

Lund University
Department of Political Science
Spring 2023

STVK12
Supervisor: Georgia de Leeuw

What is unattainable?

Rethinking utopia and degrowth as a different social imaginary

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how degrowth is represented in Swedish media. It uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse the empirical material, consisting of 31 articles from four different newspapers in Sweden. The theoretical framework is called *nomadic utopianism*, a utopianism which is based on the concept of radical imminence, i.e to do things in the present without having a perfect, blue-print society in mind. The literature review consists of research about degrowth and an ally of degrowth, post-development, which provides the background to the research question. The research question is phrased as follows; *how is degrowth represented in Swedish newspapers?* The analysis identifies six main themes which serve as the findings; a) pro-degrowth, b) pro-growth, c) green growth, d) limits to growth, e) themes within degrowth without advocating degrowth and finally, f) other observations. The six themes are discussed and related to the theoretical framework. Last, concluding remarks.

Keywords: Degrowth, utopianism, growth, post-development, sustainable development

Words: 9986

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1. Introduction

In March 2023, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its sixth assessment report, summarising the state of knowledge of climate change, its widespread consequences and risks, and climate change mitigation and adaptation (IPCC, 2023). Among its many, and literally essential findings was the following; “accelerated and non-discriminatory action in mitigating and adapting to climate change impacts is critical to sustainable development” (IPCC, 2023). Defined here as it is by IPCC; “sustainable development seeks to meet the needs of people living today without compromising the needs of future generations, while balancing social, economic and environmental considerations” (IPCC, n.d).

Other vital findings of the report were following: human activities have undeniably caused global warming. Every increment of global warming as a result of continued greenhouse gas emissions will intensify multiple and simultaneous hazards. Human-caused climate change is affecting multiple climate extremes in all regions across the globe, this has led to widespread impacts and damages to nature and people. Climate change is unevenly affecting vulnerable communities who have historically contributed the least to current climate change. Adaptation gaps still exist and will become wider at current rates of implementation. Global financial flows for adaptation today are insufficient for implementation of adaptation options, particularly in developing countries (IPCC, 2023).

Further; climate change poses a threat to planetary health and human welfare. There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for everyone. Actions and choices made in this decade will have consequences now and for thousands of years. For each of its findings, the IPCC report includes a statement of confidence, after each finding mentioned above, the report states either *high* or *very high confidence* (IPCC, 2023).

On the 17th of May, 2023, WMO (World Meteorological Organisation) published a press release stating that global temperatures are set to reach new records in the next five years.

Predicted annual mean near-surface temperature globally for each year between 2023-2027 is between 1.1°C and 1.8°C higher than the average over the years 1850-1900. There is a more than likely (66 per cent) chance of global near-surface temperature exceeding 1.5°C above pre industrial levels for at least one year between 2023 and 2027 (WMO, 2023).

Reading the latest WMO and IPCC reports is alarming. Familiar questions arise such as; will we take action in time? Will it be enough? Is it enough to speak about “sustainable development”? Or is it simply too optimistic? Is it green-washing? There are movements, scientists, researchers, activists, who argue that it is indeed not enough to speak about sustainable development. It is too late and the belief in sustainable development will only set us back. They argue that sustainable development cannot exist, the two words; “sustainable” and “development”, have opposite meanings, it is an oxymoron (Latouche, 2009).

Instead, some advocate a new paradigm. One where economic growth is no longer the primary social goal. This new paradigm is critical of economic growth as it causes ecological degradation (Chertovskaya et al., 2019; Kallis et al., 2015), it no longer increases collective welfare and it is based on injustices, sustained by an unequal exchange of resources and materials (Kallis et al., 2015). This paradigm is called *degrowth*.

Economic growth has, according to Chertovskaya et al. (2019), been solidified as a form of realism. It does not claim to be the perfect system, but that it is the *only* system. David Bell (2013, p. 1) writes capitalist realism has taken over our social imaginary entirely. Fredric Jameson phrased it; “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism”. Perhaps it is worth considering alternatives to taking economic growth as a good-in-itself as a given and to open up to the possibilities of different conceptualisation of what a good life can be.

1.2 Research question and aims

This thesis investigates degrowth in public debate in Sweden. Specifically, the goal is to analyse articles from Swedish newspapers about degrowth in order to examine whether degrowth exists in public eyes, and if it does, investigate how it is represented. The thesis

looks at content from the four biggest newspapers in Sweden, Dagens Nyheter, Expressen, Aftonbladet and Svenska Dagbladet. The research question is phrased as follows:

- *How is degrowth represented in Swedish newspapers?*

To answer the question; “what would it take for a degrowth paradigm shift to materialise?” Buch-Hansen (2018, p. 157) establishes four prerequisites for socio-economic paradigm shifts based on critical political economy principles: a) deep crisis, b) an alternative political project, c) a comprehensive coalition of social forces promoting the project in political struggles, and d) broad-based consent. The aim of this thesis is to look at representations of degrowth to examine if there are social forces seeking change, what arguments there are for and against. It is also the aim of the thesis that in doing so, it might contribute to what seems to be an on-going conversation about alternative ways of organising life.

1.3 Significance

Examining how degrowth is represented in Swedish media is significant because it could give an idea of how degrowth is perceived, it could map out common opinions, identify different stances in the degrowth debate and frame different narratives in this debate. Chertovskaya et al. (2019) and Barlow et al. (2022) write that if degrowth is to stand a chance to oppose growth realism, it is central that strategy and questions of *how* multiplicity can lead to a paradigm shift is tackled. Arguably, this process would be facilitated by first exploring how degrowth is discussed and represented, by investigating if there is a narrative for degrowth and what that looks like.

Three aspects are commonly given as arguments why degrowth itself is of consequence. First, degrowth would be ecologically sustainable. It would encompass a green, caring, and communal economy that would not contribute to further environmental degradation. For many, growth is still associated with well-being and improvement, however, continued pursuit of growth is not sustainable, there is no evidence that decoupling the economy from environmental harm is possible (Hickel & Kallis, 2019) and existing literature argues that ultimately, growth leads to ecological degradation (Chertovskaya et al., 2019; Kallis et al., 2015).

In essence, research has shown that there is an inherent incompatibility between infinite growth and finite resources (Bawtree & Rahnema, 1997, p. 380; Beling, et al., 2017). Acosta and Cajas-Guijarro (2020, p. 292) write; “the world lives in a systemic, multiple and asymmetrical crisis. That crisis is induced mostly by the contradictions coming from the capitalist logic of permanent accumulation of economic value and power; a process sustained through exploitation of human and natural life and, consequently, through continuous violations of social and environmental bounds.”

