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Money, Happiness and Human Needs: Shifting Priorities in Degrowth Research?

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2016

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Koch, M. (2016). *Money, Happiness and Human Needs: Shifting Priorities in Degrowth Research?*. Abstract from 5th International Degrowth Conference, 2016, Budapest, Hungary.

Total number of authors:
1

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Download date: 12. Oct. 2024

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Money, happiness and human needs: Shifting priorities in degrowth research?

- Subjective well-being in degrowth
- Evidence on subjectice well-being relative to income / GDP/capita
- Towards a different priority in research: basic human needs
- The case of nutrition

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Subjective well-being within Degrowth: From ‘objective’ to (top-)‘priority’?

- 2008 Barcelona Declaration: ‘2. We define degrowth as a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society. 3. The *objectives … are to meet basic human needs and ensure a high quality of life …*’
- Budapest 2016: ‘Degrowth is a *downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being* and enhances ecological conditions and equity on the planet’
- Should we endorse this downscaling only if it also increases subjective well-being?

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Mixed evidence on subjective well-being relative to scale and GDP/capita

- *Methodological issues* with measuring complex dispositions such as happiness on a scale from 1-10
- *Within* countries over time: Happiness and subjective well-being scores do not increase parallel to GDP / income after a rather modest level (Easterlin, Layard and many others)
- *Across* countries: O'Neill (2015): 'correlation between biophysical scale and human well-being. Countries with a large per capita footprint tend to score highly on life satisfaction …, while countries with a small per capita footprint tend to score poorly.'

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Subjective well-being (and other indicators) relative to GDP/capita: Global perspective (Fritz and Koch, Global Environmental Change 38, 2016)

	Ecolog. Sustainability			Social Inclusion				Quality of Life		
Material standard of living (GDP per capita, constant $ per year, purchasing power parity (ppp))	CO2 emis-sions in tons per capita	Ecological footprint of produc-tion in global ha per capita	Ecological footprint of consump-tion in global ha per capita	Gini Index for income inequality	Homicide rates per 100,000 persons	Demo-cracy Index	Freedom House Index	Life Expec-tancy	Literacy Rates	Sub-jective Well-being
'Poor' (below 3200$;n=32; e.g. Chad, Uganda)	0.2	1.2	1.3	41.1	8.3	4.0	2.5	58.9	58.3	4.2
'Developing' (3200-11000$; n=33; e.g. Ghana, Nigeria, Bolivia, Ecuador)	1.7	1.8	1.8	41.6	13.2	5.1	3.1	68.6	84.8	5.1
'Emerging' (11000-21500$; n=33; e.g. Argentina, China, Romania, Venezuela)	4.4	2.6	2.8	42.0	9.8	5.4	3.3	73.0	92.6	5.4
'Rich' (21500-50000$; n=32; e.g. Australia, Denmark, Sweden, Japan, Germany)	9.8	5.6	5.3	32.2	2.8	7.8	5.5	79.0	98.8	6.5
'Over-developed' (+ 50000 $; n=8; e.g. Qatar, Kuwait, Norway, Switzerland)	18.2	6.7	7.1	37.2	1.4	5.5	3.2	78.8	95.5	7.0

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De-prioritising subjective well-being in degrowth research (back to the 2008 formulation)

- The ecological footprint of all country-clusters beyond the poorest is environmentally unsustainable
- Given the immensity of the socio-ecological transformation towards a global SSE, subjective well-being scores may (temporarily) go down (in the rich countries)
- Yet a business-as-usual scenario would most likely lead to a massive decrease in well-being *everywhere*
- We may temporarily not have more to offer than the satisfaction of basic human needs

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Prioritising human needs (Doyal and Gough)

Basic needs	Universal intermediate needs	Culturally, socially and locally specific satisfiers
Physical and mental health	Nutritional food and clean water Protective housing Non-hazardous work environment Non-hazardous physical environment Safe birth control and child-bearing Appropriate health care	Identified through best available scientific knowledge *and* comparative anthropological knowledge in numerous cultures, sub-cultures, states and political systems
Critical autonomy (ability to make informed choices)	Secure childhood Significant primary relationships Physical security Economic security Appropriate education	

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Needs-oriented degrowth research: the example of nutritional food

- What are the environmental impacts of different kinds of food production (conventional versus organic farming methods)?
- How do the different forms compare in terms of scale and land-use (need for agricultural land) to feed everybody?
- Do such scenarios suggest particular diets (e.g. vegetarian) over others (e.g. omnivorous ones)?

