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

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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

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

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

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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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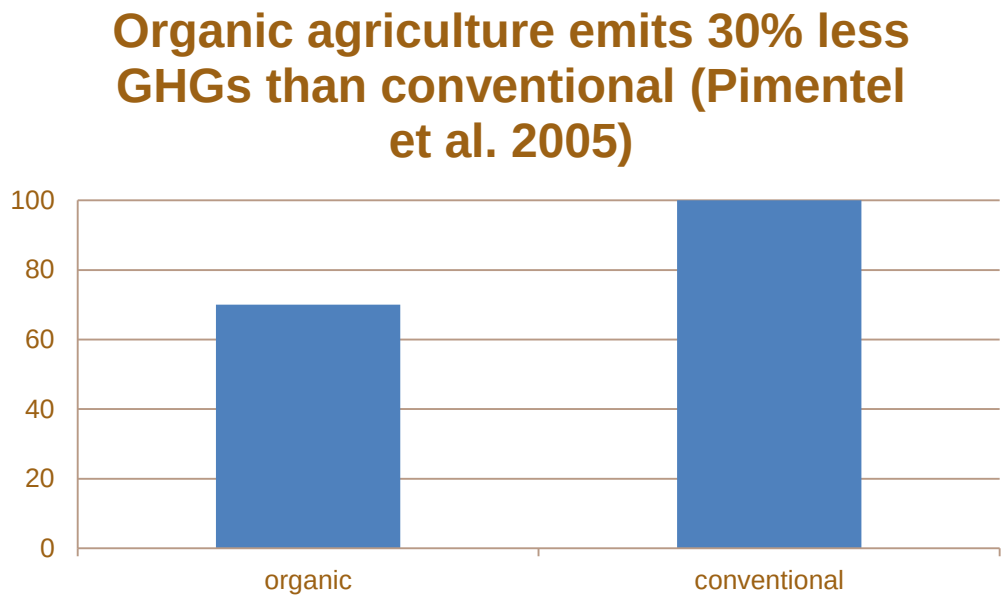
GHGs of organic vs. conventional agriculture



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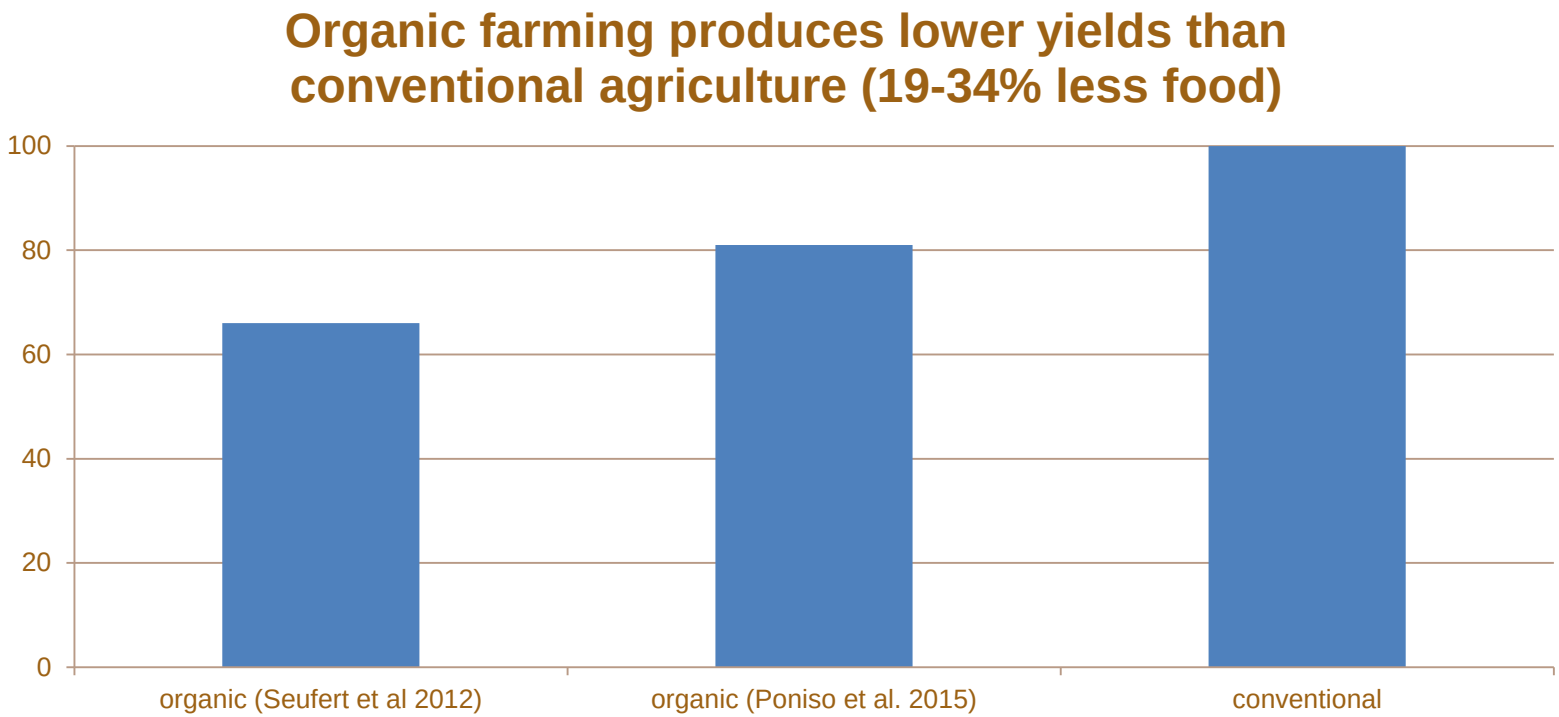
Can we feed the world with 100% organic food?