The second argument is related to socio-cultural and economic aspects, what is called the Easterlin “paradox” and how growth has become a good-in-itself. The point of using a negation for a project that is positive is precisely to free an imaginary dominated by a unidirectional future consisting of only growth. Degrowth wants to dismantle the automatic association of growth with ‘better’ (cited in Kallis et al., 2015). Degrowth argues that GDP is not a sufficient measurement as it does not measure welfare, it does not distinguish welfare-improving from welfare-decreasing economic activity (D’Alisa et al, 2015; Kallis et al., 2015; Schneider et al., 2010). Growth no longer increases collective welfare and is deemed to be based on injustices and is sustained by an unequal exchange of resources and materials (Kallis et al., 2015).

1.4 Delimitations

Degrowth has many alliances, or can be said to belong to a wide dictionary of alternative worldviews. Among those alliances are; post-development, i.e alternatives to development (Escobar, 2007; Ziai, 2007), buen vivir (Chassagne, 2018; Unai, 2019), ecological swaraj/radical ecological democracy (Kothari et al., 2014), ubuntu (Le Grange, 2012) agaciro, agdals, hurai, ibadism and shohoj (Acosta & Cajas- Guijarro, 2020, p. 303, 304). The reason this thesis focuses specifically on degrowth and not on the other concepts/worldviews mentioned is in part related to positionality, which is explored further later on.

Degrowth is European in origin and is mostly focused on the Global North, although building bonds between degrowth movements in the Global North and the Global South is crucial in the conceptualisation of these ideas (Dengler & Seebacher, 2019; Escobar 2015, p. 451,452;

Escobar 2017, p. 205). The reason degrowth has been chosen as the main focus in this thesis is there might be a limit to what extent I, as a person born and raised in Europe, can understand complex origins and contexts of worldviews stemming from all over the world with a limited amount of time. Given the scope and time-limitations of this thesis, it would also be impossible to examine all of these worldviews.

D'Alisa et al. (2015, p. 5) write that countries in the global South should be allowed to find their own trajectories of what they define as the good life, which is why degrowth should be pursued in the global North. The global north is intrinsically part of the effects of climate change through overconsumption. This is in part why Swedish newspapers have been chosen as the empirical material. Part of the degrowth argument is that we need to do things differently and that that change is grass-roots based (Demaria et al., 2013). In other words, change should not be something which is primarily done “over there”, but rather, locally, at home. In my case, home is Sweden.

2. Literature review

This section serves as background, it presents literature on degrowth and post-development.

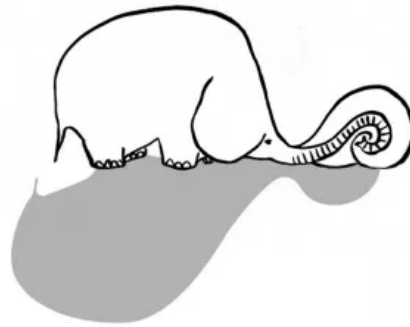
2.1 Degrowth

Degrowth, originally ‘*décroissance*’ in French, signifies a critique of growth. It calls for the detachment of public debate from the expression of economism and the abolishment of economic growth as a social objective. It includes a desired trajectory, one where societies will use fewer natural resources and organise life differently than today (D’Alisa et al., 2015; Kallis et al., 2015). Giorgos Kallis describes it as; “a trajectory where the ‘throughput’ (energy, materials, and waste flows) of an economy decreases while welfare, or well-being, increases” (cited in Chertovskaya et al., 2019, p. 1). Words like; “simplicity”, “sharing”, “conviviality”, “the commons” and “care” are central indicators of what this society could look like (D’Alisa et al., 2015, p. 3).

Degrowth is a project which is searching for a way to construct a new imaginary which implies a change of culture and which explores human identity separated from economic representations. In addition to the physical slowing of economic metabolism, it requires a socio-environmental rationality that deconstructs the current logic of production, distribution, circulation and consumption (Acosta & Cajas-Guijarro, 2020; Escobar, 2015; Kallis, 2011; Schneider et al., 2010). Acosta and Cajas-Guijarro write; “the economy must be subordinated to the mandates of the Earth and the demands of Humanity, which is Nature itself” (2020, p. 300).

In academic contexts, degrowth has existed since ca 2008 (Kallis et al., 2015; Schneider et al., 2010), however, degrowth is generally considered to have emerged post 1970s as a successor of radical environmentalism (D’Alisa et al., 2015; Kallis & March, 2014) as both a social movement and theory (D’Alisa et al., 2015; Demaria et al., 2013). Crucially, degrowth should not be confused with negative Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Kallis, 2015) or recession (Beling et al., 2017) but should be regarded as something completely different. In degrowth, there is an image, or metaphor, of an elephant and a snail which illustrates that degrowth should not be understood as synonymous with recession. The aim of degrowth is not to make

the elephant smaller, but to, metaphorically, turn the elephant into a snail - something completely new (D'Alisa et al., 2015).



The elephant and the snail

Image 1 (D'Alisa et al., 2015, p. 1)

There is evidence of public support for post-growth in Europe (Paulson & Büchs, 2022), however, degrowth is seen as the most radical alternative, considering both the speed and scope it calls for in sustainability transitions (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2020). Post-growth is a way of thinking about what might happen when the obsession with growth is over. It signifies new ways of conceptualising social progress, exploration of new values where wealth is not measured in GDP, and endless capital accumulation is not the main social objective (Jackson, 2021).

Growing evidence supports the need to re-evaluate the function and nature of our economies in favour of post-growth principles if we are to have a socially and environmentally viable future. A sound transition requires public support to legitimise political actions. Among 34 European countries, on average 60.5 % of people are in favour of post-growth. Values such as environmentalism, collectivism and post-materialism were found to support post-growth visions of the future (Paulson & Büchs, 2022).

Degrowth is one form of a post-growth future (Paulsson & Büchs, 2022). Degrowth has received increasing interest in academia, by both proponents and critics. Despite existing for about 50 years, and having been studied for ca 15 years academically, the dispersion of degrowth ideas from academia to public spheres face some hindrance as a result of lack of communication of degrowth ideas between public and academic discourse (Bähr, 2016). Barlow et al. (2022, p. 13) also write that unless the question of strategy for degrowth is seriously considered, efforts of degrowthers and others suggesting compatible visions around the world risk remaining marginalised, remaining as only ideas of alternatives.

