related to the fact that 60% of respondents live in cities above 100.000 inhabitants and only very few work in the manufacturing sector.

While a relative majority (47%) supported the proposal to "abolish the interest based monetary system", the number of non-responses on this particular statement was strikingly high (200 or 25%). Obviously, many felt unsure about the meaning of this question or found it hard to judge, implying also that those

that did answer may have understood it in many different ways. We thus hesitate to derive anything from this result other than that many respondents seem to have felt that "something is wrong with the way money works".

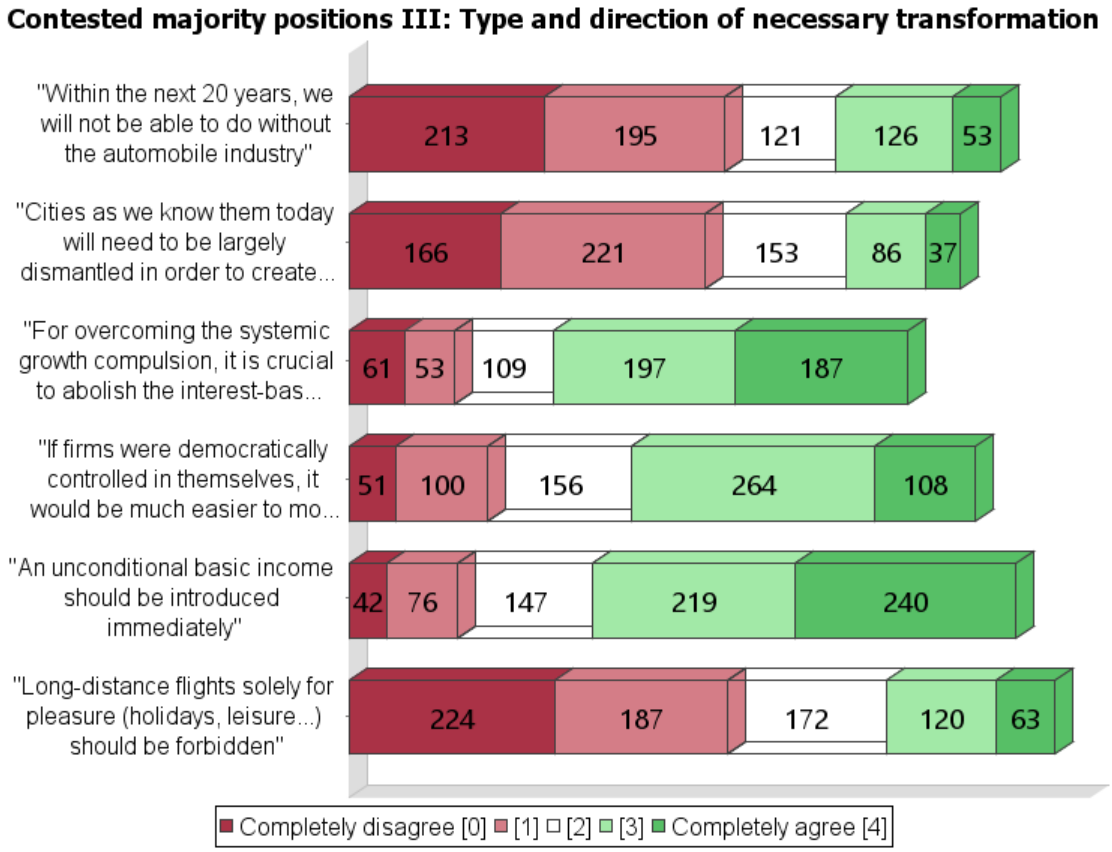

Fig. 4: Positions on the type and direction of the transformation

Furthermore, a relative majority (46%) advocated the democratization of firms as a means to "move away from growth". The basic democratic and practical approach and the distrustfulness of central coordination expressed by all these results is also reflected by the fact that restrictive measures to enforce the necessary changes find little support. Rather, most seem to hope that change will come about through responsible personal decisions, the autonomy of which should further be strengthened and protected by society. In this vein, the demand for an immediate adoption of a basic income finds very strong support (56%), while banning long-distance flights solely for pleasure is rejected by a narrow absolute majority.

These responses show that, while everyday social practices serve as the starting point for societal transformation, there is also support for broader societal reforms aimed at enabling a less resource-intensive lifestyle. At the same time, these majority positions do encounter significant dissent, indicating the limits of the approach of starting from one's own modes of living.

