

## **Degrowth: a movement or a vision?**

Identifying barriers and potentials for a powerful agent of change for the socio-ecological transformation in Barcelona

*Sara Raphaela Fromm*

---

Master Thesis Series in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science,  
No 2018:024

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Lund University  
International Master's Programme in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science  
(30hp/credits)



# **LUCSUS**

Lund University Centre for  
Sustainability Studies



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

---

## **Degrowth: a movement or a vision?**

Identifying barriers and potentials for a powerful agent of change for the socio-ecological transformation in Barcelona

Sara Raphaela Fromm

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Lund University International Master's Programme in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science

Submitted May 15, 2018

Supervisor: Turaj Faran, LUCSUS, Lund University

*“A map of the world that does not include Utopia  
is not worth even glancing at.”*

*(Oscar Wilde)*

## Abstract

Our current economic system is inherently unsustainable. The 'growth fetishism' not only is the dominant paradigm of our economies, but goes way deeper into our understanding of how well-being is defined and can be improved. The concept of 'degrowth' tries to question this hegemony. However, so far, degrowth has not entered the public debate in a sufficient way. I argue that degrowth needs more insights in how to steer the transformation, besides the extensive research that has already been done on the question of "why degrowth?".

Drawing on the example of Barcelona, I identify social movements as the agent of change towards a socio-ecological transformation. I follow Erik Olin Wright's concept of emancipatory social science and his call for 'real utopias', diagnosing that in the present day, there is no real degrowth movement in Barcelona, but rather a so-called 'critical community'. I identify a strong degrowth movement in Barcelona as a desirable alternative to steer the socio-ecological transformation. Using mainly Felix Kolb's 'Partial theory of social movements', I show its viability.

Based on interviews with different scholars barriers to a degrowth movement are uncovered. The strength is undermined by an insufficient connection of academia to the local setting, the population's material needs and different social classes as well as weak ties between academia and activism. On the strategy level, missing alliances and competing viewpoints on strategic choices hinder the formation of a strong movement.

I further analyze the potentials for the emergence of a degrowth movement in the political sphere. I conclude that the political institutional structure of Spain and Barcelona can be classified as rather 'open' and evidence of an existing elite conflict is given. Additionally, a relative instability in alignments as well as several potential allies in the political sphere do provide a range of potentials for a degrowth movement. However, the window of opportunity in the aftermath of the economic crisis is closing. Besides, a current lack of support amongst the popular public opinion and a closed political space due to the Catalan independence struggle can hinder the emergence of a degrowth movement.

I propose several leverage points to overcome the existing challenges, including the formation of alliances to a broader movement which incorporates claims of redistribution to acknowledge the material needs of the people struggling in Barcelona in the present day.

**Keywords:** degrowth, social movements, real utopias, socio-ecological transformation, Barcelona

**Word count (thesis):** 13 807

## **Acknowledgements**

First of all, thank you! Yes, you! Thank you for reading this thesis, for taking your time to dive into my mindset, to explore my research. I hope this is an interesting and helpful read for you.

Thank you, Mom and Dad. Without you, I would not be able to gain any of these great experiences. Without you, in fact, I would not be.

A big thank you – and an applause – to the LUMES family, for always being challenging and thought-provoking. I feel honored having been able to spend time amongst so many incredibly smart and driven people. Special thanks to a few very special people. I will miss you.

I also want to thank Turaj Faran, my thesis supervisor, for believing in me when I didn't.

Without my interviewees this research would not have been possible. Therefore I want to thank the scholars from ICTA for taking the time to share their thoughts with me. And the interviews would not have come into existence without the help of Mine Islar.

# Table of Contents

<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Backdrop .....	1
1.2 Research gaps, aim and questions .....	1
1.2 Contribution to sustainability science.....	3
1.3 Thesis structure .....	4
<b>2 Context and case .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 The desirability of degrowth .....	5
2.2 Research case: Degrowth in Barcelona .....	6
<b>3 Meta-theories .....</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1 Research philosophy: Critical realism .....	8
3.2 Emancipatory social science and ‘real utopias’ .....	8
<b>4 Theoretical framework: Social movements as agents of change .....</b>	<b>10</b>
4.1 Social power and civil society driving change.....	10
4.2 Social movements as agents of change.....	10
<b>5 Analytical framework and research methods .....</b>	<b>12</b>
5.1 Kolb’s partial theory of social movements.....	12
5.2 Research methods .....	15
5.2.1 <i>Data collection</i> .....	15
5.2.2 <i>Data analysis</i> .....	17

<b>6 Analysis and results</b> .....	<b>19</b>
6.1 In search of the degrowth movement in Barcelona.....	19
6.2 Barriers to a degrowth movement in Barcelona .....	21
6.2.1 <i>The strength of the movement</i> .....	21
6.2.2 <i>The movement's strategy</i> .....	24
6.3 Potentials in the political context.....	27
6.3.1 <i>Political institutional structure</i> .....	27
6.3.2 <i>Elite conflict</i> .....	28
6.3.3 <i>Partisanship of government</i> .....	28
6.3.4 <i>Instability of political alignments</i> .....	30
6.3.5 <i>Public opinion</i> .....	31
6.3.6 <i>Windows for reform</i> .....	31
<b>7 Building a strong degrowth movement in Barcelona</b> .....	<b>33</b>
7.1 Embedding research in the local setting .....	33
7.2 Addressing people's material needs .....	34
7.3 Overcoming differences over strategic choices .....	36
7.4 Emerging in times of limited political space.....	36
<b>8 Final summary and outlook</b> .....	<b>38</b>
8.1 Summary.....	38
8.2 Limitations of the study .....	39
8.3 Future research and practice.....	40

<b>8.4 Concluding remarks .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>9 References .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Appendix I: Interview guide .....</b>	<b>48</b>



## List of Figures

Figure 1. Analytical Framework.....	13
Figure 2. Degrowth landscape in Barcelona.....	35

## List of Abbreviations

CIC	Cooperativa Integral Catalana
FaDa	Feminism and Degrowth Alliance
ICTA	Institut de Ciència i Tecnologia Ambientals – Institute for Environmental Science and Technology
R&D	Research & Degrowth
RQ	Research Question
UAB	Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona – Autonomous University of Barcelona

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Backdrop

Humanity is facing a multidimensional crisis, consisting of environmental, social, economic and political challenges imposed to the society (D'Alisa, Demaria, & Cattaneo, 2013). There has been a continuous stream of criticism identifying the growth-fetishism of the current economic system, such as in “The Limits to Growth” (Meadows & Club of Rome, 1972), as a major driver of this crisis. Herman Daly (1974) called for a steady-state economy, establishing the ground for the new discipline of Ecological Economics in the 1980s (Martinez-Alier, 2013). Ecological Economics, in contrast to the mainstream neo-classical view on economics, acknowledges the biophysical limits that the economic system is embedded in (Martinez-Alier & Muradian, 2015). The highly praised new premise of ‘sustainable development’ as an alternative pathway and ultimate solution is criticized as being an oxymoron (Muraca, Petridis, & Kallis, 2015), not challenging the hegemonic understanding of development as being similar to growth. The concept of degrowth – voluntary equitable downscaling of production and consumption to increase social and ecological sustainability (Demaria, Schneider, Sekulova, & Martinez-Alier, 2013) – has been proposed as an alternative, looking for a way to steer the socio-ecological transformation (Martinez-Alier, 2013).

## 1.2 Research gaps, aim and questions

### Research gaps

So far, most of the degrowth literature that evolved in the last decade since the first international degrowth conference in Paris in 2008 has been focused on the question of “Why degrowth?” (Demaria, 27th March 2018). What is currently missing is literature that fosters an understanding on how the desired socio-ecological transformation<sup>1</sup> can take place (Demaria, 27th March 2018). Many scholars argue that the economic crisis in 2008 that hit Europe opened up a window of opportunity to question the hegemony of the growth paradigm (Schneider, Kallis, & Martinez-Alier, 2010; Stephanides, 2017). Resistance amongst civil society arose in several countries with the ‘indignados

---

<sup>1</sup> I use the term ‘transformation’ very consciously and in contrast to the often similarly used term ‘transition’. ‘Transitions’ are usually concerned with technologies and artifacts (Temper, Walter, Rodriguez, Kothari, & Turhan, 2018). In contrast, the socio-ecological transformation asks for a radical, systematic shift, including the creation of new values and institutions (Temper et al., 2018). Thus, the transformation is focusing on resistance (Temper et al., 2018), aiming for social empowerment to overcome existing forms of oppression.

movement<sup>2</sup> in Spain as one of the most powerful actors (Asara, 2016). As a consequence, many Spanish citizens started experimenting with alternative forms of production and consumption as well as societal organization, especially in the city of Barcelona (de Miguel Wessendorf, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013). Besides, Barcelona became the international hotspot for degrowth researchers. However, the window of opportunity is closing again and degrowth proponents did not succeed to bring the growth debate sufficiently on the table. One reason for this missed opportunity is the fact that degrowth proponents simply were not prepared to steer the transformation successfully. They were too preoccupied preparing the question of the vision rather than the pathway to a transformation. What needs to be done is an identification of 1) who could be the major force to foster the transformation as well as 2) how this ‘agent of change’ can successfully create change. As I will elaborate in Chapter 4, I see social movements as a strong agent that can put forward the change needed.

One of my core assumptions – *that there is already an established degrowth movement in Barcelona* – has been falsified at an early stage of my research. At the end of my fieldwork in Barcelona, I realized that the degrowth community in Barcelona can rather be described as a ‘critical community’ (see *Chapter 6.1* for further elaboration). Therefore I believe that what was and still is lacking to put forward the change needed, is the political force in form of a strong social movement.

### **Research aim**

This thesis, therefore, aims at contributing to the question on “how to steer the socio-ecological transformation?” in Barcelona. I try to shed light on the barriers that currently hinder the emergence of a strong social movement. Besides, I want to identify potentials in the political environment and leverage points to foster the formation of a degrowth movement. Through taking a sustainability science approach, I aim at re-politicizing the debate on a transformation towards a sustainable future, as “*sustainability is not a positive analytical concept, but a normative ethically justified utopia, describing a state of economy, society and environment considered optimal*” (Morus 1517, as in Spangenberg 2011).

---

<sup>2</sup> The ‘indignados movement’ (also often called ‘15M-movement’) emerged 2011 as a response to the austerity policies in Spain (Asara, 2016). It succeeded in mobilizing a broad mass, occupying the squares in many Spanish cities. Their main claim “Real Democracy Ya!” (Real Democracy Now) is an expression of the distrust in political actors (Asara, 2016).

## **Assumptions**

My research is based on the assumption that the desirability of degrowth is plausible and ensures more sustainability (see *Chapter 2.1*). Besides, I assume that social movements are powerful agents of change and therefore a strong degrowth movement could foster the desired transformation (see *Chapter 4*).

## **Research Questions**

In order to achieve my research aim and based on the aforementioned – partly corrected – assumptions, I take a look at the following research questions (RQs):

- **RQ 1:** What are the barriers that currently hinder the formation of a strong degrowth movement in Barcelona?
- **RQ 2:** Does the current political context in Barcelona provide potentials for the emergence of a degrowth movement in Barcelona?
- **RQ 3:** How can the formation of a strong degrowth movement in Barcelona be promoted?

## **1.2 Contribution to sustainability science**

Besides its very specific research aim, this thesis tries to feed into discussions relevant for sustainability science. Sustainability science is an emerging discipline within the sciences (Rapport, 2007) which looks at human-environment relationships and how society can foster these relations in a more sustainable manner (Kates et al., 2001).