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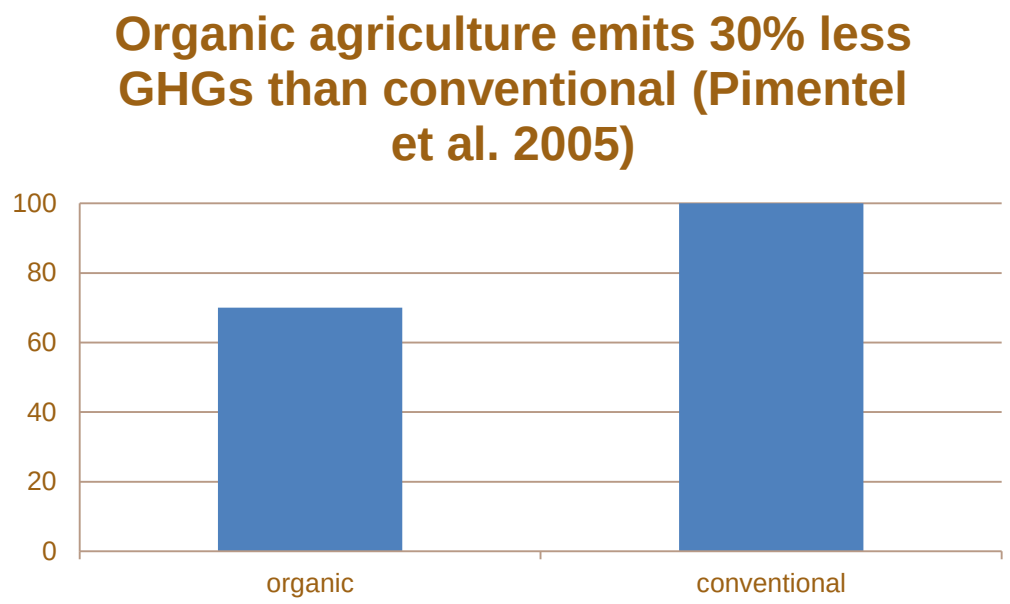
GHGs of organic vs. conventional agriculture