4. Tensions and Divisions in the thinking of Degrowth supporters

So far, we have only considered the patterns of responses on individual items. In this section, we turn to the typical patterns or combinations of responses to different statements in order to reveal underlying tensions and disagreements that extend beyond the reach of any single-issue question. To do this, we draw on two multivariate statistical methods: Factor Analysis (4.1.) and Cluster Analysis (4.2.).

4.1. Tensions: Factor Analysis

To identify systematic differences and divisions within the typical response patterns, we conducted a Factor Analysis to examine the regularities in participants' responses on all 29 statements.[8] Factor analysis looks at 'typical' combinations of answers on different questions that often go together in the data. These are used to 'compress' as much of the overall variance (degree of heterogeneity) as possible into a smaller number of new variables, called 'factors.' Each factor can be considered a synthetic 'fake statement' made up of portions of several of the original statements. The nine factors we identified (Table 1) summarize the most common patterns in which the positive or negative evaluations of individual statements were found to go together in the dataset. The factors reveal underlying dimensions of respondents' expressed attitudes that can be interpreted as "core beliefs" or "character traits." Based on the results, each respondent is assigned factor scores that indicate how they would have responded to the combined 'fake questions'. Since each statement could be agreed to or rejected, a negative factor score indicates opposition to said synthetic statement, or agreement to its opposite. In other words, every factor spans a continuum between two extreme positions. These positions, and thus the meaning of the factor, can be read off from the statements that make up the factor and the strength of their (positive or negative) contributions, while the factor scores allow each individual (or group) to be located somewhere along this continuum.

8 Some technical details: We ran a Principal Component Analysis (PCA, a variant of Factor Analysis), using Varimax rotation for optimising the results. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure, which allows an assessment of the sample's suitability for a factor analysis, is at .765, a reasonably good value for an analysis using this many variables. Bartlett's test for sphericity indicates that the null hypothesis of total non-correlation among all variables can be dismissed with certainty (p=.000). The procedure produces nine factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 (i.e. explaining more variance than any single variable/item), which, after rotation, account for 3.9% (Factor 9) to 8.4% (Factor 1) of the overall variance within the data. The commonalities – the shares of the variance in each individual variable explained by the factors – exceed the commonly cited minimum of .3 for all statements. The average commonality is .504, meaning that the nine factors extracted explain 50.4% of the variance among the 29 statements.

In our following interpretation we focus on the first four factors,[9] which, taken together, explain 26% of the differences in respondents' answers to all 29 questions. We will also briefly address Factors 5 to 7, as they reveal some further interesting fault lines and tensions helpful in interpreting the five currents of the Degrowth spectrum presented in the following section.[10]

9 Based on their absolute eigenvalues and inspection of the screeplot.

10 Following established methodological standards, our interpretation of the factors takes those statements into account that charge (positively or negatively) by more than 0.5 on the respective factor. In addition, statements charging between 0.3 and 0.5 are considered if the respective item does not contribute more strongly to any other factor.

Rotated Component Matrix[a]

	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No growth without environmental destruction	-.120	.171	-.305	.405	.214	.339	.135	-.122	
Responsibility for own lifestyle	.329	.144			.113	.542	.101		
Dismantle cities	.513			.379			.255	.107	
Previous generations	.667	-.106			.174				
Opposing capitalism is pointless		-.263	.548		-.159	.225	.239		
Democratic firms	.145	.158						.765	
Distance from conservatism	-.110	.166		.656			.132	.113	
Harsher distributional conflicts	.161	-.285	.356	.279	.417	-.190		-.335	-.108
Collapse within coming decades	.450	.129			.189		.204	.115	
Back to ‚natural place'	.570	.191		-.145		.123	.220		
Auto industry remains important	-.152	.102	.576					-.114	-.181
Female emancipation			-.117	.537	.110		-.368		.144
Violence is no means						.667			
Everyday behavior brings no change				.564	-.131	-.283		-.246	
Revolutionary change	.129	.434		.207		-.490	.218		
Ban long-distance flights	.166		-.269	.213	.130	-.118	.558	.128	
Climate change more pressing than inequality			.170				.643		
Problem is the negative consequences		-.205	.492				.145	.410	
Basic income		.521		.173	.122	-.120	-.230	.152	
Shrinkage in North necessary		.181	-.303		.595				
Rediscover spirituality	.659	.146		-.129			-.217		
Abolish interest-based monetary system	.374	.472				.111		.170	-.319
Degrowth Party	.149	.268				.108	.189	.197	-.517
Belief in growth	.148	.549				.369	.187		.122
Technology as a precondition for Degrowth	-.202	.206	.569					.136	.236
Change from below	.147	.181		.153					.761
Growth kills creativity	.426	.458		.213					
Refrain from amenities	.143				.768				
Directly feel negative consequences	.209	.288	.241	-.220	.427		.276		

Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalisation.