Sustainability Science is problem-driven, making interdisciplinary research necessary (Kates et al., 2001; Spangenberg, 2011). My thesis has been developed from the starting point of a missing success to bring degrowth in the dominant discourse in Barcelona, despite ongoing research and existing degrowth-related initiatives in the city. To analyze this problem and identify a possible solution, I draw on ecological economics, emancipatory social science and social movements theory (see *Chapter 2.1 & 3.2*), which makes this thesis interdisciplinary.

Visions and scenarios are created under sustainability science (Komyiama, & Takeuchi, 2006) while simultaneously identifying agents and necessary decisions to steer the transition or transformation towards these alternative futures (Raskin, 2008). I argue for making the ‘utopian vision’ of degrowth ‘real’. The characteristic of this realm of science to be ‘action driven’ (Spangenberg, 2011) is thus

mirrored in my call for a strong social movement and the identification of leverage points to foster the formation of this movement.

As my research is based on the understanding of the underlying broader problem as being of societal nature, it is emancipatory in the way that it seeks to challenge existing forms of human oppression. It is furthermore critical as it *“calls contemporary institutions and power relations into question and allows for a normative choice in favour of alternative social and political orders”* (Jerneck et al. 2010, p. 77).

Kates et al. (2001) acknowledge the importance of the usability of knowledge within society. I see sustainability scientists therefore as ‘bridge builders’, seeking to strengthen the dialogue between the society and science, which Spangenberg (2011) calls ‘Science for Sustainability’. As I identify myself as a sustainability scientist, I aim at wringing my thesis in a way that it is comprehensible for non-experts too, trying to make it accessible for a broader audience and activists in particular.

### **1.3 Thesis structure**

I will briefly explain the concept and desirability of degrowth, while afterwards focusing on the context of Barcelona (Chapter 2). Thereafter, I will explain my research philosophy as well as introduce Erik Olin Wright and his call for an ‘Emancipatory Social Science’ and explain the importance of the concept of ‘real utopias’ (Chapter 3). I will continue to elaborate on civil society and social movements in particular as agents of change (Chapter 4). After the introduction of my analytical framework, I describe my research design (Chapter 5). In my analysis and results sections, I follow Kolb’s (2007) partial theory of social movements using the strength, the strategy and the context to analyze the barriers and potentials of the degrowth movement in Barcelona (Chapter 6). Based on the implications of this analysis, I will propose leverage points to form a strong degrowth movement (Chapter 7). To conclude my research, I will summarize the findings and proposed solutions, its limitations, as well as topics for future research (Chapter 8).

## **2 Context and case**

### **2.1 The desirability of degrowth**

I will briefly introduce the history and concept of degrowth and why I – despite its criticism – take the desirability of degrowth for this thesis as preconditioned.

#### **The history**

The word ‘degrowth’ appeared for the first time in French as ‘Decroissance’ in 1972 (Demaria et al., 2013). It emerged into an activist slogan in the early 2000s, first in France (2001), followed by Italy (2004 as ‘Decrescita’) and Spain (2006 as ‘Decrecimiento’ and in Catalonia as ‘Decreixement’) (Demaria et al., 2013). The term ‘Degrowth’ in English did not exist until the first degrowth conference in Paris, which took place in 2008 (Demaria et al., 2013). This conference can also be seen as the beginning of degrowth as a topic of international interest for researchers (Demaria et al., 2013), marked by the publication of a monographic issue on degrowth (Prieto & Domínguez-Serrano, 2017).

#### **The concept**

Degrowth is a concept that evolved from the critique of the economic system that is currently employed in Western societies (Muraca et al., 2015). As this system is based on a paradigm of infinite growth, it is inherently unsustainable (Muraca et al., 2015). Besides the impossibility of endless growth on a finite planet for environmental reasons, degrowth also argues for the social unsustainability of the growth fetishism (Castán Broto & Dewberry, 2016). Degrowth proponents, therefore, postulate for a downscaling of economic processes, a ‘degrowing’ of the economy in order to avoid resource scarcity (Castán Broto & Dewberry, 2016). Besides, degrowth aims for a cultural change (Castán Broto & Dewberry, 2016), based on values like conviviality (Demaria et al., 2013). This cultural change is called the ‘decolonialization of the imaginary’ by Serge Latouche (2003). It aims at re-politicizing the debate about the socio-ecological transformation through questioning the hegemony of the growth-paradigm (Demaria et al., 2013).

#### **Its criticism**

The concept of degrowth is often criticized for being ‘utopian’ and its desirability is being questioned. However, the desirability of degrowth is not subject of my analysis. I acknowledge the existence of

this criticism but argue that this thesis is embedded in a different paradigm than the approaches that might criticize degrowth, such as weak sustainability, eco-modernization etc. (see *Chapter 3.2* for further elaboration).

## **2.2 Research case: Degrowth in Barcelona**

To understand the context that the degrowth community is embedded in and to stress the relevance of this thesis, a brief overview over degrowth in the Spanish and Barcelonan context will be provided in this section. I will also motivate my choice for Barcelona as a case in the following section.

### **The crisis in Spain**

Spain was hit hard by the financial and real estate crisis in 2008 (Prieto & Domínguez-Serrano, 2017). The country suffered from a high unemployment rate, which peaked in 2013 with almost 27%, particularly amongst young people as well (75%) (Prieto & Domínguez-Serrano, 2017). Besides a high poverty risk rate (22% in 2014), a lot of people in the country faced homelessness as they could not afford to pay rents and mortgages anymore (Prieto & Domínguez-Serrano, 2017). Additionally, energy poverty and missing health services became issues worsening social inequality in Spain, too (Prieto & Domínguez-Serrano, 2017).

### **Degrowth in Barcelona**

In response to the crisis, many Spanish citizens started experimenting with alternative forms of production and consumption as well as societal organization (de Miguel Wessendorf, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013). Barcelona, in particular, can be seen as a laboratory for alternative forms of living and producing/consuming, expressed in the emergence of hundreds of different cooperatives, such as food cooperatives, neighborhood initiatives, etc. (de Miguel Wessendorf, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013). Besides, Barcelona is the location for the annual degrowth summer school that takes place the fifth time in 2018 (Degrowth and Environmental Justice – Summer School, n.d.). The summer school aims at bringing together academics from different disciplines as well as ‘activist-researchers’ (Degrowth and Environmental Justice – Summer School, n.d.). The summer school is organized in collaboration with ICTA (‘Institut de Ciència i Tecnologia Ambientals’ – ‘Institute for Environmental Science and Technology’) (Degrowth and Environmental Justice – Summer School, n.d.). This research centre is based at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB – Autonomous University of Barcelona) and enjoys a high standing reputation in research on degrowth. ICTA is hosting many renowned degrowth

scholars, such as Giorgos Kallis, Jeroen van den Bergh, Federico Demaria and Giacomo D’Alisa (ICTA UAB, n.d.). In addition, the summer school collaborates with “Research & Degrowth” (R&D), “*an academic association dedicated to research, training, awareness raising and events organization around degrowth*” (Research & Degrowth (R&D), n.d.) with currently 15 active members in Barcelona and France.

Barcelona is therefore an “*international centre for research and action on degrowth*” (Research & Degrowth (R&D), n.d.), which makes it an interesting and very relevant case for research on the degrowth community.

### **Degrowth in the academic debate**

The discussion on degrowth in Spain started in Catalonia, the region in which Barcelona is embedded in (Prieto & Domínguez-Serrano, 2017). In 2007, a conference was organized at the University of Barcelona with the title «Decreixement: idees per desfer el creixement i refer el món» («Degrowth: ideas to undo growth and redo the world») (Prieto & Domínguez-Serrano, 2017). The first international degrowth conference in Paris was the beginning of a lot of intellectual work done on degrowth in Spain (Demaria, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2018). The intellectual debate in Barcelona is mainly steered by scholars from ICTA and R&D (see ICTA UAB, n.d.; Research and Degrowth (R&D), n.d.).

### **Degrowth in activism**

Even though academia has been involved in the debate around degrowth since the beginning, it is argued by D’Alisa, Demaria and Kallis (2015), that activism was and still is the ‘true protagonist’ of degrowth. The “Encuentros de Grupos Locales” (Meeting of Local Groups) that took place in 2007 in Gerona and the Marcha per el Decreixement (March for Degrowth) 2008 in Barcelona are an expression of this activism (Prieto & Domínguez-Serrano, 2017). Local groups that are described as degrowth-related by Prieto & Dominiguez-Serrano (2017) aim at providing alternative ways of living through food sovereignty, alternative social economies, local currencies, energy sovereignty and urban gardening, to mention a few.



### 3 Meta-theories

#### 3.1 Research philosophy: Critical realism

I am approaching my research and this thesis using the meta-theory of critical realism. Critical realism is based on the understanding “*that many things have a reality independent of what people say or think about them*” (Porpora 2013, p. 185). Therefore, the ontology (what is real) cannot be reduced to epistemology (what we know about reality) (Fletcher, 2016). The metaphor of an iceberg is often used in order to describe this phenomenon more illustrative (see for instance Fletcher, 2016). Although this philosophy implies that our knowledge about reality can never be complete, critical realism aims at unveiling causal mechanisms (Fletcher, 2016). It therefore fits very well with the goal of my research as I try to identify barriers and bring forward solutions to promote a strong degrowth movement. Isaksen (2012) suggests that sustainability science should make use of critical realism and its understanding of agency and social structures to facilitate research on the transformation towards a more sustainable society. As critical realism underpins, agents are shaped by the existing social structures, however they also have the possibility to transform these structures (Isaksen, 2012). Isaksen (2012) concludes that critical realism entails a call for emancipatory science, which I will follow in the next section.

#### 3.2 Emancipatory social science and ‘real utopias’

##### The task of emancipatory social science

In his work “Envisioning Real Utopias” Erik Olin Wright (2009) makes a call for emancipatory social science. He refers to this specific sort of science as a method to create scientific knowledge which is helpful in order to challenge human oppression (ibid.). Three major tasks that an emancipatory social science has to fulfill are identified: 1) a diagnosis and critique of the current state, 2) the envisioning of viable alternatives and 3) an analysis of the possible pathway towards a transformation (ibid.). Depending on the circumstances, one or the other task might be more important at a time (ibid.).

The concept of degrowth entails an emancipatory call as a response to the oppressive growth-fetishism. I take the *desirability of degrowth* as given as it has been the focus of research amongst degrowth-scholars for the past ten years (Demaria, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2018). As Demaria (27<sup>th</sup> March 2018) points out, the most pressing issue to steer the socio-ecological transformation towards a degrowth society is the answering of the question “How?”. My research therefore departs from the *diagnosis*

that degrowth is lacking a strong agent to steer the transformation. I propose that a strong social movement is a *desirable alternative* that can challenge the current state. My analysis thus is embedded in the task of envisioning the *viability* of this alternative.

### **The importance of ‘real utopias’**

Although the desirability of degrowth might, in theory, be supported by a lot of people, it is still a concept that is the target of a lot of criticism. One of the main arguments that often arise, undermining a further, fruitful discussion, is the ‘utopianism’ of degrowth. Realists are usually not prone to such ‘utopian’ ideas (Wright, 2009). In the opinion of realists, “*utopias are fantasies, morally inspired designs for a humane world of peace and harmony unconstrained by realistic considerations of human psychology and social feasibility*” (Wright 2009, p. 4). They are therefore – in the eyes of a realist – not worth thinking or even talking about (ibid.). Instead, realists are calling for pragmatic solutions to change institutions (ibid.). Wright (ibid.) acknowledges the tensions between fantasy and reality and with the idea of ‘real utopias’ tries to embrace both. The concept of ‘real utopias’ is rooted in the belief that practices that are pragmatically feasible are not independent of our visions, our imaginations, but indeed are shaped by it (ibid.). ‘Real Utopias’ help us design alternatives and communicate them, thus steering the political will to really change society and challenge oppression (ibid.). They can be helpful to motivate people to imagine alternatives, to make the first step towards an alternative future, even if the final destination may not look at all like the utopia that one departed from in their minds (ibid.). ‘Real Utopias’ are about encouraging, about empowering, without losing sight of the “*real potentials of humanity*” (Wright, 2009, p. 4). They are thus rooted in an informed understanding of the imperfect conditions we live in and that will alter the pathway towards the desired destination (ibid.).