Lack of political strategy is considered to be the weakest point in degrowth (Chertovskaya et al., 2019). Recognising this problem has led degrowthers to develop a number of practical strategies, such as a four-day workweek, abolishing GDP, carbon tax, basic and maximum income and a call to the European Union to end growth-dependency which has been signed by 238 scholars and later 90.000 more signatures. In addition to this, degrowth has been the subject of a conference by the European Parliament in 2018 (Chertovskaya et al. 2019), and in May 2023 (Beyond growth, 2023).

An essential point in degrowth is distinguishing between words like “flourishing” and “growing” or “developing.” The change degrowth is calling for is qualitative, not quantitative, like in the flourishing in the arts. Some sectors should, and must, *flourish*, such as education, medical care or renewable energy (D’Alisa et al., 2015, p. 5).

2.2 Post-development

An important ally of degrowth is post-development. Post-development is its own theory and neither degrowth or post-development can be said to be a subcategory of the other. Rather, there are connections between the two which makes them compatible (Escobar, 2015). D’Alisa et al. (2015, p. 5) argue that “development” is a problematic keyword, even when adding words like “local” or “sustainable” in front of it. The word implies an unfolding towards a predetermined end, i.e, it can only be unidirectional. Arturo Escobar, a central scholar in post-development, argues that in a world transformed by changing climate, people are forced to confront development. The collective determination to transition from development to post-development comes from struggles and desires of many peoples worldwide. Important to acknowledge is that these transitions would have to go hand in hand with those who are protecting and re-defining well-being, life projects, territories, local economies and communities worldwide (Escobar, 2017).

Post-development and degrowth argue that development suggests all countries should try to achieve the same standard, i.e, become modern, as the global North. The argument is that development is not hospitable. Gustavo Esteva said; “we need to hospitably embrace the thousand different ways of thinking, being, living and experiencing the world that characterise

reality” (Escobar & Esteva 2016, p. 2560, 2561). Development defines one version of the good life and does not include any other conceptualisations, imposing ideas of what it is to succeed and what is to not (Manzo, 1991).

Post-development is a broad term that seeks to encompass alternatives to development looking for the construction of a *pluriverse* (Acosta & Cajas-Guijarro, 2020; Demaria & Kothari, 2017; Escobar, 2017). As mentioned, there are many different alternative worldviews. It is not the aim of this thesis to make degrowth out to be the sole option. Hence, important is appreciation for multiplicity and the notion of degrowth as part of a pluriverse, “a world where many worlds fit” (Acosta & Cajas-Guijarro, 2020; Demaria & Kothari, 2017; Escobar, 2017). Alternatives to development are increasingly becoming, not only more visible but genuinely credible and viable. However, they remain marginal in comparison to the dominant narrative and practice of development (Demaria & Kothari, 2017).

3. Theoretical framework

This thesis utilises *nomadic utopianism* as its theoretical approach. This concept is discussed by David Bell (2013) and Chertovskaya et al. (2019). The purpose of adding a nomadic utopianism approach to degrowth is to recognise that degrowth is not inherently “good.” The definition of ideas and actions that would bring about a paradigm shift would be political. The concept of “utopia” is deemed to be the political concept most attached to degrowth. The term utopia was coined by Thomas More in 1516. Utopia is Greek in origin, “topos” meaning place, “eu” meaning good and “ou” meaning no, hence, the concept is understood as “the good place that is no place.” Therefore, utopia cannot be a place (Bell, 2013).

The concept of utopia is not what it is often thought to be, it is commonly referred to as unachievable dreams of good places that do not engage with reality (Bell, 2013). Utopias should not be referred to as something unattainable, but rather as a description of a desired world to come that promotes a probability of change and calls for a future that differs from the present (cited in Chertovskaya et al., 2019).

Drawing on works in the field of utopian studies and the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Franco Berardi, Bell (2013) developed the concept of nomadic utopianism, a utopianism, not driven by imagining a better future, but by creating a better present. To be nomadic here means to live without reference to that which lies beyond the present and the material: it is a philosophy of *radical immanence* that proceeds from the here and now, but which argues that the “here and now” reaches out into the future (Bell, 2013). Important to note is the difference between utopia (the place) and utopianism (a social force seeking to create change) and that the relationship between these two is inverted, i.e that the process (utopianism) must be prior to the place (utopia). This relates nomadic utopianism to the notion of “the good place that is no place” (Bell, 2013, p. i).

Related to nomadic utopianism, Bell (2013, p. 13) developed the concept of “state utopianism.” The state utopia is seen as a perfect society (a place) and denies any utopianism (social force) that seeks to go beyond it. State utopianism is anti-utopian in that they see themselves as “the good place”, ignoring the “no” in utopia's etymology. Bell (2013) argues that capitalist realism constitutes a state utopian force, and sees the world today as a utopia in

that there are “no alternatives.” State utopianism is therefore a dystopia. Capital realism, it is argued, has taken over social imaginary. We can imagine a future, but it is worse. As Frederic Jameson’s popular quote goes; “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (cited in Bell, 2013, p. 1).

At the beginning of Bell’s (2013) thesis, he states he wishes to think through the concepts “utopia” and “utopianism” and their relevance in an age that seems to have given up on the future. He quotes Berardi, who argues that our era is one utterly without any sense of future. Not that we do not experience the passing of time, but that the psychological construct of the future as a space into which progress will extend is no longer feasible.

Despite this, Berardi does not advocate remaking futurist utopianism. We cannot think that even if the present is dark, the future will be bright. The myth of the future is rooted in the experience of expansion of the economy, to believe in the future in such a manner is to reproduce the status quo. Instead, he argues, we should “*sing to the infinity of the present and abandon the illusion of a future*” (cited in Bell, 2013, p. 3). In other words, doing things in the present, based on radical immanence. Nomadic utopianism answers Berardi’s call to sing to the infinity of the present by creating a better present, yet in this process, it returns the future to us, not as a shining promise or as the same-but-more, but as a *time and space of potential* (Bell, 2013).

Nomadic utopianism is furthermore tied to ideas in post-development and the pluriverse. By applying nomadic utopianism as an approach, degrowth recognizes the centrality of multiplicity and respect for other alternative worldviews (Chertovskaya et al., 2019). The idea with a nomadic utopian approach is that degrowth does not intend to become a hegemonic, one-way dogma, imposed on the rest of the world as growth and development has been, but as one of many alternatives. This approach enables, and requires, degrowth to be a self-reflective process and to appreciate that inequalities and negative consequences as a result of degrowth are not impossibilities (Chertovskaya et al., 2019).

As utopia contains both a description and a process, it is highly compatible with degrowth. It is a vision (description) that is also performative (process). Utopianism contains both a description and a process, but emphasises the process, making it a key concept for capturing the open-endedness of degrowth and its political economy (Chertovskaya et al., 2019).