Relevant positive contributions marked in green, negative ones in red.

Reading example: The statement that "To live more sustainably, we should remember and revive the lifestyles of previous generations" contributed two thirds of the weight of a single statement to the construction of the first factor, with a positive response contributing to a positive factor score.

a. Rotation converged after 16 iterations.

Table 1: Rotated component matrix of the Principal Component Analysis

Factor 1: Critique of Civilization vs. Modernist Progressivism

The first factor captures what seems indeed to be a central dividing line within the internal dynamics of the Degrowth spectrum. The statements that contribute to it all refer to issues of civilization and progress. The strongest contributing item (.667) is the call to revive "the lifestyles of earlier generations", followed by the claim that Degrowth includes rediscovering spirituality (.659) and the very controversial statement that "Man should return to his (and her) natural place in the world" (.570).[11] Also contributing slightly above 0.5 is the claim that cities will need to be "largely dismantled". Finally, the expectation that western societies will collapse if no fundamental change occurs has its strongest contribution (.45) on this factor.

In sum, a positive score on this factor expresses a fundamental skepticism of industrial civilization, a rejection of technological notions of progress, and a desire for a "return" to a more "natural" lifestyle. Conversely, respondents with a negative score tend to reject such ideas in favor of a rationalist, 'disenchanted' world view and an affirmation of civilizational progress: Cities and the associated cosmopolitan lifestyles are regarded as cultural achievements worthy of preservation, romanticizing views of nature or traditional ways of life are rejected as regressive and at odds with emancipatory ideals, as are esoteric or religious views as well as expectations of civilizational collapse.

Read both ways, the core disagreement described by this factor is only secondarily about respondents' evaluations of technology. Primarily, it is between positive and negative stances on modern Western civilization as a set of material, cultural and mental infrastructures. It separates those that *dismiss* any positive notion of progress along with the fixation on growth from those struggling to separate the two and *redefine* progress in ways allowing for a non-escalative or "reductive modernity" (Sommer/Welzer 2014).

Factor 2: Voluntarist Idealism vs. Sober Materialism

The second factor concerns the question of what it is that drives growth and change. Its positive variant is most strongly characterized by agreement to the statement "Except our own belief, there is nothing that forces us to go on with the madness of growth" (.549) and to the demand for a basic income (.521). Weaker, but still relevant are the contributions of the call for abolishing the interest-based monetary system (.472) and the claim that growth has "killed off people's creativity" (.458). Furthermore, the statement that only "revolutionary change" can end growth has its strongest positive contribution here (.434).

A positive factor score thus indicates that someone locates the key driver of growth, but also the crucial starting point for change, in people's subjective

11 This item received a singularly high number of nonresponses (300/37%), as well as numerous handwritten comments on the paper questionnaire such as "what's that supposed to be?" Obviously, many felt they could not answer because they rejected the implicit premise that such a ‚natural place' even exists. This effect was indeed intended by us in opting for this wording.

attitudes and everyday practices. It expresses the 'individualist' assumption that 'growth' is merely the sum of everyone's individual practices and that everyone could just as well start 'undoing growth' if only they became conscious of this. This entails a very positive assessment of the chances for far-reaching change, since it would follow that such change could come about quickly by way of political reforms (basic income, monetary reform) once those holding power and responsibility woke up to realize the need for it. The "revolutionary change" advocated thus mainly invokes a revolution of thought in the sense of Latouche's (2006) 'decolonization of the imaginary', which would more or less automatically pave the way for far-reaching societal transformation.

We call this attitude *voluntarist* because it assumes that everything could change immediately if only people wanted it (having realized it is in their 'true interest'), and an *idealist* one because it expects changed ideas to directly entail changes of societal structures. In addition, the stances on the items about creativity and basic income suggest a close connection with a critique of *alienation*: growth is negatively identified with the heteronomy and pressure exerted to enforce it, while liberation is sought in regaining sovereignty and space for creativity through instruments such as the universal basic income.