## **4 Theoretical framework: Social movements as agents of change**

In this chapter, I will argue first that civil society and social power generally can drive change. Secondly, I will describe why social movements specifically are powerful agents of change. I introduce Kolb's Partial theory of social movements to outline the analytical framework of my analysis.

### **4.1 Social power and civil society driving change**

Wright (2016) analyses current economic systems and alternatives, arguing that power needs to be at the centre of this task. He defines power as "*the capacity to do things in the world, to produce effects*" (Wright 2016, p. 56). Power thus allows agents to change things. Following this agent-centered definition of power, he differentiates three kinds of power within economic systems: Firstly, economic power which basically stems from the control of economic resources and their usage; secondly, state power stemming from the ability to make and enforce rules; and thirdly, social power based on the ability to "*mobilize people for cooperative, voluntary collective actions*" (Wright 2016, p. 59). His differentiation is similar to the three different spheres of social change which have been identified by other social scientists: economy, politics and civil society (Callinicos, 2007).

Wright analysis shows that civil society, collectively gathered and executing social power, not only influences economic life through directly interacting with it but also indirectly through the subordination of state and economic power (Wright, 2016). Polanyi's (2001) analysis of transformation processes in the past shows that theories naming civil society as the agent of change are indeed of relevance. His retrospective approach let Polanyi identify societal forces for processes of transformation (Polanyi, 2001). He furthermore concluded that the state does not 'per se' achieve an improvement of societal challenges; indeed, it often implements and secures existing hegemonic capitalistic structures until a counter-movement emerges from society (Polanyi, 2001). Such a 'counter-movement' could be a social movement, as I will argue in the following section.

### **4.2 Social movements as agents of change**

Social Movements are phenomena of modernity (Haferkamp & Smelser, 1992). They are based on the understanding that fundamental change is possible and "*society and policy are made by people, not by gods or kings*" (Haferkamp & Smelser 1992, pp. 44f).

In emancipatory struggles, popular mobilization and collective action from *below* are needed in order to challenge existing power structures (Wright, 2018). Defining social movements as “*collective, organized, sustained, and non-institutional challenge to authorities, power-holders, or cultural beliefs and practices*” (Goodwin & Jasper 2007, p. 4), they are a major agent of change.

My argument is based on the understanding of people as active citizens and not only (critical) consumers (Leach, Scoones, & Newell, 2015). Therefore “*citizens are creative, knowledgeable actors exercising active agency, individually and through networks across scales*” (Leach et al. 2015, p. 19).

## 5 Analytical framework and research methods

In this section I will introduce Kolb's partial theory of social movements which builds the basis of my analytical framework. Afterwards I explain my methods for the collection and analysis of my data.

### 5.1 Kolb's partial theory of social movements

Kolb (2007) developed a theoretical framework which explains social movement activities, so-called 'causal mechanisms'<sup>3</sup>, that can steer *political* change. He saw a gap in the existing literature, as outcomes of social movements had already been studied quite in depth but causalities had not been sufficiently analyzed (ibid.). Kolb acknowledges that political change can entail a variety of consequences and cannot be reduced to a single, specific development (ibid.). He furthermore distinguishes between external and internal outcomes, whereas the political impact belongs to the former. He further narrows down the scope of his theory on political change to consequences that affect the state and policies and its effects for society (ibid.).

Kolb acknowledges that the validity of his theory is limited to western democracies, as it draws from the study of western social movements (ibid.). It therefore is geographically applicable for my case study in Barcelona, Spain.

#### Analytical framework

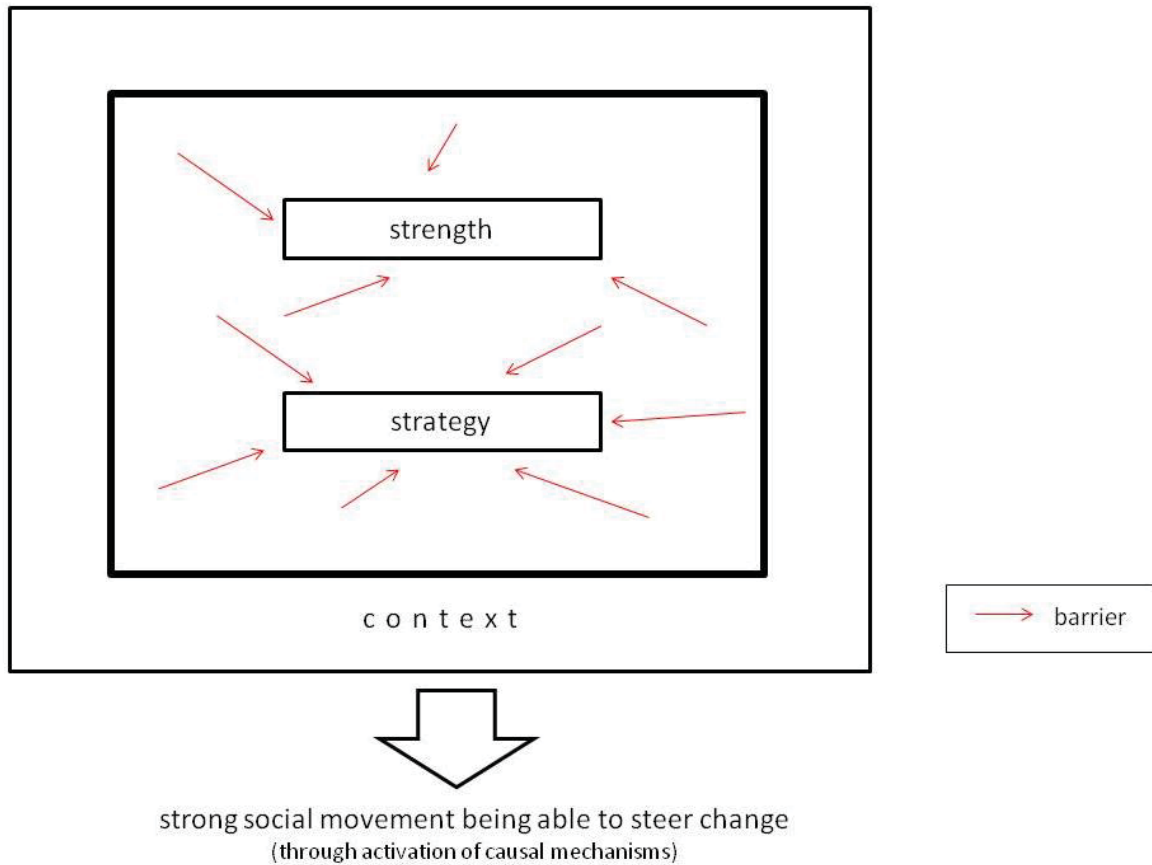
My analytical framework (see Figure 1) is firstly based on the two variables that determine the success of social movements to activate causal mechanisms and are *internal* to the movement (Kolb, 2007) (see *Chapter 6.2* for a more detailed explanation of each variable):

- 1) the strength of the movement
- 2) the movement's strategy

These two factors can (relatively) directly be steered by the social movement itself and are thus useful to analyze barriers to increase the strength – and in the case of degrowth of Barcelona - the *formation* of a strong degrowth movement (RQ1).

---

<sup>3</sup> Kolb identifies five different 'causal mechanisms' that can be activated by social movements to foster political change: disruption, public preference, political access, judicial and international politics mechanisms



**Figure 1** Analytical Framework. The *strength* and *strategy* are challenged by different barriers. They are embedded in the *context* which might hold several potentials. For a strong social movement that can successfully steer change, the barriers to the movement’s strength and strategy have to be overcome and potentials in the context have to exist (based on Kolb, 2007)

Secondly, I look at the Barcelonan political context (Kolb, 2007) that the degrowth community is embedded in. The context is *external* and cannot directly be influenced by the movement although it is of course interacting with it.

Factors to look at the *economic* and *cultural* context of social movements and their causal effects are not very often theorized (ibid.). A high level of uncertainty concerning causalities and their relevance for the success of the social movement make the theorization difficult (ibid.). For this reason, as well as the limited scope of this thesis, my focus lays on the *political* context of Barcelona.

Kolb describes eight different factors that can help explaining the political context that social movements are embedded in (ibid.). They might not all be (equally) relevant, depending on the subject of the study (ibid.). Six of the eight factors are relevant for my case study and are therefore analyzed. To answer RQ 2 (“Does the current political context in Barcelona provide potentials for the

emergence of a degrowth movement in Barcelona?”), I look at the following political variables that Kolb (2007) classified as shaping the outcomes of social movements:

- 1) Political institutional structure
- 2) Elite conflict
- 3) Partisanship of government
- 4) Instability of political alignments
- 5) Public opinion
- 6) Windows for reform

An analysis of 7) the mass media is not feasible within the scope of my research. Additionally, 8) the strength of counter-mobilization is not of relevance for this case study as there is no degrowth movement *yet* that could trigger a counter-mobilization.

### **Adaptations of the theory for my research**

Kolb’s partial theory of social movements focuses solely on the political outcomes of social movements (Kolb, 2007). Kolb’s reasoning behind this restriction is firstly that most studies that he draws upon are only concentrating on political effects. As a second reason he mentions the complexity of the social world and points out that no single theory would do justice to this complexity (*ibid.*). As for my thesis, the *actual* (potential) *outcomes* of a ‘degrowth movement’ in Barcelona are not a substantial part of my analysis. I focus my analysis on the *barriers* and *potentials* for the emergence of such a degrowth movement. Outcomes in line with the vision of degrowth would not only significantly influence the political level, but would also lead to a cultural and economic change (Castán Broto & Dewberry, 2016). Nevertheless, the variables (strength, strategy and context) to activate causal mechanisms would potentially stay the same. I therefore assume that the analysis of the barriers and potentials based on the success variables provided in order to steer political change still enable a fruitful analysis.

A second adaptation is the fact that Kolb investigated mainly two movements (the anti-nuclear energy movement in Germany and the civil rights movement in the US) in *retrospective* (Kolb, 2007). In comparison, my subject of analysis – the degrowth movement in Barcelona – is not existing yet. Outcomes of the movement’s activities are therefore not existent and thus not measurable. For this reason, I only use the three success factors for activation identified by Kolb for my analytical

framework, not his entire theory. Homburg's (2011) analysis of the degrowth movement in Germany shows that the use of Kolb's theory with this adaptation is a valid approach.

## **5.2 Research methods**

My research is exploratory, as I did not know what the outcomes of my research would be and I indeed encountered some crucial and surprising findings. It is based on qualitative research and using the approach of a case study (Creswell, 2003). Case studies are particularly helpful to answer research questions that focus on "how?" or "why?" and look at a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

### ***5.2.1 Data collection***

Relevant data has been generated through the analysis of primary and secondary literature, electronic sources, as well as six semi-structured interviews. Besides, participant observations conducted during the fieldwork in Barcelona have marginally played a role in the data collection and analysis as well.

#### **Literature and electronic sources**

To get an overview over relevant topics and to complement the data generated in the interviews, I gathered literature and electronic sources. Most of the literature used for the thesis was obtained through snowball sampling (Bryman, 2016), leading from more general, mostly secondary literature, to the study of primary literature. The literature consists mainly of peer-reviewed journal articles and books. In addition, several published research articles were taken into account which were recommended to me by my interviewees as well as other experts on the topic of degrowth. Additionally, a few electronic sources, such as website contents and blog posts, were analyzed as well.