Relevant here is also “difference-in-itself”, a concept associated with Deleuze. For Deleuze, difference is not something that exists between two identities, rather difference comes before identity and is internal to all things (cited in Cockayne et al., 2017). Nomadic utopianism proceeds through non-hierarchical organisation, maximises difference-in-itself and creates new forms of living as it proceeds, creating nomadic utopias (Bell, 2013; Chertovskaya et al., 2019).

There are a number of political aspects to be aware of, such as making sure that degrowth does not lose its core value in trying to stake out a viable relationship between social movements and state institutions (Chertovskaya et al., 2019). There is a need to repoliticise the future, but based on the realities of the 21st century, not the 20th (Welzer, 2011, p. 37). Chertovskaya et al. (2019) argue that this can only be accomplished by continued political struggle. Policy proposals are an important first step, however, for them to be valuable, there needs to be an on-going negotiation between social actors who agree on their definitions. That is, not only growth, but degrowth as well, cannot be apolitical (Chertovskaya et al., 2019).

Nomadic utopianism has been chosen as the theoretical framework for this thesis because it can be used as a lens through which the empirical material can be described and explained. Is degrowth represented as a utopia in the traditional sense, i.e, an unreachable perfect place? Is degrowth thought of as a dystopia that would lead us to a worse future? Are there hints of “radical imminence”, for example that degrowth projects exist and are portrayed in Swedish media? Is degrowth represented as an alternative to capitalist realism? Is the future believed to be bright?

4. Methodology

This section describes the research method and empirical material. Additionally, it includes the process of coding, positionality, potential limitations and ethical considerations.

4.1 Research method

This thesis uses discourse analysis as its methodology. Discourse analysis focuses on higher-level organisational properties of written text or dialogue (Fairclough, 1992). It examines implicit meaning rather than content itself. Text and images do not just depict reality, but are ways of creating and maintaining reality. Words are chosen for a certain effect. Text should not be taken for what it is, one should also examine hidden messages, i.e, deconstruct data to create meaning, looking at what is implied and what is absent (Denscombe, 2017).

Specifically, this thesis uses Critical Discourse analysis (CDA) as its method in the analysis of the empirical material. According to Fairclough (1989), language is centrally involved in power and struggles for power. CDA adds a political aspect to the approach and explores how power in society is achieved through discourses and how this becomes clear in certain texts (Denscombe, 2017).

Discourse is defined as language as a social practice, determined by social structures. Actual discourse is determined by socially constituted *orders of discourse*, sets of conventions associated with social institutions. Orders of discourse are ideologically shaped by *power relations* in social institutions and in society as a whole and discourse has effects upon social structures, as well as being determined by them, and so contributes to social community and *social change* (Fairclough, 1989, p. 14).

Emphasis on social change in CDA is one reason why it has been chosen as a method. Another reason is what Fairclough writes about social imaginary and democracy in CDA. “A more productive orientation on the part of CDA must, I believe, be framed within a profound commitment to democracy. CDA can contribute to the social imaginary, to the stock of feasible Utopias which can inform choices which people make individually and collectively on their own behalf” (cited in Börjesson, 2003, p, 181). Fairclough’s work is

drawing on theories that can be said to be social movements for enlightenment and democratisation of society, which is applicable in this context. A third reason relates to the argument in nomadic utopianism about capital realism and how growth has become the default, taken for granted as a desirable social objective. Teun van Dijk writes; “critical discourse analysis involves exploring why some meanings become privileged or taken for granted and others become marginalised. In other words, discourse does not just provide an account of what goes on in society; it is also a process whereby meaning is created. This involves asking ‘who uses language, how, why and when’” (cited in Bryman, 2012, p. 538).

Fairclough (1989, p. 92,93) writes about three different stages in CDA; *description* of text, *interpretation* of the relationship between text and interaction and *explanation* of the relationship between interaction and social context. There are a number of tools for analysing texts such as; interactional control, i.e relationships between speakers, metaphors, vocabulary and grammar.

Central is also the three-dimensional model of CDA. It consists of text, discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough 1999, p. 72,73). David Grant summarises the model as; a) examination of the actual content, structure, and meaning of the text under scrutiny (the text dimension), b) examination of the form of discursive interaction used to communicate meaning and beliefs (the discursive practice dimension) and c) consideration of the social context in which the discursive event is taking place (the social practice dimension) (cited in Bryman, 2012, p. 538).

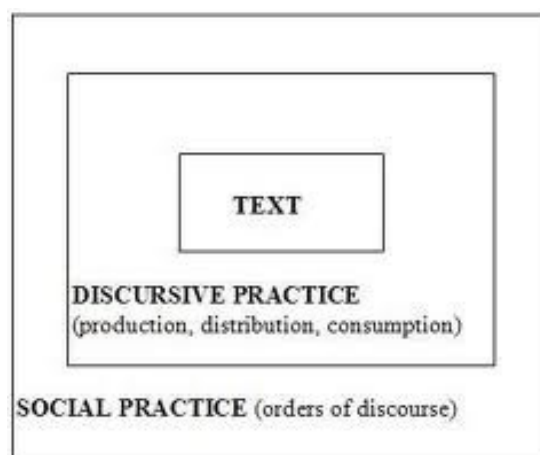


Figure 1. Three dimensional model (Fairclough, 1989, p. 21)

4.2 Empirical material

The empirical material in this thesis is articles from Swedish newspapers. The articles are from the four biggest newspapers in Sweden; Dagens Nyheter (DN), Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), Expressen and Aftonbladet. These are the four newspapers in Sweden in that they have the most number of readers. The material consists of 31 articles, published within a span from 2010-2023.

These articles were found and selected by Googling the name of each newspaper in addition to “degrowth”, “nerväxt” or “nedväxt”, the two Swedish versions of the word degrowth. Additionally, some were discovered by “snowballing”, that is, some articles included were found under for example “related reads”, as a reply in a debate or as an article related to a debate where degrowth is mentioned. Articles have also been found by using the website Kungliga Biblioteket (The Royal Library). Kungliga Biblioteket.se provides statistics over which newspapers have articles corresponding with specific words, such as “nerväxt” (degrowth) or “tillväxt” (growth.) Every article that is part of the empirical material can be found under Appendices.

4.3 Coding

The process of identifying themes in the empirical material has been through open coding. The purpose of open coding is to discover and categorise phenomena, and to develop categories concerning their properties and scope (Denscombe 2017, p. 377). Codes here are understood as phenomena such as; a type of event, a type of action, strands of opinions, the occurrence of a certain word or expression and an implied meaning or opinion (Denscombe, 2017).