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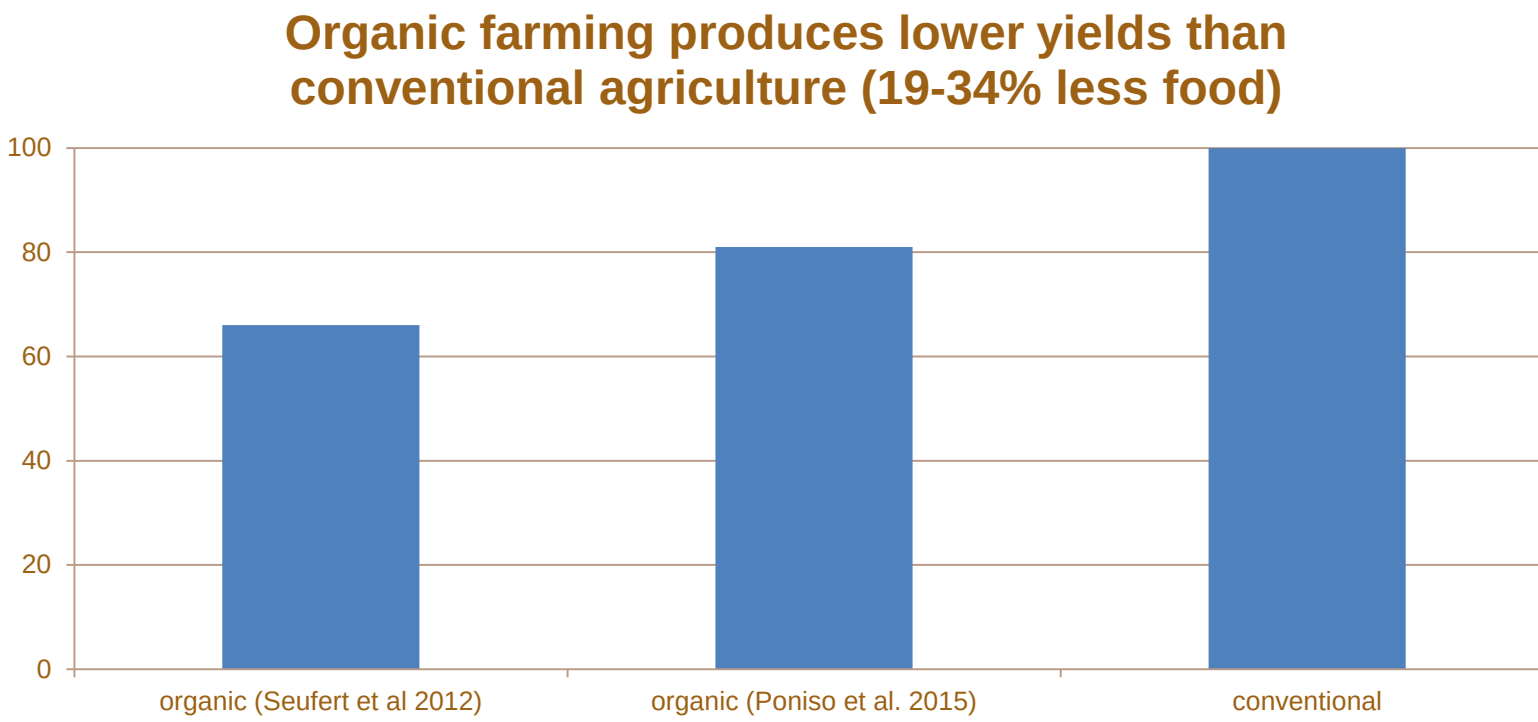
Can we feed the world with 100% organic food?



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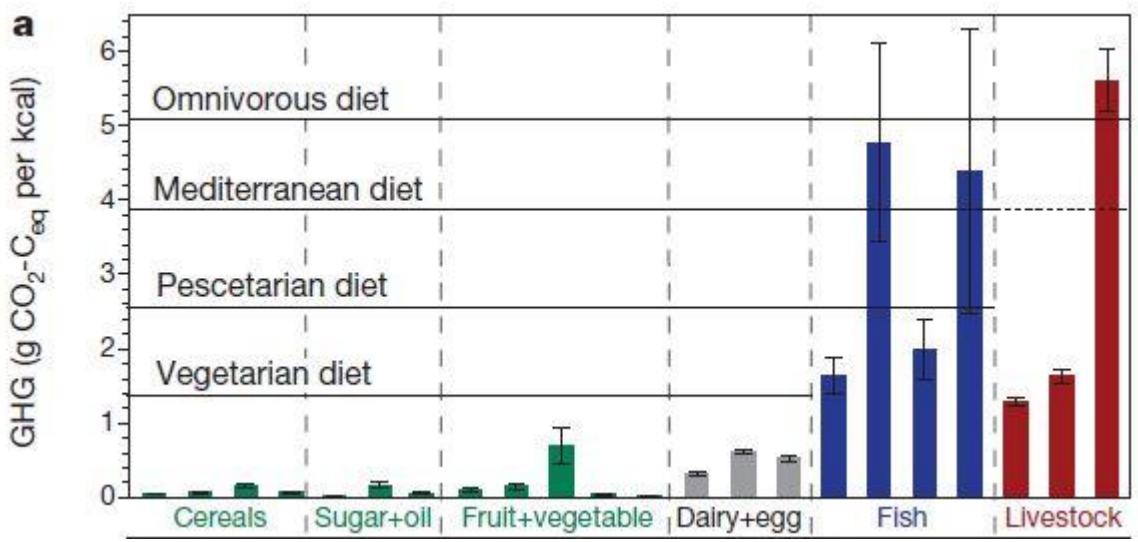
Greater scale of organic food production suggests a less omnivorous diet: 1. GHG emissions would fall (Tilman & Clarke 2014)