#### **Semi-structured interviews**

I used semi-structured interviews to ask specific questions aiming at uncovering patterns and perceptions that could not be revealed by the study of the scholar's publications alone. The openness of this interview method allowed for new topics to emerge, giving me valuable hints in order to find an appropriate theory to analyze the data in a more succinct way. It has to be noted that the interview guide I developed (see Appendix I) is based on my initial assumption: that a strong



degrowth movement in Barcelona is evident. As semi-structured interviewing is a relatively open process (Bryman, 2016), it allows for follow-up questions. Depending on the course of the interview, I added and adapted my questions in order to gain the most interesting and relevant insights from each participant as possible. I recorded all interviews with the consent of the respondents and transcribed them afterwards.

### **Interviewee sampling**

Initial interview contacts were provided by Mine Islar, a scholar from LUCSUS, who is an expert on degrowth and has personal connections to Barcelonan degrowth stakeholders. I furthermore selected interviewees based on their relevance for the degrowth community and the case study. Three of my respondents, Federico Demaria, Giacomo D'Alisa and one more respondent (anonymous) are renowned degrowth scholars at ICTA that published the book "Degrowth: Vocabulary for a new Era" (Demaria et al., 2015). They are all also active members in R&D. Claudio Cattaneo similarly is a degrowth researcher at ICTA and member of R&D, as well as an inhabitant of 'Can Masdeu' (see Section 'participant observations'). Brototi Roy, a PhD scholar at ICTA, works mainly on environmental justice but also on degrowth and is part of R&D. She furthermore volunteers in the organization of the Degrowth Summer School in Barcelona. My last respondent, who wants to remain anonymous, is a scholar at ICTA as well, working mostly on the topic of environmental justice but with a high private dedication to degrowth-related initiatives, such as neighborhood projects and food-cooperatives. Unfortunately, I was not able to get a respondent from the Cooperativa Integral Catalana (CIC – Catalan Integral Cooperative), the only initiative in Barcelona that I found with a direct connection to degrowth with degrowth as a 'general principle'. However, I was able to get a rough impression of the initiative through my participation in a tour through the centre of the cooperative.

### **Participant observations**

Participant observation is a method to collect data while being actively involved in certain activities (Yin, 2014). The participant observation mainly took place at three events: a guided visit in Can Masdeu, a meeting of the degrowth reading group and a guided tour at CIC.

I was invited by one of my interviewees, Claudio Cattaneo, to join a study visit of the project with a group of English students. Can Masdeu is a squatted place that functions as a housing project, a social centre and community garden in the outskirts of Barcelona (Vall de CanMasdeu, n.d.). Claudio

Cattaneo, who lives in Can Masdeu, introduced us to the project, showed us around and answered questions for approximately three hours.

The Barcelonan degrowth reading group was established eight years ago (Research & Degrowth (R&D), n.d.). The group consists of interested people meeting bi-weekly in a private, rotating setting. The session took approximately two hours and involved a discussion about two particular articles and some broader questions connected to their content.

My third visit led me to the centre of the CIC in the middle of Barcelona. The cooperative is an *“initiative in transition for the social transformation from the bottom through self-management, self-organization and networking”* (translated from Catalan, Cooperative Integral Catalana, n.d.). It was established in 2015 and currently has approximately 400 members (Cooperative Integral Catalana, n.d.). Local products can be traded with their own currency ‘eco’ (Cooperative Integral Catalana, n.d.). As part of the cooperation’s philosophy, CIC states the importance of degrowth as one of their ‘general principles’ (Cooperative Integral Catalana, n.d.). I took part in one of the weekly tours through the centre, aiming at informing potential new members and interested local producers (Cooperative Integral Catalana, n.d.).

## **Research Ethics**

All interview participants signed a consent form in which I informed them about my research. The form also stated that they can always withdraw from the interview. It furthermore asked them about their preferences on anonymity. Two of the six interviewees decided to stay anonymous.

### **5.2.2 Data analysis**

In order to answer my RQs, I analyzed the interviews through firstly identifying recurring topics. This first step led to the development of codes to allow the comparison of the different standpoints of my respondents. I therefore coded the interviews using “MAXQDA”, a coding software. Looking at the derived codes, I identified Kolb’s (2007) partial theory of social movements as an appropriate theory to for my analytical framework (see *Chapter 5.1*). Such an inductive approach is often used in qualitative research (Harwell, 2011). Gaps in my qualitative data were filled with complementary primary and secondary literature in a deductive approach. As I looked at the context that the Barcelonan degrowth community is embedded in for my third RQ, I combined the analysis of semi-structured interviews and literature as well as electronic sources in order to come to valuable

conclusions. I thus complemented the respondent's perceptions on existing potentials with evidence of actual events.

## 6 Analysis and results

In this chapter I analyze the data generated through my six interviews as well as the participant observations. I use Kolb's partial theory of social movements as shown in my analytical framework to come to conclusions about the degrowth community in Barcelona.

### 6.1 In search of the degrowth movement in Barcelona

At an early stage of my research I made the observation that a social movement worth its name does currently not exist in Barcelona. Della Porta & Diani (2006) describe social movements as *"a form of collective action that:*

- *are involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents*
- *are linked by dense formal networks*
- *share a distinct collective identity"* (p. 20).

During my search for interviewees from abroad and while being in Barcelona, it was difficult to find initiatives that identify themselves clearly as 'degrowth initiatives'. Besides the already mentioned CIC with degrowth as a 'general principle', all other formats mainly included academic actors (the Degrowth Summer School, ICTA, R&D). I thus argue that there is currently no "dense formal networks" nor a "distinct collective identity" based on the core concept of degrowth in Barcelona.

#### **Degrowth in Barcelona – a critical community**

What exists can rather be defined as a 'critical community' (see Rochon, 1998). Critical communities, by Rochon's (1998) definition, are communities of a minor size that include critical thinkers creating new ideas. Using Erik Olin Wright's (2009) terminology, their focus mainly lays on the *diagnosis* and *critique* of current structures or systems, which then leads to the proposal of alternatives (Rochon, 1998). One major characteristic of these critical communities is that the thinkers *"do not necessarily belong to a formally constituted organization, but they are part of a self-aware, mutually interacting group."* (Rochon 1998, p. 22).

Critical communities are particularly interested in developing new values (ibid.), being mostly engaged in discussions in order to conceptualize core claims. This is particularly true for degrowth with ongoing attempts to sharpen the degrowth vision. This conceptualization is helpful to increase the broader social acceptance of these claims (ibid.). In contrast, social movements are mainly

concerned with increasing the social and political acceptance of these ideas and values, thus focusing on collective action (ibid.). Social movements are active agents that can help spreading the ideas developed in critical communities, as pointed out by Rochon (1998): *“Social Movements are formed by the melding of a critical discourse to collective action”* (p. 32).

Therefore, it is the task of the movement leader(s) to identify useful ideas provided by the critical community to increase the success of the movement (Rochon, 1998). By a reformulation of these ideas they can effectively be used to mobilize activists and build alliances (ibid.). As a consequence, the critical communities’ ideas *“become ideological frames, orientations to an issue”* (Rochon 1998, p. 31). Frames are crucial for social movements as they *“provide social movement actors with definitions of the issue at stake, of their potential allies and opponents, with evaluations of appropriate strategies, and a rationale for action”* (Diani 1995, p. 13).

My observation overlaps with research done on the existence of a degrowth movement in the German context (Homburg, 2011). Even one of the main degrowth scholars at ICTA described degrowth actors rather as actors within a critical community than a social movement:

*“If you say degrowth actors I don't think of anyone apart from the people, the activists and the scholars that come to the conferences and they are part of the network but these are quite a few. [...] But I don't see it as an organization. I see it as a small group of people that creates the idea that can speak to different debates, to different organizations who are doing different things”* (Respondent B – (RB)).

This opinion stands in contrast to the understanding of other scholars, such as Kerschner (2010), who are explicitly talking about the degrowth movement in Spain (as well as France and Italy). However, Kerschner (2010) does not make a cogent analysis about the existence of such a social movement but seems to use the term ‘degrowth movement’ from a brief glance at the Spanish degrowth website “decreixement.net”. These different viewpoints may also come from an analysis on different scales. Most scholars look at degrowth on a national or global level (see, for instance, Kerschner, 2010; D’Alisa et al., 2013), whereas my analysis focuses on the local level of Barcelona.

As a strong social movement is essential to steer the transformation to a degrowth society, I will identify the barriers that currently restrain the formation of a degrowth movement in Barcelona in the next section.

## **6.2 Barriers to a degrowth movement in Barcelona**

In order to answer my RQ 1, I will use Kolb's (2007) success variables for activating causal mechanisms necessary to steer political change to analyze my data. The factors that limit these variables – the strength, the strategy and the context of the movement – can be seen as the current barriers of the degrowth community in Barcelona that have to be overcome in order to steer the socio-ecological transformation.

### **6.2.1 The strength of the movement**

The movement's strength is of high relevance for the success of a social movement (Kolb, 2007). Two different standards have been established to measure this strength: either equating strength with the size of the organization (in terms of numbers) or with the level of protest mobilization (ibid.). I identified four barriers in the degrowth community that negatively influence the strength of the possible movement in terms of organizational numbers and level of mobilization.

#### **Missing link of academia to the local setting**

My analysis found that the researchers at ICTA are often not connected to the local struggle, the Barcelonan setting. Claudio Cattaneo (CC) mentions that none of the researchers at ICTA are “a local character” as they are not Catalans and are traveling a lot. Brototi Roy (BR) points out that the degrowth community is making good efforts in connecting on a global level, mainly through the international conferences as well as the publishing of international articles. However, she mentions a lack of connection to the people and political parties in Barcelona, which she sees as a crucial point to steer the socio-ecological transformation (BR). She is the only interviewee who *explicitly* recognizes the missing link to the local setting as a weak point of the academia. Besides that, Federico Demaria (FD) mentions at the very end of our interview that the scholars at ICTA and of R&D are most likely not a “reference point” for local “degrowthers”. He justifies this assumption by giving the example that the scholars do not publish any articles etc. in Spanish (FD). Thus, there is already a language barrier towards sharing knowledge and therefore connecting the work of the ICTA scholars to the local population. In addition, neither R&D nor ICTA focus in their research on Catalonia or even Spain, but rather on the international and European level (FD). What makes the missing link between ICTA and the local setting even more evident is captured in FD's note that there is an annual Spanish conference on degrowth, which none of the scholars from ICTA ever attended due to time constraints. In a more subtle way, this finding is supported by answers given to questions

specifically about Spain and its politics. In September 2017 Sergi Saladié, a politician from the left party 'CUP', made a motion in the Catalan parliament on degrowth (15/15\15, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2017). When asking about their thoughts on this event, three of the six interviewees responded that they had "heard about it", but were not really informed about it (RB, BR, Respondent A (RA)).

### **Weak ties between academia and activism**

Connected to the above-mentioned problem is the barrier of weak ties between academia and activism in general. Degrowth is often described as an example of 'activist-led science', being a concept that started off as an activist slogan and then got picked up by academia (D'Alisa et al., 2013; BR). However, it seems like in Barcelona this link between activism and research got missing on the way. FD tells the story about R&D talking to Barcelona en Comú – the degrowth-sympathizing ruling party in the Barcelonan city council - in a working group for preparing their political program:

*"They told very explicitly: "We don't need your theoretical stuff. We are now struggling to understand how the municipality works because we might actually win the election..."." (FD).*

Interdisciplinarity (the integration of different academic disciplines) is very high on the agenda-setting of the researchers. As FD, for instance mentions: *"There is another wave of more specific special issues. Degrowth and Feminism, Degrowth and Environmental Justice, Degrowth and Tourism, Degrowth and Transport. And what I just mentioned is on the going, so is going to be published in one or two years"*. These attempts, however, only take place on an academic level, the publication of special issues do not touch the sphere of activists. Only Giacomo D'Alisa (GD) mentions "reporting back" to the subject of the study: *"I try to supervise Master thesis that then can be useful for the people engaged in directly practices that are interesting from a degrowth perspective"*.

