

DEGROWTH: A POSSIBLE EXIT STRATEGY FOR EUROPE?

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ABSTRACT

The current economic crisis dramatically upsets the economic and social system that has ruled the world from the advent of industrialized society in the 17th century. The contradictions and weaknesses of western prevailing economic system have come out with all their hard and negative consequences, mostly on weaker countries.

On one hand, the goals of economic policies have proved to be inadequate, as well as they seem to forget to pursue the human well-being and started to think in economic terms, like an enterprise, and no more as a human being. This way to act has produced negative effects on environmental issues that currently represent a urgent and pressing subject matter: the current industrial business directly pushes humanity to a reckless exploitation of natural resources using non-renewable sources of energy and producing huge quantity of pollution. The Stern Report on Climate Change of 2006 is clear: if we will not drastically reduce the current CO2 emissions, the negative impact on the environment and on humans would be comparable to that of the last two world wars put together. Many environmental summits by NGOs or governments were organized, but it still was not done anything useful.

On the other hand, looking at the main industrial strategies for the increase of consumptions it is possible to find same explanations on the

progressive transformation of people's lifestyle and on the removal of the sense of limit and moderation from the human's imaginary. With the coming of the *consumer society* people started to accept new needs that, however, are not really useful. Even though the number of people with easy access to the commodities is increased, there have been a terrible spread of dissatisfaction and frustration within society, and it could be considered an example of modernity's paradoxes.

Nevertheless, times of crisis represent important opportunities for change and breeding ground for alternative proposals to those economic and social models that proved inefficient.

The present work has the goal to describe the project of the so-called "degrowth", not considered in the negative and economic meaning as the English word might imply. In fact, in the Romance languages we can find terms, as "décroissance" in France, "decrecimiento" in Spain e "decrescita" in Italy, which best describe the particular meaning of this concept. It based mainly based on the awareness of the problematic situations faced by governments and the urgent need to reverse the self-destructive undertaken by humanity.

The primary purpose is to clarify *what* is degrowth in a European dimension and its validity as an alternative option to possibly follow to get out from the current state of alarm.

In his first chapter, this work wants to demonstrate that the surrounding degrowth project have a theoretical base established over time, with origins much further than it may seem. In the first part of the chapter we create an evolutionary path of man's thought for what concerns his conception of reality and of its own nature, starting from the reflections of ancient philosophers and thinkers, as Epicurus and Aristotle, to reach the most recent events that have led to a radical transformation of society and of the human imaginary. After that, we aim to offer a classification of thinkers,

coming from many different disciplines, which in the course of the 20th century have felt the need to study the deep changes that were taking place both globally and locally, but above all to explain what were the causes of the subsequent effects that were beginning to have serious repercussions on human behaviour, now immersed in a context increasingly globalizing and fragmented.

The second chapter of our work will regard Serge Latouche, with a presentation of the thought of this French economist and philosopher, authors of multiple books and a promoter of numerous meetings and conferences, that is carrying out the degrowth project, that he defines "convivial".

Latouche is an expert of economic anthropology, environmental issues and research about possible techniques and innovative practices that can allow humanity to re-appropriate the guide of its evolution. He specifies that degrowth is not just a mere collection of simple ideas or criticism. In fact, he offers a precise political project (in part contained within the program of 8 R), with the intent to give to degrowth a vigorous formalities as well as a material dimension and concrete realization. In keeping with its denunciation of the "dictatorship of the economy" that has invaded the human language and thought patterns, he affirms with rational optimism that even though the proposals are difficult to achieve, it doesn't mean that they are not necessary or that we should give up acting.

The third and last chapter of our work aims to focus attention on the most current and practical dimension with examples within the geographical limits of Europe and in contrast to the models of European economic policy. First, there has been a review of some of the most important followers that represent important landmarks in the modern intellectual landscape and that have the merit of stimulating debates on important issues of real importance and necessity in the political and institutional places.

The final part of the chapter is the result of an investigation which covered some interesting examples of associations or groups of people who, in Europe, expressing the will to act against the practices imposed by the consumer society, and, given the indifference of politics, the need to commit to the preservation of its territory, but also the rediscovery of the value of social relations, currently lost because of a relentless and atomizing individualism.

In conclusion, I believe that it necessary to underline the fact that the subject of this thesis was the result of a precise will to study it in deep. The decline is not just a set of ideas and values, comparable to any other ideology: it is "the matrix that generates an abundance of alternatives" as declared by Serge Latouche. For this simply reason, it does not require precise rules or systems but offers man the opportunity to use their own creative intelligence to invent a new way to live on planet Earth and recover the wisdom in the sharing and use of natural resources. With a general commitment for a positive change, degrowth movement may help fight climate change, government surveillance, and other 21st-century human ills.