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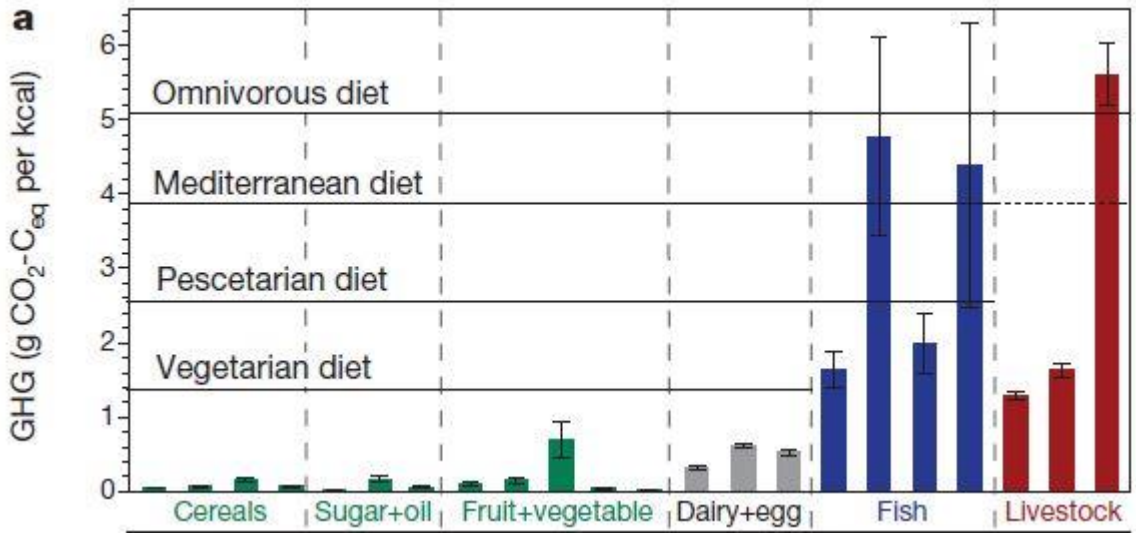
Greater scale of organic food production suggests a less omnivorous diet: 1. GHG emissions would fall (Tilman & Clarke 2014)