The specific process of data preparation and familiarisation has been the following: an initial readthrough of all articles where notes were taken and paragraphs were copied into a separate document when a concept was mentioned multiple times in many different articles. Themes were phrased based on codes, i.e concepts and terms appearing multiple times, each theme was colour coded. Some codes and themes were removed if they did not appear frequently enough, in only two or three articles for example. Then, a second read-through of the articles where all articles were copy pasted into a new document and the six themes

identified were highlighted according to the colour code in the previous document. Among these paragraphs and quotes, some have been translated and selected as examples, illustrating a specific theme. Last, a third read-through of all articles where themes were once again colour-coded to confirm they are recurring throughout the material. A table of codes and how they relate to each theme can be found under Appendices.

4.4 Positionality

Central in this thesis is my own background and biases. The identity, values and convictions of a researcher play a part in the analysis of qualitative data (Denscombe, 2017, p. 384). During the analysis, I have tried to distance myself from normative convictions and not take a stance. However, in social science it is impossible not to have a position in research. Denscombe (2017, p. 383) writes; “fundamentally, we must realise that there can never be any research that is free from influence from those who perform it. Qualitative data, words or images is a product of a process of interpretation.” A researcher should account how personal experiences and social background has shaped the research (Denscombe, 2017, p. 384).

I came across degrowth when reading the introductory course in Human Ecology at Lund University. Since then, I have spent some time reading about it. I attended a lecture about it organised by Lund University Sustainability and Environmental Science (LUMES), and I have spoken about it with friends of mine. It is not the intention of this thesis to be normative, however, I wish to be transparent with my own interest in the concept.

4.5 Limitations

This section discusses five potential limitations. Number one is translations. I am fluent in Swedish and fairly confident in English. I have read my bachelor’s degree entirely in English, I believe I understand the language, both in translating it in the more literal sense and that I could be capable of conveying underlying messages through certain word choices and expressions. Despite this, there might be mistranslations. The second concern is limitations of the method, qualitative analysis; finding themes and explaining findings in data risks simplifying complex social phenomena and if the empirical material is representative (Denscombe, 2017, p. 299). The material is based on only four newspapers,

there is no content from debate forums such as Twitter or Facebook where a debate about degrowth might be more lively.

The third limitation regards degrowth itself. Degrowth is complex and wide and defies a single definition. D'Alisa et al. (2015, p. xxi) write: “like freedom and justice, degrowth expresses an aspiration which cannot be pinned down to a simple sentence. Degrowth is a frame, where different lines of thought, imaginaries, or courses of action come together. We see this versatility as a strength.” The scope of this thesis makes it impossible to include all aspects of degrowth, there might be vital things this thesis has not mentioned. Even so, the thesis has made an attempt at representing degrowth as faithfully as possible and has highlighted what has been deemed most important in relation to the research question and aims.

Finally, important to mention is that views of degrowth presented in this thesis is discernible only from the particular newspapers analysed. There are other newspapers and debate forums such as the magazine *Syre*, an explicitly green paper in Sweden where the presence of degrowth is likely far more tangible. There are also other platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter forums where degrowth is being discussed in Sweden such as Institutet för nerväxtstudier, The institute for Degrowth Studies.

4.6 Ethical considerations

The main areas of ethical concern in social science are related to; lack of informed consent, harm to participants, invasion of privacy, and deception (Bryman 2012, p. 154). The empirical material in this thesis is newspapers. As the material is based on documents, not on specific people or their statements, these aspects are not relevant in this thesis.

Newspapers are accessible to the public in Sweden, all articles and links to them can be found under Appendices for the sake of transparency. Note that I subscribed to two of the newspapers in order to gain access.

5. Analysis and discussion

Here, the main analysis of the thesis is presented. This section includes six main themes and subthemes identified in the empirical material. These six themes serve as the findings of the thesis. After the themes have been introduced, there is a discussion about each theme.

5.1 Themes and sub themes

Six distinct themes/findings are recurring throughout the articles. The first two are people advocating for and against growth, here referred to as “pro degrowth arguments” and “pro growth arguments.” The third theme is what I call “green growth”, that is, technical solutions, green technology and sustainable economic development that would allow production and consumption to go on more or less as it is today, but with greener solutions. The fourth most common theme is what I call the “limits argument”, i.e, that the planet has finite resources which physically puts limits to growth. The fifth theme is when themes within degrowth itself are present, such as a shorter workweek/more leisure time, how the consequences of climate change are felt unevenly across the globe and once again the “limits argument”, however the writer does not advocate degrowth or use the word. The last theme I call “other observations.”

Within the first two themes, there are also sub themes. In the “pro- degrowth argument” the “limits argument” is present throughout. Infinite wants and limited resources are incompatible, the environment and the climate will be unrecognisable if we do not give up perpetual economic growth. In the “pro growth arguments”, the sub themes are; aiming for degrowth would make us poorer and would lead to misery. There is a question of; why would we want to go backwards? It is also implied it is radical/happening too quickly. There is mention of a third option, a middle ground, advocated by the economist Kate Raworth, which she calls “growth agnosticism.” All text in italics are quotes taken as examples from the newspaper articles.

5.1.1 Pro degrowth

There seems to be a division between left and right leaning writers and journalists in the discussion about degrowth. For example, Katalys is a social democratic think tank which sometimes is given space in the debate of the independent liberal newspaper Dagens Nyheter. Katalys is criticised for advocating degrowth in one of the articles from Svenska Dagbladet whose political colour is independent moderate. Similarly, the Green Party (left-green) and Feminist Initiative (feminist-left) are the political parties in Sweden which are pro-degrowth. Generally, degrowth seems to be advocated by left-leaning and opposed by right-leaning. This illustrates a common division where climate issues are considered a left issue, the “*eco-left*” as one article phrased it (Expressen, 2021-06-27).

To some extent, all arguments for degrowth can be traced back to the “limits argument.” None of the articles advocating degrowth speaks about socio-economic aspects of growth or mentions inequality tied to economic growth. Another absence is; there is no mention of some of the core concepts mentioned earlier, “sharing”, “conviviality”, “the commons” and “care” (D’Alisa et al., 2015, p. 3). Arguments for degrowth are primarily tied to the “limits argument.”

The vision for degrowth can be said to be bright. The advocates of degrowth describe the transition as it would entail good quality of life, people’s health, global justice and questions if growth is a prerequisite for welfare.

Climate change has set limits to growth. Therefore, we should instead start to discuss degrowth. It could be the solution to the problems of our age, says Robert Skidelsky (DN, 2019-12-02).