The analysis allowed furthermore some conclusions on the explicit roles of the respondents in the degrowth community. Damaria et al. (2013) mention that many participants are inheriting a double role: being researchers but also being involved in activism (and vice versa). Duverger (2011) mentions the positive effects that such involvement of actors with various identities can have.

When taking the interviewed researchers as the subject of the analysis, it is difficult to identify a single pattern amongst the interview participants. One of the interviewees is engaged in a lot of different initiatives, thus identifies herself as an activist. She often consciously decides to not appear in her role as a researcher when being involved in those initiatives (RA). As her research focus is not

on degrowth, she cannot clearly be seen as someone with multiple identities within the degrowth community. FD rejects to call himself an activist as he would see that as “arrogant”. He would rather identify as an “activist-oriented scholar” (FD). RB sees himself clearly as only a scholar, with the goal of advancing debates and pushing ideas. BR entails a double role as an activist and partly a degrowth-scholar. She is volunteering for the organization of the degrowth summer school in Barcelona as well as the reading group, even though she focuses on the Global South in her research (BR).

### **Failure in addressing people’s material needs**

Another problem that became evident in the interviews with the participants is the problem of addressing people’s material needs – such as access affordable housing - within the call for degrowth. GD mentions that the connection to people’s material needs has been - and still is - a weakness of degrowth proponents. He points out that the momentum of the Indignados movement offered the opportunity for the degrowth scholars to overcome this shortcoming. FD mentions several times the hesitations of people that acknowledge the desirability of degrowth to put degrowth on their political agenda (FD). Their reasoning is that the broader mass would not understand “it” and therefore reject the idea – and the parties might lose popularity.

*“He [the Podemos politician] says, Podemos should not be in favor of degrowth. But I think what is interesting is [...] the long answer, the reasons he gives on “why?”. And basically he comes to say, a little bit like basic income, “people will not understand it, there will be rejection and we will be f\*\*\*\*\*d!”” (FD).*

I would argue that the broader mass might not understand the desirability of degrowth as – as already mentioned – it often fails to address their material needs and therefore does not sufficiently connect to their realities of life.

### **Degrowth – an elitist concept?**

A third barrier could be identified which is in line with existing criticism in the broader literature. Degrowth is often described as a movement of the middle-class (Demaria, Schneider, Sekulova, & Martinez-Alier, 2013), or even elitist (Romano, 2012); Schwartzman, 2012. RA also states:

*“[The] Degrowth movement is sometimes considered like, or criticized, from the eco-socialists as a more kind of a middle-class movement. And to what extent it embraces, or to what extent it sees working-class movement also as a part of it” (RA).*



RA points out that a “socially broader revolution” needs to be established. She mentions that the scholars at ICTA discussed the importance of the inclusion of people from the Global South, but does not disclose whether the discussion touched upon including the European ‘working class’ as well. The phenomenon of an ‘elitist movement’ was also visible in the structure of the degrowth reading group. The group consists of approximately 20 people and during the meeting which I attended all nine participants were connected to academia: Master students, PhD candidates and researchers. Of course, a reading group in itself is a rather ‘intellectual’ concept that attracts a different target group than a demonstration or other, more activist-oriented, initiatives.

### **6.2.2 The movement’s strategy**

With movements being agents of change rather than the objects of change, there are further implications than the barriers that limit the strength of the movement and its influence on the success of the social movement (Kolb, 2007). In order to increase political power, strategic choices have to be considered as well (ibid.). Kolb (2007) defines a strategy “*as the way in which a social movement pursues its political goals with certain tactics*” (pp. 45f).

#### **Missing alliances with other movements**

I found that generally the interviewed researchers acknowledged and highlighted the importance of alliances (RA, FD). However, several interviewees said that (stronger) alliances are needed (FD, BR). FD points out that he and GD called for a stronger focus on alliance-building with the feminist movement, whereas BR mentions that it takes time to establish such alliances. They refer to the ‘Feminism and Degrowth Alliance’ (FaDA), a project that has been developed since the last international degrowth conference in Budapest in 2016 (FD, BR).

When being asked about their personal engagement with other movements in their work, different responses emerge. CC says he is not really engaging or working with other movements/concepts right now, but he has more in the past (CC). RB mainly tries to influence through ideas, talking to mainly people from the green movement (in Greece) during conferences and with personal relations. However, his attempt does not seem very strategic. In contrast, a few respondents showed an engagement in building alliances: GD is recently focusing on feminism and degrowth in his research, whereas BR is engaged in alliance-building in her role as an activist, as she voluntarily co-organizes the degrowth summer school. She sees the summer school as a platform to connect people from different movements together (BR). FD talks extensively about attempts to connect degrowth with

other disciplines, mainly in the form of the publication of special issues . Instead of calling it alliances, he refers to it as *“a colonialization, if you want, of degrowth into new disciplines” (FD)*.

### **Different standpoints on strategies**

Internal tensions within the degrowth community seem to be a barrier to a coherent strategy of a potential movement, too. They do not only seem to appear within R&D or ICTA, as the following paragraphs will show, but also in the degrowth community in general. FD states that their publication on 10 policy proposals in the Spanish context (Demaria et al., 2013) *“got attacked on both sides. Some people were saying it was not radical enough, other people saying it was too radical”*.

In order to justify this observation, I categorize my respondents into different strategic patterns. There are several ways to differentiate between strategies of social movements. Demaria et al. (2013) distinguish between opportunistic, alternative-building and reformist strategies. Opportunistic strategies are characterized by the goal of a clear cut with existing institutions and structures (Demaria et al., 2013). The concept of reformism aims at changing existing institutions, thus steering change within the current system (Demaria et al., 2013). In contrast, the creation of new institutions is at the centre of alternative-building strategies which operates outside of the system (Demaria et al., 2013).

The respondents can be classified under the different strategies, mainly showing evidence of two different types: the alternative-building and reformist approach. Four out of the six respondents can easily be matched with the different models of transformation:

GD seems to have a strong focus on the building of alternatives as he talks a lot about the importance of the common senses:

*“So I think the transformation is first of all is a matter of practicing and also perform different kind of daily life where you live” (GD)*.

CC follows the same strategies, being very explicit as in his alternative-building position as he refers to the claims made by the indignados movement:

*“My stance would be the system, I mean, it’s crap! Don’t hope for it! Make your own push! [...] It’s flourishing of alternatives that become more autonomous, not entirely at all, but more independent from the main state in capitalistic systems” (CC)*.

A tendency towards an almost opportunistic approach, willing to possibly actively challenging the state is also visible for this respondent:

*“But I want to stress this position that... Some way to get self-organized and squat a place or start to live with less money or just reply to the system. You know, don't pay the metro. Don't pay for things that should be given to you as a citizen, if the system was redistributive. And if it is not redistributive, redistribute it yourself!” (CC).*

However, CC refers to himself as a “poly-facetic strategist”, meaning he prefers to apply several different strategies at the same time. Nevertheless, he mentions his preference for the alternative-building approach:

*“I think it is a good strategy to go through the parliament. I wouldn't put all my eggs on this. Because, I mean, the strength of the system to strike back is incredible.” (CC).*

RA acknowledges the importance of the resistance through alternative building as well as the attempt to steer change through lobbying. However, she points out:

*“[...] if you cut the strength of social movements and their organization, and only focus on "okay, we organize on the political party level", then you cut your transformation basically” (RA).*

In contrast, FD clearly is the strongest character in sympathizing with the reformist approach:

*“I spent a lot of time on this idea of linking with policymakers. So with the European Parliament, we have done a consultancy for them, with macroeconomic models.” (FD).*

What becomes evident are the different preferences amongst the scholars concerning strategic choices. FD points out the tensions that might arise from these different viewpoints:

*“In Spain, it's true that one major attempt that we did was... Podemos was arising, I am particularly friendly. Not everybody is in the group [R&D] but I think it's radical enough but also mainstream enough to become eventually the ruling party in Spain.” (FD).*

## **Summary of identified barriers**

This chapter aimed at answering my RQ 1, identifying barriers to a degrowth movement. Barriers in the section of strength include insufficient connection of academia to the local setting, the population's material needs and different social classes as well as weak ties between academia and activism. On the strategy level, missing alliances and competing viewpoints on strategic choices undermine the formation of a strong movement.

The identified barriers constrain the degrowth community and the strength and strategy of the potential degrowth movement. However, they can also be influenced by the degrowth actors. Besides, the context that the community is embedded in plays an important role in the success of the potential movement to steer change. Therefore I will analyze the Barcelonan political context in the following chapter.

## **6.3 Potentials in the political context**

To answer my second RQ 2 ("Does the current political context in Barcelona provide potentials for the emergence of a degrowth movement in Barcelona?"), I look at six political variables defined by Kolb (2007) to identify potentials in the political context of Barcelona in the following section.

### ***6.3.1 Political institutional structure***

One can distinguish between 'open' and 'closed' political institutional structures (Kriesi, 2004). The differentiation lies between structures that provide more access points to the political systems and others that do not (Kriesi, 2004). As an example, Kitschelt (1986) suggests analyzing the political openness by the number of political parties in the government.

In Spain, municipality elections take place every four years, whereas Barcelona constitutes its own municipality (Ajuntament de Barcelona, n.d.). In the last election in May 2015, seven different parties and coalitions received enough votes to get a seat in the city council (Ajuntament de Barcelona, n.d.). 'Barcelona en Comú' (Barcelona in Common) is governing with a minority of 25%, forwarding the mayor, Ada Colau (Ajuntament de Barcelona, n.d.). Barcelona en Comú emerged out of the 'Indignados movement' and was established in June 2014 as a citizen platform (Baird, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2014). Aiming at increasing participatory democracy, the platform succeeded in getting enough votes within less than a year since its establishment (Baird, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2014). Barcelona en Comú therefore is a perfect evidence for the openness of the Barcelonan municipality system.

A similar development can be identified on the national level. The Spanish congress currently consists of seven different parties (La Moncloa, n.d.). In March 2014, also related to the Indignados movement, the left-wing party 'Podemos' evolved (Orti, 2014). Only two months later the party successfully made its way into the European Parliament during the election in late May 2014 with over one million votes (Orti, 2014). Additionally, Podemos became the third largest party in the Spanish congress in the elections in December 2015 (Orti, 2014).

The relatively high number of parties represented on the national as well as municipality level and the fast rise of two newly formed parties on both levels are evidence that the political institutional structure of Spain and Barcelona can rather be classified as 'open'.

### **6.3.2 Elite conflict**

In most cases, the claims made by social movements challenge the interests of the power holders, the elites (Kolb, 2007). For degrowth, this is definitely the case, as the accumulation of capital of the wealthy is challenged with the questioning of the growth paradigm. Kolb (2007) states that social movement's opportunities to foster political change are highly constrained if the elite is "*united against the challenge posed by the social movement*" (p. 56). The elite constitutes mainly of government officials, leaders of the political parties, parliament members, journalists as well as influential business people (ibid.). The effect of the elite conflict is highly intervened with the 'Partisanship of government' (point 3), and thus I will elaborate on both factors in the following section.

### **6.3.3 Partisanship of government**

The partisanship claims that the different political parties are mainly expressions of different interests (Kolb gives the example of capital versus labor) (Kolb, 2007). Linking to point number 2, the elite conflict, it is argued that partisan influence is only of relevance if the elites disagree over the goals of the social movement (ibid.). Studies found that Green parties and social democratic parties are more likely to respond to claims made by (left or progressive) social movements (ibid.). The hypothesis Kolb establishes in this context is that it is more favorable for a social movement if the sympathizing political party or parties are currently in power (ibid.).