The counter-position, marked by a negative factor score, advances a *materialist* (in the philosophical sense) perspective against this view. From this 'holistic' vantage point, 'growth' is not the mere sum of individual practices, but the product of entrenched societal structures functioning largely beyond the individual's will, which cannot be easily left or abandoned and are defended by powerful interests. It is these interests, and the relations of power and domination constituting them, that respondents with a negative factor score aim at with their critique and that they identify as inherent or practical constraints to overcoming growth (quick revolutionary change is unrealistic, immediate far-reaching demands are pointless). In sum, thus, the negative version of this factor indicates mainly a disillusioned or *sober* vision of the prospects for social change, centering on the power of entrenched social structures.

Factor 3: System-Immanent Techno-Optimism vs. Critique of Industrialism

A positive score on factor 3 indicates a comparatively techno-optimistic attitude, coupled with a relatively positive view of capitalism. Most strongly positively contributing are the statements that "we will not be able to do without the automobile industry" within the next 20 years (.576), that a high stage of technological development is an important precondition for the transition to a post-growth society (.569), and that "it is pointless to oppose capitalism" without any coherent alternatives at hand (.548). While the latter does not necessarily imply explicit approval of capitalism, it does suggest an acceptance of the capitalist social order as the frame within which any realistic change will have to take place for the time being. This moderate or 'pragmatic' stance is also expressed by affirmation (just below .5) of the statement that "the critique of growth is less about growth as such as about its destructive effects". Although

not significant technically, the negative contributions (just above .3) of the consensual items that "growth without environmental destruction is an illusion" and that shrinkage will be inevitable in the North neatly fit in with this. Obviously, the trait referenced by this factor involves a desire to distance oneself from what is perceived as an overly radical, fundamentalist opposition to growth and capitalism. The last statement with a relevant contribution is the expectation that a shrinking economy will bring harsher distributional conflicts, indicating a concern that social justice will be much harder to achieve without growth. In sum, a high positive factor score places a respondent at the fringes of the Degrowth spectrum, indicating that they are more inclined to ideals of ecomodernism or 'green growth'.

In contrast, negative scores point to a harsh critique of capitalism, which highlights neither alienation nor inequality, but decidedly focuses on technology: Rejecting capitalism is seen as sensible, the automobile industry as obsolete, and a high level of technological development is interpreted as more of a hindrance for a post-growth society. Growth is rejected head-on as a matter of principle, while economic contraction is seen as unavoidable or even desirable and not necessarily associated with escalating distributional conflicts. herein essence, this is a radical critique of capitalist industrialism as a mode of living dominated by technological systems that are not merely in the wrong hands, unjustly distributed or inappropriately used, but inherently problematic and harmful for social cohesion.[12]

Factor 4: Structural Critique of Domination vs. Reformist Conservatism

Factor 4 captures the tension between a radical, revolutionary stance against all forms of social domination and a 'pragmatic' concern with 'small steps' within existing institutions. Its positive variant is most strongly characterized by support for a clear distancing of Degrowth from conservative thought (.656), followed by the claim that "female emancipation needs to be an important issue for the Degrowth movement" (.534). Another element is the belief that "changing our everyday practices will not make the world a better place, since it does not question capitalism" (.564). This indicates a structure-oriented thinking that locates the starting point of change in struggles against societal structures of power as such rather than in individual social practice. Furthermore, the fact that the statement "growth without environmental destruction is an illusion" also contributes to this factor (.405) suggests that society's relations with nature are also subject to this critique of structures of domination.

Scoring negatively, Factor 4 stands for an openness to conservative ideas, or at least to debate with conservatives, for a focus on individual daily practice, and

12 Such fundamental critique of industrialism and large-scale technology is also central in the writings of some of the key intellectual forerunners of the Southern European décroissance movement, such as Ivan Illich (1998) and André Gorz (2009).

generally for a shying away from the more radical elements of Degrowth thought. We call this stance *reformist* because of its intention to seek change mostly on a small scale, in little increments and without antagonism, and *conservative* because it aims to preserve the existing overall structure of social relations.

Factors 5 to 7

The explanatory power of Factors 5, 6, and 7 is notably lower than that of the first four, and they receive contributions from only a few closely related items each. We still want to briefly mention them because they do provide hints at relevant divisions in the field of Degrowth thought and activism that can enhance our understanding of the relations between the five currents we will introduce in the following section.

Factor 5: Denouncing Amenities vs. Modernist Progressivism. It captures the tension between insistence on the necessity of renouncing the amenities of a resource-intensive and destructive 'Northern' lifestyle and a contrary position that is more focused on questions of wealth distribution. The statements contributing to it are "In the future, we will have to refrain from amenities that we have become used to" (.768) and "Let's be honest: In the industrialized countries, shrinkage will be necessary" (.595) as well as, to a weaker degree, the expectation of harsher distributional conflicts in case of economic shrinkage (.417).