Even with degrowth, we’ll have the same number of people who can work. We will still have fields, forests, clothes, things, culture, knowledge, ideas and we’ll have more time to enjoy it all. In other words, excellent conditions for quality of life (SvD, 2020-12-04).

By presenting the degrowth theory as the natural successor of both keynesianism and the neoclassical economy, Kallis succeeds in liberating it from the shimmer of alternativism /.../ It's abstract and compact, but unexpectedly exciting (Expressen, 2020-06-27).

At the website of the Sami parliament, our position is stated in the document "Iellembiràs." It states that we advocate the second model of degrowth and a changed set of values and worldview in society, where nature and people's health are defined in welfare, instead of perpetual economic growth (DN, 2023-03-27).

Let agencies, central banks and banks investigate how and where different kinds of degrowth can be implemented, and be complementary, little by little (DN, 2021-08-26).

5.1.2 Pro growth

Three of the statements equate degrowth with negative GDP-growth and "welfare" with economic growth. The first quote in the sub theme section is from a person speaking about his book *More from Less* (SvD, 2022-09-27). He speaks about what degrowth would mean, oversimplifying it to an extent where it is misrepresentative. Degrowth is not the same as recession or negative GDP-growth (Kallis, 2015) as suggested. Striving for "welfare", i.e., economic growth, is expressed to be a fundamental human trait, something that is inherent in all of us. The quote states "*we need to become poorer*". "Poorer" is a relative term. Poorer than who? Poorer than we already are? Who is "we?" Who is included and excluded in "we"? "Poor" is also a word with fundamentally negative connotations.

The second sub theme is one where degrowth is said to lead to misery. It is equivalent to something from which people "flee". Countries with growth are seen as better places, where people's futures would be "brighter". Countries with "non-growth" fail to give prospects for the future and abuse their power. The use of the word "naïve" in the quote "*naïve opinions who want to step off the train of success*" (SvD, 2016-10-24) is disempowering and signifies that to believe in degrowth is foolish. There is a metaphor of "success" as a train, which could be related to conceptualisations of progress, modernity and development as uni-directional. It

is implied that it is unwise to want to step off the train in fear of being left behind in a place without modernity, that is, countries from which people are “fleeing.”

“Fleeing” or “escaping” also suggests a desperation to go from one place, without economic wealth, to another, with it, and to want something other than to be on the train would be strange. The idiom “singing with the angels” means to concur with the majority, to contribute nothing new because it is comfortable to agree with the currently popular opinions. This idiom undermines these opinions in that, it implies it is not their actual opinions but people who advocate degrowth ideas are simply agreeing because it is easier to do so. It is unclear which specific countries the writer is speaking about. If it is from developing countries in general, there is not much agency saying “they” collectively, to people from countries with so-called “non-growth.” Who exactly would suffer from degrowth, who is the writer speaking for, who are “they?”

It is also said nobody would want to, or could live in a world where so-called “welfare production” has been shut down. The last quote is from an article critical of the previous government consisting of the Socialdemocrats and the Green Party related to issues of energy policies. It is implied that parties like the Green Party want adjustments that are happening too quickly, that are too radical considering the phrase “without passing go” which is a reference to the board game Monopoly. This reference suggests that advocates of degrowth want change but are skipping steps. The writer also uses a they/us- narrative, creating an alliance with the audience.

Moreover, a so-called degrowth, that is, a decrease in welfare and productive capacity, would be an irresponsible path to take given the global warming we’re heading towards (SvD 2021-08-09).

Vigorous politics which aims to first and foremost stop growth would not solve our problems. The earth and the people deserve better governance than that (DN, 2021-08-17).

Today's model of growth is not environmentally sustainable. On the other hand, negative growth - or degrowth - is not sustainable for economic and social reasons (SvD, 2011-03-21).

The book is also questioned by those who believe decoupling between development of welfare and reduced use of resources and environmental degradation is impossible, or can't be done fast enough, the degrowth movement. Bottom line in their message is that the planet can't handle our human aspiration for welfare, so we have to stop economic growth and instead shrink the economy. We need to become poorer (SvD, 2022-09-27).

And it would of course be unreasonable to shut down large, and for each year, growing parts of society and the welfare production for good - nobody wants, and nobody can live like that (SvD, 2021-08-09)

The sub themes in the “pro growth arguments”; poverty, misery and radicalism is discernible from quotes such as:

We need to become poorer (SvD, 2022-09-27).

On the other hand, Landström is right that “degrowth”, probably will mean poverty and misery and is therefore not exactly an alluring vision of the future (Aftonbladet, 2021-06-09).

It's from these non-growth countries that people are fleeing from. They're not fleeing from climate change but from abuses of power of different kinds and from hopeless future prospects, that is, things that characterise countries without sustainable economic growth. They move to countries where the future is brighter, where growth has not yet been replaced with degrowth. My conclusion is that a strong formation of opinion against the naïve opinions who want to step off the train of success is necessary. There is no shortage of such forces in Swedish politics today. In particular those who, like the Green Party and the Left Party are usually “singing with the angels”, are the biggest threats to a good future (SvD, 2016-10-24).

System change parties like the Green Party tend to not be too interested in adjustment, at least as a process. They want to take us from fossil dependent to fossil free, from growth to “degrowth” without passing “go” (reference to the board game Monopoly) (DN, 2021-11-28).

5.1.3 “Growth agnosticism”, advocated by economist Kate Raworth

There are only two articles speaking about a “middle ground,” however, it is worth including as it illustrates nuance in the way newspapers in Sweden represent degrowth.

But in choosing between degrowth and green growth, Kate Raworth is advocating a cautionary principle. Or, as she calls it, “growth agnosticism” (DN, 2021-03-28).

If we are in a position with growth fixation leading to ecological doom, and growth criticism leads to an economic one, then it would be reasonable to consider a third option (Aftonbladet, 2021-06-09).

5.1.4 Green growth

It is of note that in both “pro degrowth” and “pro growth” arguments, consensus seems to be that there are limits to earth's resources, however, how to address this conundrum differs. The advocates of degrowth concur that there are biophysical limits to the planet and thus want to turn to degrowth, whereas the advocates of growth, or those who do not explicitly advocate degrowth, believe this dilemma can be solved with green growth or a differently designed economy, such as circular or doughnut economy.

Overall, believers in green growth are more optimistic about the future than the degrowthers. They believe decoupling the economy from climate change is possible, that we can have sustainable economic growth without depleting the planet and that greenifying GDP will create more “green jobs.”