Looking at the Barcelonan context, Barcelona en Comú currently is in power and it has been noted by one interviewee "[...] when Barcelona en Comú had their proposal, they didn't talk about growth.

*The growth Paradigm was not there, so it was consciously decided that they will not do that talk about growth.” (BR). However, “there are people inside of Barcelona en Comú with are explicitly degrowthers, but there are many who are not. So there is an internal negotiation” (FD), restraining the potential for cooperation.*

Secondly, 'CUP' (Popular Unity Candidacy) was identified by the degrowthers at ICTA as a possible respondent to their claims on the municipality level (BR). The left-wing, socialist party currently holds three (out of 41) seats in the city council (Consulta de Resultados Electorales, n.d.). GD states that *“CUP [is] strongly engaged and deeply related to degrowth policies and visions”*. Indeed, in September 2017, Sergi Saladié from the CUP made a motion in the Catalan parliament on degrowth in the midst of the referendum for the Catalan independence (15/15\15, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2017).

Besides CUP and Barcelona en Comú on the municipality level, Podemos was mentioned several times by the interviewees as a possible ally (RA, FD). However, division over the topic of degrowth seems evident as well (FD). Nevertheless, FD describes the strategy of the scholars to support and push the left-wing party towards a degrowth agenda:

*“So with the article we have written, with the 10 policy proposal, the operation we were trying to do it was two folded: On one hand, we wanted to mention and support a few policies that Podemos was already supporting, like audit of the debt and basic income. And on the other hand we wanted to push Podemos and the debate a little bit more radical, so towards environmental limits and abolishing GDP and so on and so forth.”*

However, the current ruling party which forms the government on a national level is the 'Partido popular', a conservative, Christian-democratic party (La Moncloa, n.d.). Although the Partido popular might not seem to be a good ally for degrowth, FD tells a story on Santí Vila, a conservative politician that contacted and met up with the ICTA scholars as he wanted to support degrowth. FD therefore comes to the conclusion that

*“Degrowth is clearly left but some people have asked whether there could be a broader constituency. And I think there could be. And I think, Santí Vila, this is what he proved to us.” (FD).*

It has to be considered that my analysis is not based on a retro-perspective approach but looks at the context for the emergence of a strong degrowth movement. Therefore, the future predictions for

election results of political parties that might become allies of such a movement are of high importance. Thus, the current state based on elections on a national level in 2016 and the municipality level in 2015 can only show a tendency.

#### **6.3.4 Instability of political alignments**

Electoral instability is a sign for unstable alignments in a (liberal) democracy (Kolb, 2007). As the political alignments get unstable, political leaders have to react to guarantee the support of the voters (Kolb, 2007). In Barcelona, as already elaborated, the successful emergence of two new parties is a sign of relatively unstable political alignments. These changes in political alignments can be explained by the economic crisis and the indignados movement which evolved as a reaction to the austerity policies (Asara, 2016).

However, unstable electoral alignments often do not have the power to cause real political change as the established political parties often reframe the new claims in a way that fit with the existing paradigm (Kolb, 2007). Through this reframing the possible destabilization is absorbed and thus prevents real political changes (Kolb, 2007). This 'co-optation' of social movement's claims is a common fear amongst social movement actors and has also been brought up by one of my interviewees (RA). The conservative politician Santí Vila (Catalan European Democratic Party) is a good example for the legitimacy of this fear:

*"So he is a conservative but he wanted to appear modern. And he wanted to flirt a little bit with progressive position. And his assistant told me explicitly: "Santí believes there is a future for degrowth, also politically, and he wants to be the first one to mention this in the Parliament." [...] Although, of course, he is going to co-opt it a bit. The assistant didn't say that, but we knew it. [...] But then the political situation changed. Barcelona en Comú came and so they were taking him from the left already, he was too late. So he started... [...] Santí Vila attacked Barcelona en Comú and he said explicitly "What Barcelona en Comú has in mind, as an economic program, is degrowth and degrowth means the stop of investments and so on". So he was taking a completely... He was attacking us!" (FD)*

### **6.3.5 Public opinion**

The factor of public opinion describes that politicians will make readjustments in order to be re-elected (Kolb, 2007). In order to let public opinion shape politician's claims and decisions the existence of an elite conflict is necessary (ibid.). The public opinion on a specific topic can therefore either have a positive or negative impact on the social movements demands (ibid.). The degree of impact of the public opinion to cause real political change is dependent on two factors: Firstly the prominence of the goal that the social movement aims at steering and secondly the compliance of the public opinion with the social movement goals (ibid.).

A high salience of degrowth in the political landscape in Barcelona these days seems to be mainly influenced by one important struggle: The Catalan independence. As I observed myself during the fieldwork, it shapes the city picture as Catalan flags are hanging in front of windows and from balconies in many parts of the city. When Sergi Saladié made the degrowth motion in the Catalan parliament in September 2017, this took place in the middle of the Catalan referendum (15/15\15, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2017). The moment is described by one of the interviewees as very "hectic" for the politicians (GD). Most of the interviewees seem to agree that they currently "*don't see a big political space for a degrowth*" (FD) as the attention of politicians and the civil society is on the Catalan independence (CC, FD). One of the interviewees even mentions a "tiredness" among the scholars at ICTA as "*the issue of independence is occupying all the political space*" (FD). FD points out that the issue of independence, and nationalism more generally, might end up in "depoliticizing debates". Through shifting a focus to struggles over national identities no space is left for a discussion on the growth fetishism (FD).

An adequate analysis on the preferences of the public opinion on degrowth is difficult. I would argue that my finding on the challenge of addressing people's material needs can be transferred to the context of public opinion. FD mentions several times that many people claim degrowth would not be understood by the broader public. Thus, it can be argued that the public opinion on the claims made by the degrowth community *as they are right now* would in majority not be positive.

### **6.3.6 Windows for reform**

The windows for reform can be depended on the government's mandate (Kolb, 2007). As on the municipality level, Barcelona en Comú is currently ruling with a minority (Consulta de Resultados Electorales, n.d.), its mandate is considerably low. Kolb (2007) mentions that economic crises can



open up windows of reform, too. Various scholars (Stephanidis, 2017; Schneider et al., 2010) indicate that the economic crisis that hit Europe in 2008 opened up a window of opportunity for a discussion on the hegemony of economic growth. As there was no growth in “reality”, it seemed easier to imagine a world without growth and question the growth fetishism (FD). However, the researchers expressed their fear that this window already closed again, mainly with the implementation of the austerity policies and the rise of the GDP:

*“But I am not too worried about independence. I am more worried that it's true that in 2010 there was a little bit of political space, because of the hegemony had been questioned. I think that space very quickly closed again with the austerity and so on. So there was recuperation and now you see the economy is growing and so on.” (FD)*

### **Summary of identified potentials**

In conclusion, the analysis of the current potentials in the political context in Barcelona revealed the following findings related to my RQ 2:

The political institutional structure of Spain and Barcelona can be classified as rather ‘open’ and evidence of an existing elite conflict is given. Additionally, a relative instability in alignments as well as several potential allies in the political sphere do provide a range of potentials for a degrowth movement despite a relatively narrow window of reform and a current lack of support amongst the popular public opinion.

The identified barriers and potentials have to be taken into consideration when aiming at making the desirable alternative of a degrowth movement viable as well. I aim at proposing several leverage points to foster a social movement in Barcelona in the following chapter.

## **7 Building a strong degrowth movement in Barcelona**

In sustainability science, it is crucial not only to identify problems but also to propose solutions or at least give leverage points to make a degrowth movement not only desirable but also viable. Therefore, I will go on to answer my third RQ on “how to steer the formation of a strong degrowth movement in Barcelona” by drawing on the implications of my analysis in the previous chapter.

### **7.1 Embedding research in the local setting**

In order to facilitate the formation of a degrowth movement in Barcelona the academic sphere should be connected to the local setting it is embedded in. More specifically, ICTA and its relevant degrowth scholars should acknowledge their importance and potential agency for the formation of such a Barcelonan movement. ICTA is internationally known amongst degrowth sympathizers for its high-qualitative publications on degrowth. Several main characters of the international degrowth community are based at ICTA. I do not intend to undermine the importance of research done by the scholars on other cases, outside the borders of Spain. However, I still argue that the researchers at ICTA could make an important contribution supporting the socio-ecological transformation in Barcelona through more connection to the local context.

#### **Increasing transdisciplinary research**

To ensure a better connection with the degrowth-related activists that are present in Barcelona, the concept of ‘transdisciplinarity’ should be embraced by the researchers. Transdisciplinarity aims at creating knowledge through the integration of non-academic participants in the research process besides academic research from different disciplines (Evely et al., 2010). It therefore is a combination of the ‘interdisciplinarity’ approach with participatory elements (Evely et al., 2010). What is crucial is the mutual goal-setting of the research in order to achieve a common goal (Evely et al., 2010). Existing attempts in ICTA to report back to the subject of study are not enough to ensure the true relevance of the research topic for the subject. ‘Science of sustainability’ calls for an *“involvement of extended peer communities, not only in dissemination of research results but also in the research process itself [...] as in a knowledge society knowledge is dispersed and cannot be monopolized by a single group, in this case the scientific system and community”* (Spangenberg 2011, p. 277).

### **Doing more ‘science for sustainability’**

During the reading group, one participant mentioned the responsibility of “them” (as ICTA, R&D) to do more research on topics relevant for the local stakeholders, the communities (GD). Spangenberg (2011) explains that a ‘science for sustainability’ aims at strengthening the dialogue between science and society. It is thus “*a service provided by science to society*” (Spangenberg 2011, p. 277).

### **7.2 Addressing people’s material needs**

What goes hand in hand with the recommendation for more transdisciplinarity in order to (re-)connect research to activism in the local setting of Barcelona is the appropriate recognition of the local struggle, the population’s material needs.

#### **Incorporating claims of redistribution and recognizing the population’s needs**

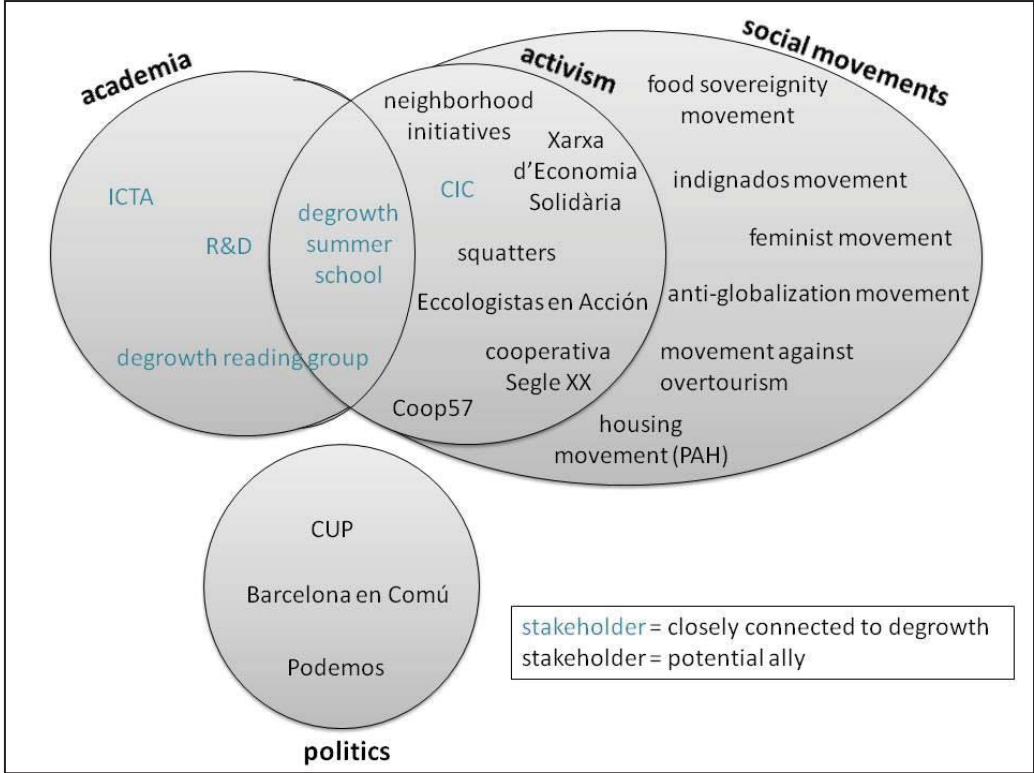
To foster the formation of a degrowth movement, distributional claims that address the material needs of the Barcelonan population should be incorporated. Social movements go beyond critical communities as they reformulate the community’s core claims to increase mobilization and alliance-building (Rochon, 1998). Nancy Fraser advocates for the incorporation of claims of both, recognition and redistribution (Fraser, 2000), in social movements. For the degrowth movement in Barcelona particularly the inclusion of claims connected to the struggle for affordable housing, against gender inequalities and ‘overtourism’ could increase mobilization. It would at the same time help removing the ‘elitist’ notion of the degrowth concept. In 2016 the term ‘decrecimiento’ (degrowth) has entered the public debate around solving the problems of overtourism in Barcelona (Blanchar, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2016). The term was used to describe that the municipality’s government talked about not only limiting but actually reducing the number of accommodations for tourists in Barcelona (Blanchar, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2016). This discussion could therefore be a good leverage point to expand the degrowth community.