Factor 6: Individualist Pacifism vs. Revolutionary Conflictualism. Its positive version includes a rejection both of violence as a means of political struggle (.667) and of revolutionary change in general (-.490), as well as an ethics of individual accountability for the consequences of one's personal lifestyle (.542). Thus, respondents with high positive factor scores assigns a high degree of responsibility to the individual for contributing to a transformation that must, by any means, be nonviolent and occur without a revolutionary rupture. A negative score indicates a revolutionary orientation favoring a sharp rupture with the structural imperatives of growth that may not be possible without violent conflict.

Factor 7: Eco-Authoritarianism vs. Libertarian Egalitarianism. Positive scores on this factor are constituted by prioritizing the challenge of climate change over the problem of social equality (.643), coupled with support for the idea of banning long-distance flights for leisure purposes (.558). Pointedly, this amounts to an eco-radicalism escalated to the point of supporting the authoritarian enforcement of what one considers binding ecological imperatives. In contrast, negative scores testify to a refusal to play out ecological demands against concerns with social justice and personal autonomy.

4.2. Divisions: Five currents within the Degrowth spectrum

As the results of the factor analysis have shown, the Degrowth spectrum is not only united by a broadly shared consensus, but also internally heterogeneous and crisscrossed by multiple tensions concerning its goals and strategies. To help us gain a better understanding of how these tensions and disagreements play out within the political "landscape" of the spectrum, we now turn to the last step in our investigation. Using the method of Cluster Analysis[13], we have identified five currents that not only differ in terms of their ideas and beliefs, but are also distinct in terms of social composition and political and day-to-day practices. While these five currents can be characterized in detail with reference to their responses on each of the 29 statements in the survey (see Eversberg/Schmelzer 2016), it is also possible to describe each of them, as well as the proximities and distances between them, in terms of their respective scores on the factors examined above. Fig. 5 graphically summarizes this, portraying each Cluster by its specific combination of the 'character traits' captured by the factors.

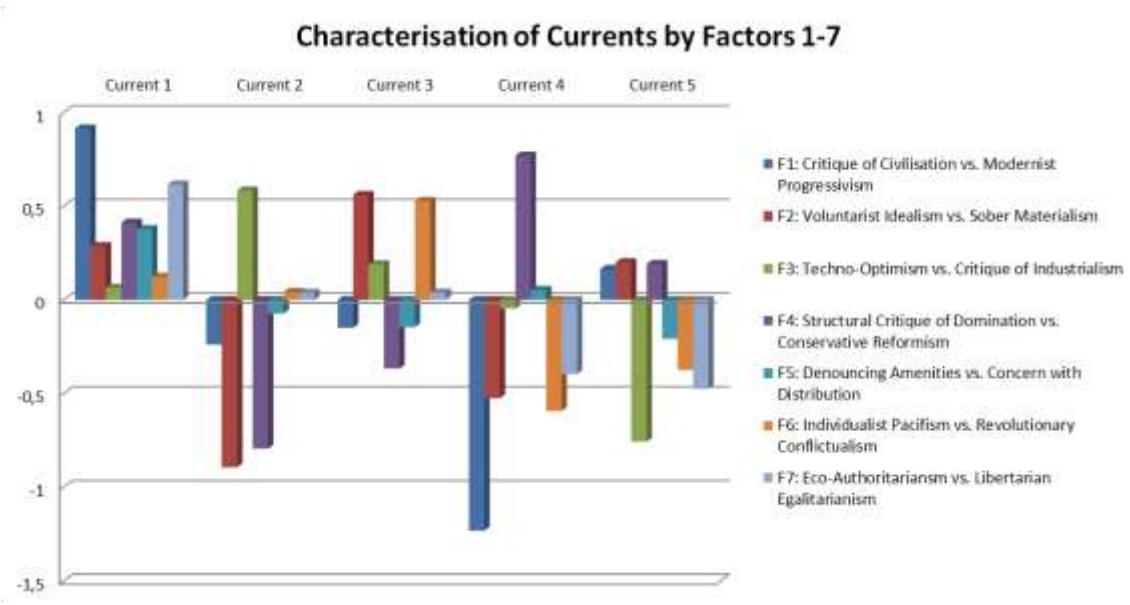

Fig. 5: Characterization of Currents by Factors 1-7

1. Sufficiency-Oriented Critics of Civilization: 22% of survey participants belong to this current, which is characterized by positive scores on *all* factors, but most