Another interesting distinction, not directly linked to how degrowth is discussed is the way both green growth and pro degrowth speak about “sustainability.” In green growth it commonly signifies sustaining the way we are doing things, whereas in degrowth it usually means conserving the planet. “Sustainability” has come to mean “the sustaining of the

current system”, more than “sustaining life and resources as they are” (Bawtree & Rahnema, 1997, p. 380; Beling, et al. 2017).

Isn't it risky not to look at alternatives? What is called “green growth” currently does not have scientific support to curb the climate threat. But there is research being done on so-called degrowth (DN, 2021-08-26).

The economist Ann Pettifor is on the other hand sure of both ends and means in her pamphlet on a Green new deal. But I wonder how appealing her utopia of the stationary society is (Expressen, 2020-06-27).

The good thing is that we've changed social and technical systems: we handled the ozone depletion by replacing CFCs. Smog and poor air quality in cities has been addressed with better car engines and catalyst converters. And we know what to do to make it happen: a combination of taxes, regulation and innovation (DN, 2021-08-17).

The most uncomfortable message in Alf Hornborg's book “Kannibalernas maskerad”, is that the technical solutions that all political parties, and the whole west, are hoping to solve the climate, won't work (Aftonbladet, 2022-01-23).

5.1.5 Limits to growth

One aspect to consider in the “limits argument” is what specifically is said to be at fault. There is a difference between humans, human activity and human extraction. This is a discussion tied to the difference between the anthropocene and the capitalocene (Moore, 2016), which will not be detailed here. The point is that nowhere does it say that humans themselves are the cause of environmental degradation or climate change, but rather, our activities. Likewise, the IPCC report states it is human activities causing climate change (IPCC, 2023). It is not humans themselves that are the problem, but rather what we do.

The close connection between economy and the environment should be easy to understand. But we've built an economic model where the assumption is that the

resources will always be there. For too long, we've lived on the myth of perpetual material growth and the illusion that nature's pantry is infinite (SvD, 2011-03-21).

All economic activity must be regulated so that it is within planetary and social bounds (Aftonbladet, 2021-02-13).

In their manifesto for ecopolitics, the Green Party writes: "Infinite economic growth in the traditional sense is not possible on a planet with finite resources." Janine Alm Ericson argues that the economic system today does not take the effects on the environment and the climate into consideration.

- *"Is the Green Party against growth?"*
- *"We can't have eternal economic growth without considering environmental bounds"(DN, 2022-08-27).*

- *There is a limit to how much material we can extract from the branch we're sitting on before it snaps (Aftonbladet, 2021-06-09).*

5.1.6 Themes within degrowth without advocating or mentioning degrowth

The word "utopia" is only mentioned twice throughout the articles. *"Back then, these demands were seen as dangerous, and as pure utopia"* (DN, 2019-12-02) and *"But I wonder how appealing her utopia of the stationary society is"* (Expressen, 2020-06-27). Here, it means utopian in the traditional sense, as a place which is impossible to reach, however in the first quote, degrowth ideas are described to have been seen as utopian, and in the second, us being able to go on doing things the way we currently are is seen as utopian.

People should have to work less to earn their living. "What was your first reaction when you heard Sanna Marin's statement?" - "That it was completely understandable. We discussed the first demands for an 8-hour work week which were proposed in Finland in 1903 at the party. Back then, these demands were seen as dangerous, and as pure utopia. So it was a good reminder how the times can change" (DN, 2019-12-02).

A way to show that the climate crisis originates from international injustices - the ones who have done the least to exacerbate the climate crisis are the ones who have been affected the most”(DN, 2022-06-03).

Another explanation could be that we’re still captive in our history of ideas, where the ecomodern myth of progress, development and decoupling is worshipped so blindly that we can’t see that the world is burning (SvD, 2021-02-26).

5.1.7 Other observations

This section presents other observations found, or not found, in the material.

There is very little mention of hope in the articles. Most arguments for degrowth goes “we should transition to degrowth because it is impossible to go on as we are”, but very few highlight that there is hope or that it is not too late. The IPCC report in the introduction states: there is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for everyone (IPCC, 2023). This means the window is not closed yet.

Second, it is said in three quotes that degrowth is relatively marginalised, that this movement is not very loud, but it does exist. In Swedish, the word “krafsa” in the first quote has been replaced with the word “existed.” “Krafsa” means to scratch, however, it does not translate exactly, here it means something which is on the outside of something, like a cat, who wants to get in.

Degrowth is a political idea that has existed on the outskirts of the debate in society for a long time (Expressen, 2021-06-27).

We agree that there is a striking lack of politics for dealing with our unsustainable consumption, but it’s not completely silent. We risk missing to see the transition that is happening from underneath - in municipalities, regions, among entrepreneurs, in

research and education and not least in civil society. Transition is happening, if not very loudly (DN, 2018-05-15).

The discussion about the post-growth society is alive in many countries, even if it's completely marginal in Sweden. Perhaps the conference can change that (SvD, 2018-08-27).

5.2 Discussion

This section discusses each of the six themes.

5.2.1 Pro degrowth

The pro-degrowthers can be said to be more pessimistic than those who believe in continued economic growth. The ever-present “limits argument” suggests that degrowth advocates are more worried about the future than the pro-growthers or the ones who believe in green growth. On the other hand, the vision of degrowth is bright. Despite, or perhaps because the reasons for why the limits argument are so common, e.g, fear of ecosystem collapse, species dying out, the future degrowth advocates envision is bright, e.g, preservation of nature, quality of life, focus on people’s welfare. Degrowth is understood in most articles as a process and it is seen in the same way as nomadic utopianism promotes, i.e “a social force seeking to create change” (Bell, 2013).

5.2.2 Pro growth

The predictions of what degrowth would bring according to people who advocate growth is poverty and misery. Economic growth is seen as a precondition for a good life. Interesting to think about is that both degrowthers and pro-growthers speak about “welfare.” However, for degrowthers, welfare should be separated from economic aspects and for pro-growthers, welfare is essentially synonymous with economic growth. It is said that no one would want to live in a world without growth. This relates to the dystopian in the theoretical framework, nomadic utopianism (Bell, 2013; Chertovskaya et al., 2019). Here, degrowth becomes a

dystopia in that it provides an alternative to the status quo, it becomes the “end of the world”, per Jameson’s quote (Bell, 2013).