#### **Connecting different movements and building alliances**

Rochon (1998) points out the importance of alliances for social movements. RA mentions that the “degrowth movement” could be a major agent in bringing together similar movements. The focus should be on identifying similarities, rather than focusing on differences and barriers (RA). Within the interviews, many possible partners for alliances that are very relevant for the Barcelonan context were mentioned (see Figure 2). The project “Degrowth in movement(s)” from Germany can be seen

as a good example of how to start with identifying similarities amongst the different movements and initiatives in Barcelona. “Degrowth in movement(s)” is a book project that collects 32 essays authored by representatives of different movements as well as initiatives in Germany, aiming at bridging differences and fostering mutual learning (Konzeptwerk Neue Ökonomie e.V. & DFG-Kolleg Postwachstumsgesellschaften, 2017).

On the last international degrowth conference in Budapest in 2016, Ashish Kothari introduced the idea of a “global confluence of alternatives” (Nemnövekedés – Degrowth, 9<sup>th</sup> September 2016). This idea could firstly be brought on the local level, aiming at forming a strong movement that incorporates the main claims of the allies involved. As an example, the indignados movement succeeded in occupying Spanish squares, bringing together people from all backgrounds that were unified under the umbrella of a call for “real democracy” (Asara, 2016).



**Figure 2.** Degrowth landscape in Barcelona. Relevant stakeholders for a degrowth movement in academia, activism (and social movements) and politics (own illustration, based on interviews)

### **7.3 Overcoming differences over strategic choices**

In order to be able to form a strong degrowth movement, differences amongst the degrowth community over strategic choices have to be overcome.

#### **Embracing a multiple-strategy approach**

The different strategic preferences within the degrowth community can be seen as conflicting. However, these strategies can and should not only co-exist but in fact equally be embraced. Chatteron and Pickerill (2010) point out that different strategies are compatible and a combination of tactics can be fruitful for social movements. Tactics of alternative building and reforming, which are particularly evident amongst the interviewees, as well as opportunistic strategies can nurture each other by addressing different timescale perspectives (Demaria et al., 2013) (see also the following chapter). Through this *“all actors together challenge the hegemony, with barricades or words, while imaging and building alternative socio-environmental futures”* (pp. 207f).

### **7.4 Emerging in times of limited political space**

The analysis of the Barcelonan context shows that the political space is currently occupied by the Catalan struggle for independence. Besides, the window of opportunity that opened up after the economic crisis is slowly closing again. However, I argue that a degrowth movement could still emerge giving the identified potentials within the Barcelonan political context.

#### **Preparing the ground with the right strategies**

Although there currently might not be a big political opportunity, this does not mean that there should not be any efforts to promote the socio-ecological transformation. However, it does mean that it is crucial to analyze which tactic(s) in particular should be pursued in the current political and cultural climate. I argue that the alternative-building outside of the system should especially in the focus. This tactic allows establishing social empowerment in niches while being in co-existence with the current system. As it does not challenge the system on a broader level, the power holders might not see it as a threat (Wright, 2009). Through this, the socio-ecological transformation can be steered in the right direction even though the political space might currently be taken by other debates, preparing the ground for a better moment.

## **Summary of identified leverage points**

I identified several leverage points to overcome the existing barriers for a strong degrowth movement which I will sum up briefly:

- Increasing transdisciplinary research
- Doing more 'science for sustainability'
- Incorporating claims of redistribution and recognizing the population's needs
- Connecting different movements and building alliances
- Embracing a multiple-strategy approach
- Preparing the ground with the right strategies

## 8 Final summary and outlook

### 8.1 Summary

I found very early in my research that one of my initial core assumptions was wrong: The existence of a strong degrowth movement in Barcelona. The degrowth community currently existing in Barcelona can rather be described as a 'critical community'. Based on this corrected assumption, my research was guided by three RQs.

My analysis unveiled several findings for my first RQ: "What are the barriers of the emergence of a strong degrowth movement in Barcelona in order to lead towards the socio-ecological transformation?". Barriers to a degrowth movement in the category of strength include the insufficient connection of academia to the local setting, the population's material needs and different social classes as well as weak ties between academia and activism. On the strategy level, missing alliances and competing viewpoints on strategic choices undermine the formation of a strong movement.

The analysis of the second RQ: "What are the current political potentials for a degrowth movement in Barcelona?" provided several findings. To keep it short, I conclude that the political institutional structure of Spain and Barcelona can be classified as rather 'open' and evidence of an existing elite conflict is given. Additionally, a relative instability in alignments, as well as several potential allies in the political sphere, do provide a range of potentials for a degrowth movement. However, the window of opportunity in the aftermath of the economic crisis is closing. Besides, a current lack of support amongst the popular public opinion and a closed political space due to the Catalan independence struggle can hinder the emergence of a degrowth movement.

To answer my third RQ: "How can the formation of a strong degrowth movement in Barcelona be promoted?", I went back to literature and used concepts of sustainability science. I identified several leverage points to overcome the existing barriers for a strong degrowth movement. To ensure an embedding of research in the local setting, the concept of transdisciplinarity and co-creation of knowledge should be used in order to re-connect the researchers to the local setting. Secondly, more science for activism should be supported, following the call for a 'science for sustainability' that connects science with society. To address people's material needs, claims of redistribution and the recognition of the populations needs, such as access to affordable housing, are necessary. Through the connection of different movements and alliance-building, a strong movement with synthesized

claims could be formed that succeeds in mobilizing a broader mass than the degrowth community does nowadays. To overcome the last barrier of differences over strategic choices, the degrowth movement should embrace a multiple-strategy approach. Through the nurturing of the different, parallel working tactics, the hegemony can be challenged more efficiently. In terms of the political context, the emergence of the degrowth movement in times of limited political space can be steered by preparing the ground for the implementation of a degrowth vision through a focus on building alternatives outside the current system.

## **8.2 Limitations of the study**

### **Inherent limitations**

The specific findings of this research are only transferable to another context to a limited extent, as the political context is very particular in Barcelona. Nevertheless, this research is of relevance for other geographic contexts as the methods and theory used to extract the findings can be of value for other cases and context as well. Kolb's Partial theory of social movements has not often been used yet to analyze distinct cases. Most of the literature that he draws his theory from are retrospectively looking at the performance of different social movements (see Kolb, 2007). My research, in contrast, shows that the partial theory of social movements can be used to analyze the potential possible leverage points of movements that are still emerging and not yet established.

### **Contingent limitations**

One major limitation of my research is the limited sampling of the degrowth community in Barcelona. The scholars at ICTA are definitely a core stakeholder – even though they might not see themselves as a major part of the Barcelonan degrowth community - but viewpoints of people only engaged in activism would have been fruitful for the analysis. As my initial topic changed after the return from my fieldwork in Barcelona and I therefore only identified the activists as a core stakeholder for the new research focus, it was extremely difficult to still get in contact with other stakeholders - mainly activists but also politicians – from abroad.

The change of the research focus increased the relevance of my research on limiting factors to the success of degrowth. However, this change also means that a few of my interview questions were partly not very relevant anymore for the new topic and I thus might have missed out some insights for the new RQs.



Additionally, my lack of Catalan skills might have limited my ability to identify and furthermore engage with relevant stakeholders. I conducted my analysis aiming at filtering initiatives that are concerned with degrowth topics in Barcelona in English and Spanish, unfortunately not in Catalan.

Lastly, the limitation of my scope to the context of Barcelona means that national, European and international interlinkages and dependencies are not sufficiently accounted for in my analysis. However, they definitively influence the political, but also the cultural and economic landscape of the municipality. To give an example, drawing the boundaries around Barcelona means that Carlos Taibo, a Madrid-based political scientist who is very active in degrowth on a national level (FD), has not been in the focus of my stakeholder sampling.

### **8.3 Future research and practice**

This thesis focused on the *variables* that determine the success of the activation of the causal mechanisms of social movements. Future research could use this analysis and continue by looking at the actual causal mechanisms and supporting the question of “how?” for degrowth by identifying concrete strategies within these mechanisms (such as the public preference and the political access mechanism).

My call for a ‘confluence of ideas’ would make a strategic decision on a name and core claims of this movement necessary. To ensure that this confluence acknowledges all ideas sufficiently, a democratic, participatory process of all ideas involved is necessary. Who exactly should be involved in this movement building and how it exactly should take place could be the subject of future practice and research.

Furthermore, a next step on the journey to a degrowth ‘utopia’ is the question of what kind of institutions are desirable and how they should look like. In line with Erik Olin Wright’s (2009) vision of ‘real utopias’, this future research would ensure that history is not repeated in the sense that “*the history of the human struggles for radical social change is filled with heroic victories over existing structures of oppression followed by the tragic construction of new forms of domination, oppression and inequality*” (p. 16). In order to promote a socio-ecological transformation that is not shortsighted, research should investigate the establishment of viable alternative institutions (Wright, 2009).

A topic that evolved in the interviews that has not been covered in my analysis is the question of communication and framing of the degrowth concept. Different target groups might make different framings of the core claims and concepts of degrowth necessary (RA, FD). Further research could look into strategies to communicate degrowth accordingly, increasing its power to mobilize different movements and a broader mass.

#### **8.4 Concluding remarks**

I departed this journey from the observation, that scholars in the past 10 years were mainly occupied with identifying the “why?” of degrowth rather than focusing on the “how?”. The vision of a degrowth society has been designed and (re-)formulated by scholars and activists around the globe. For a true emancipation, aiming at overcoming the struggle over oppression, it however needs more than just a vision. We know how Utopia looks like; it just has to be transformed into a ‘real utopia’. My research aim was therefore to contribute to the roadmap towards this utopia. A strong agent of change is necessary that can bring this vision to the public debate and can mobilize people to challenge the existing hegemony and power structures. A strong degrowth movement is therefore desirable. It is furthermore viable if the Barcelonan degrowth community succeeds in overcoming barriers, using existing potentials.