13 Cluster Analysis is a method that is suitable for identifying *groups* that share similar basic orientations or worldviews among the respondents that answered to a specific set of questions. We conducted this second multivariate analysis (specifically, a *k*-means Cluster Analysis) using, again, the responses on all 29 statements as a basis. The results are documented in detail elsewhere (Eversberg/Schmelzer, forthcoming). Here, for reasons of space, we restrict ourselves to a very short, condensed presentation.

strongly by its biting *critique of civilization* and, to a lesser degree, its inclination to support *eco-authoritarian* policies. Many of these respondents are older activists, often with long-standing experience in social, and particularly environmental, movements. Based on a vigorous ecological motivation, they strongly affirm the statements stressing closeness to nature, spirituality, or a revival of earlier generations' lifestyles. Their activism is directed towards building sufficiency-oriented "parallel societies" (Adler 2015) as nuclei of an alternative way of life. After the collapse of industrial societies that many of them expect, they envision that these communities could become a model for a societal 'reset'.

2. Immanent Reformers: The second current combines a stark *sober materialism* with an almost equally strong *conservative reformism,* combined with the highest *system-immanent techno-optimism* among all currents. Respondents in this group (19%) actively use the newest technologies, travel frequently, often belong to political parties and student initiatives, and feel comparatively little connection with social movements. This group stands at the techno- and progress-optimistic pole of the Degrowth spectrum, and is the most 'reformist' (in terms of operating within the existing institutions). They reject anti-civilizational skepticism, spirituality and regressive orientations, but also express little support for revolutionary upheaval and anti-capitalism. They seek thorough societal change between the poles of "green growth", ecomodernist visions, and reforms that would transcend growth from within existing institutions. As they diverge most strongly from the Degrowth consensus sketched above, we do not consider this current a part of the Degrowth spectrum in its entirety. Yet, precisely for that reason, its members could potentially be crucial actors in mediating between the Degrowth movement and institutionalized politics, or could act as moderate disseminators for its ideas.

3. Voluntarist-Pacifist Idealists: People in this current (23%) typically score high on *voluntarist idealism* and *individualist pacifism,* and they also tend toward a *conservative reformist* attitude. They are on average relatively young, two thirds of them are female, and many have little experience with social movements and political activism. Most of their views don't differ much from the average of the survey participants – their most striking single position is the above-average endorsement of a Degrowth party, presumably signaling a desire for an established public mouthpiece of their beliefs. They locate the problem with growth mainly in people's day-to-day habits, which they think everyone could change right away if only they understood. This is coupled with a particularly strong pacifism and a general avoidance of conflict. Their ideal of a transformation is one in which Degrowth prevails simply by way of an evolutionary expansion of day-to-day behavioral change from below. We assume that this cluster is in part a transitory state that many young sympathizers pass through before forming strong opinions and ending up in a different cluster later in life.

4. Modernist-Rationalist Left: This group has some very clear-cut views, especially its *very* strong *modernist progressivism* and its staunch *structural*

critique of domination. It also scores high on *sober materialism*, *revolutionary conflictualism and libertarian egalitarianism*. Its members are primarily male, strongly concentrate in large cities, and account for only 13 percent of respondents. They often have a long history of activism, which mostly involves relatively "traditional" forms of left politics: a comparatively large share are party members, and a particularly large majority often participates in demonstrations. Their identification with social movements is weaker than average, while their core stances are almost the mirror image of the first current: They believe in progress, sharply refuse spirituality, romanticization of the past and conservatism, and advance a critique of capitalism based on structure-oriented arguments and issues of social justice rather than ecology. They consider a through critical analysis a central precondition for any political practice, and taking action without such theoretical groundwork easily appears to them as naïve, futile, or even dangerous. This is another current that can probably not in its entirety count as part of the Degrowth spectrum. The part that does articulate its positions "from within", however, is immensely important in shaping the Degrowth discourse.