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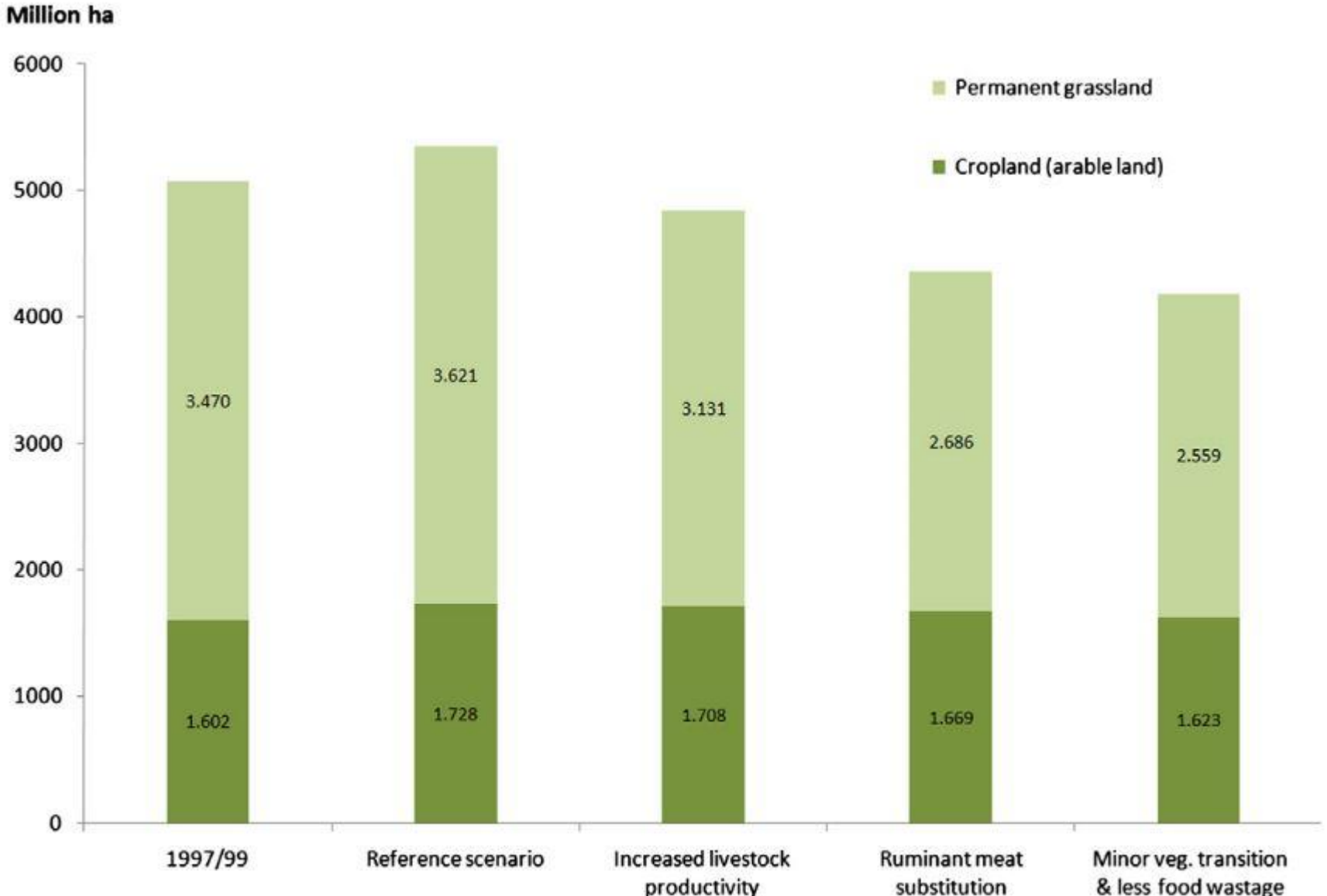
2. A 25% decrease of meat consumption would lead to a 15% minor need for agricultural land by 2030 (Wirsenius et al 2010)



Conclusion

- Mixed evidence on subjective well-being relative to GDG/capita suggests a deprioritisation of happiness / subjective well-being in degrowth research (as in 2008 definition)
- Whether more than the provision of basic human needs can be provided in a transition to a global SEE is an empirical question
- Human need for food: A transition to a vegetarian diet would not only be more sustainable than omnivorous ones, it would also feed a larger population (given constant land-use)

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