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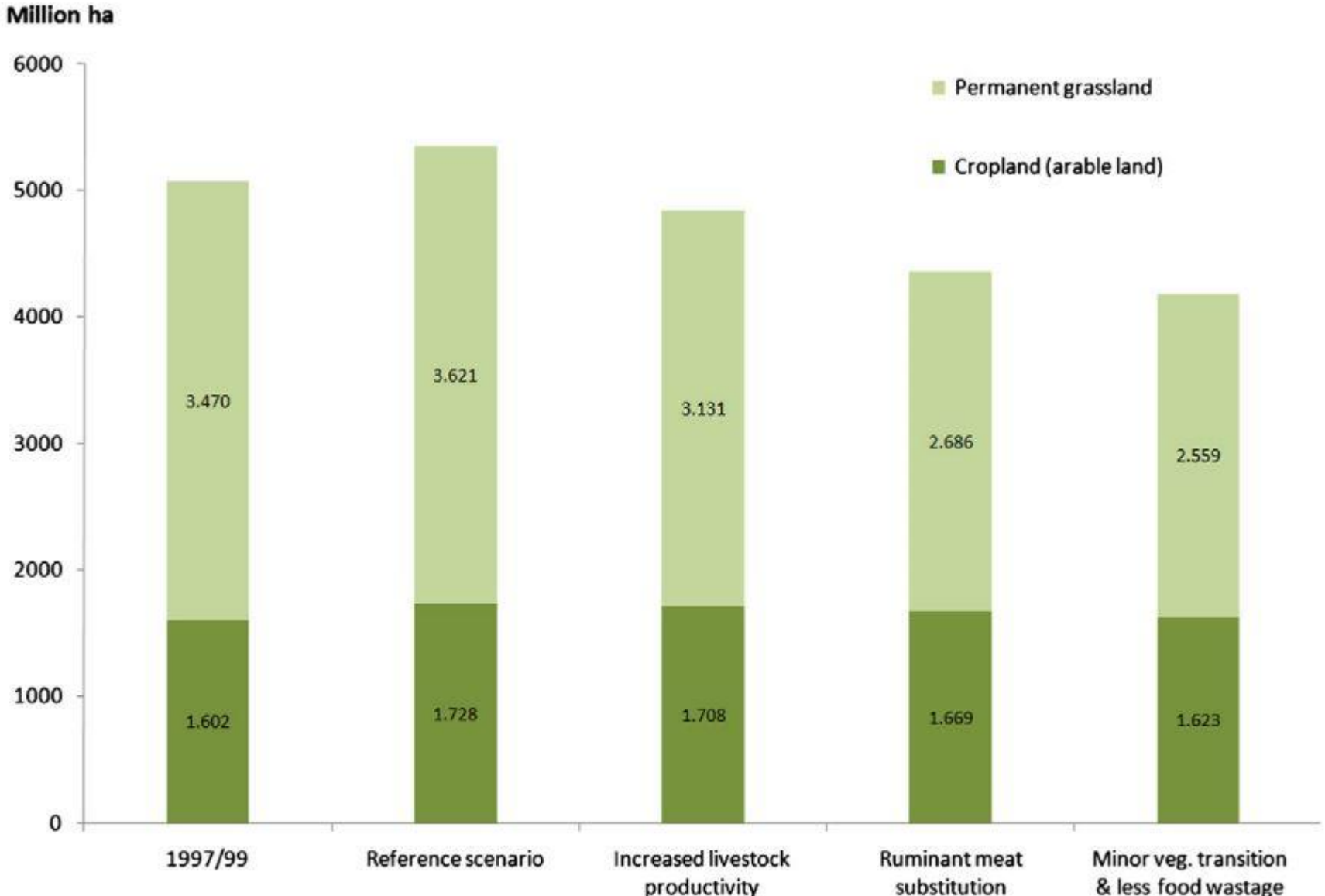
2. A 25% decrease of meat consumption would lead to a 15% minor need for agricultural land by 2030 (Wirsenius et al 2010)



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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