5. Alternative Practical Left: The fifth current is in some ways an antagonist of the second, expressing a particularly vocal *critique of industrialism* and leaning toward both *revolutionary conflictualism* and *libertarian egalitarianism*. It comprises 22% of respondents, with an above-average percentage of people living outside Germany and a strong rootedness in an activist alternative milieu. Among this group, participating in direct actions or living in alternative housing projects are far more common than on average. They strongly identify with social movements and are highly networked within the Degrowth environment. They typically express a pattern of mostly radical views which, however, cannot clearly be located on either side of the divide between the critique of civilization (Current 1) and modernist-rational leftism (Current 4), but rather crisscross it. To them, openness to spirituality and rejecting the romanticization of nature, structural thinking and a critique of industrial society are no contradictions, but go hand in hand. This current stands for an *anarchist*-inspired critique of growth and capitalism that agrees with the fourth current in stressing aspects of social justice, while being more in line with current 1 in focusing on experiences of *alienation* caused by the perpetual pressure to expand. Respondents from this current do consider personal everyday practice a leverage point for transformative action, while avoiding a moralist stance based on an individualist ethics of responsibility. Their practical dissent and experimentation with counter-conduct aims less at the formation of parallel structures than at transforming one's own growth-determined subjectivity and, as a long-term consequence, society as a whole. The bottom line is the vision of bringing about *revolution by way of practical self-transformation*.

5) Conclusions

The findings presented in this article are based on the first large-scale empirical survey among activists of the Degrowth spectrum. What insights can

researchers and activists within and beyond this spectrum gain from this investigation? What lessons does it hold for those struggling for a global social and ecological transformation?

Most importantly, we do see reasons to believe that Degrowth can be described as a social movement in the making – a movement that opposes economic growth, capitalism, industrialism, and other forms of domination, that proposes and works on alternatives, and that takes self-transformation and collective practices in the here and now as starting points for broader societal transformations. We have demonstrated in this article that participants of the Degrowth conference, and this probably equally applies to Degrowth activists more broadly, are a) engaged in conflictual relations with growth-based capitalism;[14] b) form dense informal networks; and c) – a point we we believe to have made particularly clear – they also share a rather distinct collective identity (on these three defining criteria for social movements see della Porta/Diani 2006, 21). The main cornerstone of this identity is certainly what we have described as the movement's basic consensus, including the belief that a reduction of the biophysical size of the market economy will be necessary in the Global North, requiring that people here abstain from certain amenities, and a desire for this transformation to transcend capitalism in a feminist, pacifist and emphatically democratic way. Another important piece of evidence is that 41% chose "the Degrowth movement" when asked what social movements they identified with. Indeed, many also identified with other social movements (in particular environmental, alter-mondialist and anti-nuclear movements), partly to an even larger extent, but there was also a segment of 16% who *only* identified with the Degrowth movement. Degrowth should thus not be seen as competing with other movements. Rather it might be the hallmark of Degrowth that it is a complement or an interpretative frame that can create meaningful connections between otherwise separate ecological, social, and political concerns (Demaria et al. 2013).

Degrowth is certainly still a movement *in the making,* insofar as it has scarcely been the subject of classical oppositional social movement practices such as demonstrations, civil disobedience, or direct actions so far. Even if many activists have participated in such actions, they were seldom perceived as activities of the Degrowth movement. Currently, however, this may be changing – actually, the conference in Leipzig ended in a demonstration and an open action training at a local coal power plant. The 2015-2017 "Degrowth in Action" summer schools, designed as a follow-up to the conference, were deliberately held at the same site and in close cooperation with the more openly activist climate camp in the Rhineland region. As part of this strategy of forging links with the climate movement, the end of the 2015 Summer School was timed to

14 We accept that this may indeed be the one point at which this conclusion might legitimately be challenged: Does such an abstract entity as "growth-based capitalism" pass as a "clearly identified opponent"? In fact, the issue does seem more complicated, since the concern with self-reflection and self-transformation implies a recognition of one's own entangledness in the machinery of growth, i.e. a (partial) inclusion of one's own self in the identified "opponent" (Eversberg 2016).

coincide with *Ende Gelände*, a large-scale civil disobedience action against lignite mining that participants were invited to take part in.