## 9 References

- 15/15\15 (6<sup>th</sup> September 2017). *El Decrecimiento a debate en el Parlament de Catalunya. Entrevista a Sergi Saladié, parlamentario de la CUP-Crida Constituent*. Retrieved from <https://www.15-15-15.org/webzine/2017/09/06/el-decrecimiento-a-debate-en-el-parlament-de-catalunya-entrevista-a-sergi-saladie/>
- Ajuntament de Barcelona (n.d.). *Ajuntament de Barcelona – La organización*. Retrieved from <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/es/organizacion-municipal>
- Asara, V. (2016). The Indignados as a Socio-Environmental Movement: Framing the Crisis and Democracy. *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 26(6), 527-542. doi:10.1002/eet.1721
- Baird, K. S. (24<sup>th</sup> November 2014). *Let's win back Barcelona!*. Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/kate-shea-baird/let%27s-win-back-barcelona>
- Blanchar, C. (17<sup>th</sup> January 2016). *El decrecimiento del turismo entre en la agenda política de Barcelona*. Retrieved from [https://elpais.com/ccaa/2016/01/16/catalunya/1452970830\\_001603.html](https://elpais.com/ccaa/2016/01/16/catalunya/1452970830_001603.html)
- Brown, K., S. O'Neill, & C. Fabricius (2013). Social science understandings of transformation. In *World Social Science Report 2013: Changing Global Environments*, OECD Publishing. <http://doi.org/10.1787/9789264203419-13-en>.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Castán Broto, V., & Dewberry, E. (2016). Economic crisis and social learning for the provision of public services in two Spanish municipalities. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 112, 3018-3027. doi:10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.09.136
- Chatterton, P., & Pickerill, J. (2010), Everyday activism and transitions towards post-capitalist worlds. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 35: 475-490. doi:10.1111/j.1475-5661.2010.00396.x

- Consulta de Resultados Electorales (n.d.). *Municipales / Mayo 2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es/min/busquedaAvanzadaAction.html?vuelta=1&codTipoEleccion=4&codPeriodo=201505&codEstado=99&codComunidad=9&codProvincia=8&codMunicipio=19&codDistrito=0&codSeccion=0&codMesa=0>
- Cooperative Integral Catalana (n.d.) *Cooperative Integral Catalana*. Retrieved from <https://cooperativa.cat/es/>
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- D'Alisa, G., Demaria, F., & Cattaneo, C. (2013). Civil and Uncivil Actors for a Degrowth Society. *Journal of Civil Society*, 9(2), 212-224. doi:10.1080/17448689.2013.788935
- Daly, H. (1974). Steady-State Economics versus Growthmania: A Critique of the Orthodox conceptions of Growth, Wants, Scarcity, and Efficiency. *Policy Sciences*, 5(2), 149-167. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4603736>
- de Miguel Wessendorf, K. (31<sup>st</sup> January 2013). Farwewell to growth society. Retrieved from <https://www.boell.de/en/economysocial/economy-degrowth-movement-films-article-16552.html>
- Degrowth and Environmental Justice – Summer School (n.d.). *Degrowth and Environmental Justice – Summer School*. Retrieved from <https://summerschool.degrowth.org/>
- della Porta, D., & Diani, M. (2006). *Social Movements: An Introduction*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Demaria, F. (2018, 27<sup>th</sup> March). *Happy 10<sup>th</sup> birthday Degrowth!* [blog entry]. Retrieved from <https://www.degrowth.info/de/2018/03/happy-10th-birthday-degrowth/>
- Demaria, F., Kallis, G., & D'Alisa, G. (2015). *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*. Oxfordshire, United Kingdom of Great Britain & Northern Ireland : Routledge.
- Demaria, F., Schneider, F., Sekulova, F., & Martinez-Alier, J. (2013). What is Degrowth? From an Activist Slogan to a Social Movement. *Environmental Values*, 22(2), 191-215. doi:10.3197/096327113x13581561725194

- Diani, M. (1995). *Green networks: a structural analysis of the Italian environmental movement*.  
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd..
- Duverger, T. (2011). *La décroissance, une idée pour demain. Une alternative au capitalisme*. Paris:  
Sang de la Terre.
- Evely, A., Fazey, I., Lambin, X., Lambert, E., Allen, S., & Pinard, M. (2010). Defining and evaluating the  
impact of cross-disciplinary conservation research. *Environmental Conservation*, 37(4), 442-  
450. doi:10.1017/S0376892910000792
- Fletcher, A. J. (2016). Applying critical realism in qualitative research: methodology meets method.  
*International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(2), 181-194.  
doi:10.1080/13645579.2016.1144401
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking Recognition. *New Left Review*, 3,107–119.
- Goodwin, J., & Jasper, J. (2007). *Social Movements: Critical Concepts in Sociology, Volume 4*. London:  
Routledge.
- Haferkamp, H., & Smelser, N. J. (1992). *Social change and modernity*. Berkeley: University of  
California Press, cop. 1992.
- Harwell, M. R. (2011). Research design in qualitative/quantitative/mixed methods. In Conrad, C. F. &  
Serlin, R. C. *The SAGE handbook for research in education: Pursuing ideas as the keystone of  
exemplary inquiry* (pp. 147-164). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi:  
10.4135/9781483351377
- Homburg, A. (2011). *Post-Growth on the Move* [Master thesis].
- ICTA UAB (n.d.) *Staff*. Retrieved from <http://ictaweb.uab.cat/personal.php>
- Isaksen, K. R. (2012). Can critical realism be an adequate philosophy of science for sustainability  
science? : based on themes already extant in sustainability science.
- Jerneck, A., Olsson, L., Ness, B., Anderberg, S., Baier, M., Clark, E., ... Persson, J. (2010). Structuring  
sustainability science. *Sustainability Science*, 6(1), 69-82. doi:10.1007/s11625-010-0117-x

- Kates, R.W., et al. (2001). Sustainability Science. In *Science*, 292(5517), 641-2.
- Kerschner, C. (2010). Economic de-growth vs. steady-state economy. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 18(6), 544-551. doi:10.1016/j.jclepro.2009.10.019
- Kolb, F. (2007). *Protest and Opportunities. The Political Outcomes of Social Movements*. Campus Verlag: München.
- Komiyama, H. & Takeuchi, K. (2006) Sustainability science: building a new discipline. *Sustainability Science* 1(1): 1–6.
- Konzeptwerk Neue Ökonomie e.V., & DFG-Kolleg Postwachstumsgesellschaften (Eds.) (2017). *Degrowth in Bewegung(en)*. München: oekom.
- Kriesi, H.-P. (2004). Political Context and Opportunity. In: Snow, D.A., Soule, A. & Kriesi, H.-P. (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Social movements* (pp. 67 – 90). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- La Moncloa (n.d.). *Gobierno de España*. Retrieved from <http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/Paginas/index.aspx>
- Latouche, S. (2003). *Décoloniser l'imaginaire: La Pensée creative contre l'économie de l'absurde*. Lyon: Parangon.
- Leach, M., Scoones, I., & Newell, P. (2015). *The Politics of Green Transformations*. Oxon: Roudledge.
- López, A. R. (2008). *Ecología Social y Decrecimiento*. [blogpost] <http://www.decrecimiento.info/2017/06/ecologia-social-y-decrecimiento.html> (10th May 2018).
- Martinez Alier, J. (2013). Ecological economics. In International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences. (Entry 91008).
- Martinez-Alier, J., & Muradian, R. (2015). Looking forward: current concerns and the future of ecological economics.
- Meadows, D. H., & Club of Rome. (1972). *The Limits to growth; a report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind*. New York: Universe Books.

Muraca, B., Petridis, P., & Kallis, G. (2015). Degrowth: between a scientific concept and a slogan for a social movement.

Nemnövekedés - Degrowth (9<sup>th</sup> September 2016). *Ashish Kothari – Radical Alternatives to Unsustainability and inequality* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AbYUkwROMhU>

Odum, H.T. & Odum, E.C. (2006). The prosperous way down. *Energy*, 31(1), 21–32.

Orti, P. (2014). *The A to Z of Spanish Culture*. London: Unusal Connections Ltd.

Polanyi, K. (2001). *The great transformation: the political and economic origins of our time*. [Electronic source] Boston, MA : Beacon Press, 2001.

Porpora, D. (2013). The new world order: What role for critical realism. In M.S. Archer & A. Maccarini (Eds). *Engaging with the world. Agency, structure and historical formations* (pp. 183-197). London, UK.

Prieto, L. P., & Domínguez-Serrano, M. (2017). An Ecofeminist Analysis of Degrowth: The Spanish Case. *Feministische Studien*, 35(2). doi:10.1515/fs-2017-0027

Rapport, D.J. (2007) Sustainability science: an ecohealth perspective. *Sustainability Science* 2(1): 77–84.

Raskin, P.D. (2008) World lines: a framework for exploring global pathways. *Ecological Economics* 65(3): 461–70.

Research & Degrowth (R&D) (n.d.). *Research & Degrowth (R&D)*. Retrieved from <https://degrowth.org/>

Rochon, T.R. (1998). *Culture Moves. Ideas, Activism and Changing Values*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Romano, O. (2012). How to rebuild democracy, re-thinking degrowth. *Futures* 44, 582–589.

- Schneider, F., Kallis, G., & Martinez-Alier, J. (2010). Crisis or opportunity? Economic degrowth for social equity and ecological sustainability. Introduction to this special issue. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 18(6), 511-518. doi:10.1016/j.jclepro.2010.01.014
- Schwartzman, D. (2012). A critique of degrowth and its politics. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 23(1), 119–125.
- Spangenberg, J. H. (2011). Sustainability science: a review, an analysis and some empirical lessons. *Environmental Conservation*, 38(03), 275-287. doi:10.1017/s0376892911000270
- Stephanides, P. (2017). Crisis as Opportunity? - An ethnographic case-study of the post-capitalist possibilities of crisis community currency movements.
- Temper, L., Walter, M., Rodriguez, I., Kothari, A., & Turhan, E. (2018). A perspective on radical transformations to sustainability: resistances, movements and alternatives. *Sustainability Science*. doi:10.1007/s11625-018-0543-8
- Vall de CanMasdeu (n.d). *Vall de CanMasdeu*. Retrieved from <http://www.canmasdeu.net/?lang=es>
- Wright, E. O. (2009). *Envisioning Real Utopias*.
- Wright, E.O. (2016). Socialism and Real Utopias. In: Hahnel, R. & Wright, E.O., *Alternatives to Capitalism*. (pp. 54 – 73). London: Verso.
- Wright, E.O. (2018). The Continuing Relevance of the Marxist Tradition for Transcending Capitalism. *tripleC*, 16(2). doi:10.31269/triplec.v16i2.968
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research : design and methods*. London : SAGE, cop. 2014.



## Appendix I: Interview guide

These are the general questions that I developed for my interviews. It has to be noted that the focus of my thesis changed afterwards, as I corrected my assumption on the existence of a degrowth movement in Barcelona. Depending on the direction of the interview, I did not always ask all of them.

1. What are your thoughts on the reactions by politics – mainly austerity policies - to counteract the negative effects of the economic crisis of 2008 in Spain?
2. The Indignados movement evolved as a reaction to the crisis in Spain. Did this movement shape your vision of degrowth?
  - a. If yes, how?
3. In September 2017, Sergi Saladié from the CUP made a motion in the Catalan parliament on degrowth. What are your thoughts on this?
4. What does degrowth mean to you?
5. Who are the actors involved in the degrowth movement in Spain?
6. Who – of these actors – are the most powerful and important ones for the socio-ecological transformation in your opinion?
7. How could the socio-ecological transformation successfully take place in Spain in your opinion?
  - a. What does it need to achieve it?
8. In your work, are there any other major concepts or social movements you work with?
  - a. If yes, which movements/concepts?
9. What is your role in the degrowth debate?
10. How would you describe your networks and communication with other degrowth actors?