5.2.3 Green growth

Believing in growth and green technology or green growth relates to the question of whether we should pursue futurist utopianism or nomadic utopianism and the notion of optimism or pessimism. The green growth advocates are more optimistic, perhaps because they believe they have tangible solutions. For believers in green growth, “doing something” is investing in green solutions. As Berardi wrote: “we cannot believe that even though the present is dark, the future will be bright”, and thus argued that we should abandon the future and sing to the infinity of the present (cited in Bell, 2013, p. 3) i.e do things right now, rather than believe that we will be fine. The difference between the believers in green growth and the degrowthers is that the degrowthers do not believe green technology will be enough. As stated, simply adding “sustainable” in front of “development” is seen as an oxymoron (Latouche, 2009) and will not be enough to save us from the consequences of climate change.

5.2.4 Limits to growth

The limits to growth arguments is by far the most common. It is present throughout essentially all articles, and as mentioned, consensus is that the limits argument is “true” according to both degrowthers and advocates of growth. One explanation for this could be that to state that the planet has finite resources is very concrete. It is very logical and easy to understand, and it can be proven. Other arguments in degrowth, e.g, the relationship between growth and social injustice is more difficult to prove and arguably depends on one’s political ideology. We can all agree that physically, nature’s resources will one day run out. There is research that there is incompatibility between infinite growth and finite resources (Bawtree & Rahnema, 1997, p. 380; Beling, et al., 2017). This statement is in a way apolitical, whereas issues social justice and questions like; “what is welfare?” is politically charged.

5.2.5 Themes within degrowth without advocating or mentioning degrowth

Something which is interesting is to consider why degrowth is not advocated or mentioned when its themes are there. One explanation could be related to Paulsson and Büchs (2022) findings. Among 34 European countries, on average 60.5 % of people are in favour of postgrowth. Values such as environmentalism, collectivism and post-materialism characteristic for post-growth are also found in degrowth, however they also found that degrowth is considered to be the most radical alternative (Paulsson & Büchs, 2022). The fact that themes within degrowth are present without advocating degrowth might be due to the view that to call for degrowth is taking it one step too far, but values within it are gaining popularity.

5.2.6 Other observations

A few articles say that degrowth projects are happening, but “under the radar” so to speak. It is said the degrowth movement and other related movements and projects exist in Sweden but they are not very noticeable. This relates to the radical imminence mentioned in the theoretical framework. Harald Welzer (2011) writes about growth, mental infrastructures and utopias, not with a nomadic utopianist approach, which should be mentioned, but he does have some relevance in this context. He writes; “their utopia will be compartmentalised, not all encompassing, yet because it will consist of numerous small elements, and for that very reason, it will be possible to realise it immediately, as shown by many practical projects that have transformed our reality” (Welzer, 2011, p. 37). By highlighting how degrowth projects are happening without being recognised or with a so-called blue-print society in mind, these actors are doing things in the present, one could say they are improvising, but in way that would “bring the future back to us” (Bell, 2013) as it is phrased in nomadic utopianism. This also relates to the notion of degrowth’s grass-roots origin (Demaria et al., 2013, p. 201). Many different, and crucially, local, projects exist, created by civil society, researchers and entrepreneurs.

Another central aspect is the presence of growth realism, related to the quote; “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (cited in Bell, 2013, p. 1). Critical Discourse Analysis looks at power structures and why some meanings become privileged and

others marginalised. Growth seems to be privileged and has for a long time been reproduced as being synonymous with a good life, promising wealth, abundance, modernity. Articles which are positively inclined, or those still undecided present degrowth as a new narrative, where consumption patterns and our infinite wants are questioned. As some articles suggest, degrowth exists in Sweden “under the radar” but is marginalised. Welzer (2011) discusses how growth is part of our mental infrastructures. It is part of the fabric of reality for many people in the west. The fact that degrowth is present in some articles in Swedish media suggests some people are beginning to see other values and consider a different narrative.

6. Concluding remarks

This section presents some concluding remarks. The research question that has guided this thesis is;

- *How is degrowth represented in Swedish newspapers?*

The identified findings in this thesis are six main themes which are present throughout the empirical material. Number one is advocates for degrowth, number two is those who oppose it. There is also a middle ground of people who are undecided, who see values on both sides. The third theme is green growth, the belief in greener GDP. The fourth is the limits argument, physical limits to growth due to finite planetary resources. The fifth theme is when themes within degrowth itself are present without there being arguments for or mentions of degrowth and lastly, other observations.

Advocates of degrowth primarily highlight the necessity of a transition considering biophysical limits of the planet and environmental harm. The future degrowth advocates envision is bright: quality of life, human welfare, preservation of nature, set in contrast to the future that they believe is likely to come to pass if we continue as we are now. Advocates of growth or green growth believe that degrowth would bring about a worse world, a dystopia, or that the threat of climate change can be averted by investing in the right green solutions and innovation. Those who speak against degrowth believe it would decrease “welfare” and occasionally misrepresent it as negative GDP.

Something which is missing in the material is mentions of some of the core terms in degrowth, e.g; “sharing”, “conviviality”, “the commons” and “care” (D’Alisa et al., 2015, p. 3). “Simplicity” is discussed in one article. Another aspect which is missing is hope, the notion that it is not too late to change the current trajectory.

Advocating degrowth is generally seen as a left-leaning stance and pro-growth as right-leaning, which is common with environmental concerns. As degrowth argues the climate crisis calls for general social change, it is arguably counterproductive to still think in

terms of left-right divisions of politics. Pursuing growth has for a long time been a dominant objective, a privileged narrative. It is for many, a solid mental infrastructure. However, the presence of degrowth in Swedish newspapers suggests new social imaginaries are possible.

Finally, something which is not discernible from the material, but which is a point I would like to highlight personally is the notion of degrowth as “the good place is no place.”

Degrowth is seen in the articles as a “social force seeking to create change” and some examples exist of the nomadic aspects of this kind of utopianism, e.g small-scale projects and organisations. The theoretical framework distinguishes between utopia and utopianism, where utopia is a place and utopianism is a process or force. I would like to emphasise that, by this logic, degrowth is unattainable. However, in the sense that it is, and has to be, a social force seeking change, an on-going process, not a perfect place which we can “attain.”

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Codes and themes

Themes	Codes		
Pro degrowth	Positive aspects, quality of life	Limits to growth means a change is necessary	Degrowth offering an alternative to the status quo
Pro growth	Economic growth as prerequisite for a good life, well-fare, wellbeing	Degrowth would lead to poverty, misery	Change happening too quickly/radical
Green growth	Technical solutions, green technology	Sustainable development	Alternative design of economies, circular, doughnut
Limits to growth	The planet has finite resources, biophysical limits to growth	We can't go on as we are	Extraction of natural resources
Themes within degrowth	Themes within degrowth itself are present without advocating degrowth or using the word.	Shorter workweek/more leisure time,	"Limits argument"

Figure 2

Appendix 2: Empirical material

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