The effectiveness of Degrowth in providing an interpretative frame, or rallying point, for a conflictual diversity of critical intentions and transformational approaches is demonstrated by our Cluster Analysis. It shows that five broad currents coexist: The eco-radical *Sufficiency-oriented Critics of Civilization,* the moderate *Immanent Reformers,* a transitory group of *Voluntarist-Pacifist Idealists,* the *Modernist Rationalist Left* and the *Alternative Practical Left*. Our findings suggest that within this internal heterogeneity, there is indeed one group that most closely represents the core ideas of the academic debate around Degrowth, and plays an integrating role that makes it a sort of "embodiment" of the interpretative frame Degrowth provides, namely the *Alternative Practical Left*. Their views are firmly rooted in a radically critical view of capitalism, industrial society, and social domination, while avoiding both the anti-civilizational retreat into alternative communities common among the *Sufficiency-oriented Critics of Civilization* and the theory-centered concept of political action typical of the *Modernist-Rationalist Left*. The *Alternative Practical Left* most clearly advocates a transformational practice that starts out from the everyday, opening up experimental spaces for acting differently (in squats, urban gardens, repair cafés, or climate camps), and aspiring to 'become something different' in the process, to experimentally turn oneself into a different subject emancipated from the imperatives of growth. Thus understood, 'revolutionary change' is not a yearned-for future event, but the successive broadening and proliferation of this process of transforming oneself and society (cf. Graeber 2009: 211; 526-534).

It is these 'contagious' effects of transformational practice that may play a role in fostering practical convergence between the ideologically differing currents within the Degrowth spectrum. Based on the shared consensus, such practically self-reflexive practice, if self-consciously political, could bridge the gap between the antagonistic clusters 1 and 4, appealing both to some in the *Modernist-Rationalist Left* tired of the rightly structural, but often strategically stumped critical posture and to parts of the *Sufficiency-oriented Critics of Civilization* wary of the social ineffectiveness of retreating from the political sphere. For many of the *Voluntarist-Pacifist Idealists,* the attractiveness of the practical-transformative approach was probably crucial for attending the conference in the first place. What seems doubtful is whether many *Immanent Reformers* can be convinced of this kind of strategic orientation, seeing that this current is the most skeptical about the basic consensus. Still, openness to their intentions on the part of others in the movement is important: If parts of this group do get affected by the 'field effect' of Degrowth, they may become important advocates of Degrowth ideas within the more institutionalized realms of politics.

Finally, Degrowth also stands for the re-emergence of a form of emancipatory critique that – at least in Germany – had lost currency in recent decades: the critique of alienation. While the organized left, coming from the Marxian intellectual trajectory, has traditionally held that critiques of exploitation and

injustice are the more 'mature' version of anti-capitalism, the re-actualized critique of alienation is capable of mobilizing strands of anti-capitalism that were regarded as ineffective or thoroughly integrated since the upheavals of the 1970s and the formation of a "flexible capitalism" (Boltanski/Chiapello 2003, van Dyk 2010). As some Degrowthers put it: The cake is not only distributed wrongly, it is also poisoned (Rosa 2009). Degrowth, then, is not about getting a greater piece of the pie, nor even about appropriating the bakery and baking it yourself, but also, on top of that, about collectively finding something entirely different to bake that is both smaller and tastier. This requires a different way of baking, which itself presupposes bakers capable of doing that because they have practically tried it. This is what the demand to practically start with the transformation of everyone's relations to themselves and the world aims at. This importance of the critique of alienation for the Degrowth movement is evidenced by several of our results, not least in the factor analysis. It is present both in the deep rift between a fundamental critique of civilization and a modernist rationalism evidenced by factor 1, and in factor 3, which separates the radical critique of industrialism as an *alienating capitalist* formation from a wholesale anti-civilizational stance.

To us, this seems to mirror the intellectual origins of Degrowth in the critical traditions of Southern Europe. While in Italy or Spain, critiques of alienation had always been an integral part of left thought in the form of anarchist and libertarian-socialist currents, in Germany – with the exception of a short surge in 1968 (Eversberg 2016) – it has practically always been marginalized in the discourse of the left (not to mention the GDR, with its Marxist-Leninist state ideology). Beyond the (politically marginal) anarchist circles that had always held onto it, this type of critique has gained new traction with the rise of the anti-globalization movement in the last 15 years – again going particularly strong in Southern Europe (Graeber 2011). These lineages may help explain why Degrowth originates in France, Spain and Italy, and also why key differences persist between Southern European variants of Degrowth, in which the critique of alienation and post-development always played a key role, and 'post-growth' debates in Germany, Austria and the Anglo-Saxon countries, in which a more strongly "marxianized" left has always been more focused on economic inequality and exploitation, and more strongly separated from debates about ecology and sustainability (see also Muraca 2014; Muraca/Schmelzer 2017).

In any case, a new movement coalition does seem to be emerging around the notion of Degrowth. While disagreements and rifts within the field of Degrowth activism persist, both the intellectual stimuli of Southern European debates and the active efforts to create a transformative practice in line with them have been effective in creating the sense of relative unity and common purpose that is characteristic of emerging social movements.

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