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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 subjective 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?



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.'



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 emissions in tons per capita | Ecological footprint of production in global ha per capita | Ecological footprint of consumption in global ha per capita | Gini Index for income inequality | Homicide rates per 100,000 persons | Democracy Index | Freedom House Index | Life Expectancy | Literacy Rates | Subjective 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



Prioritising human needs (Doyal and Gough)

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



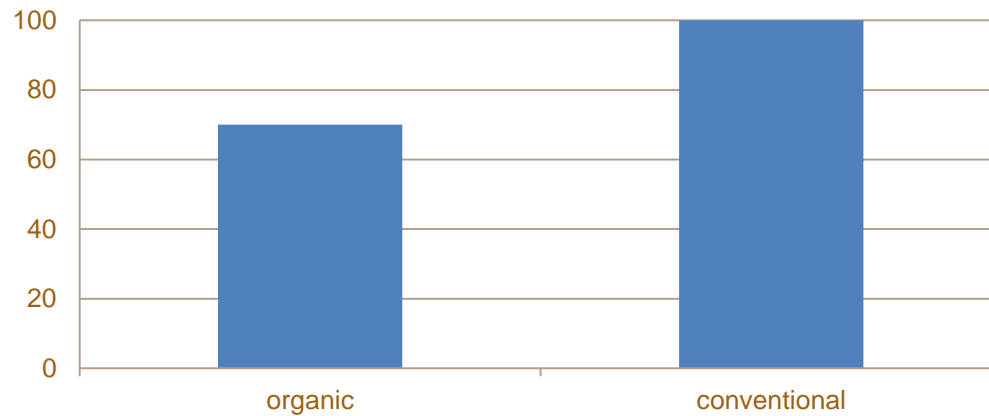
Needs-oriented degrowth research: the example of nutritional food

- 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)?



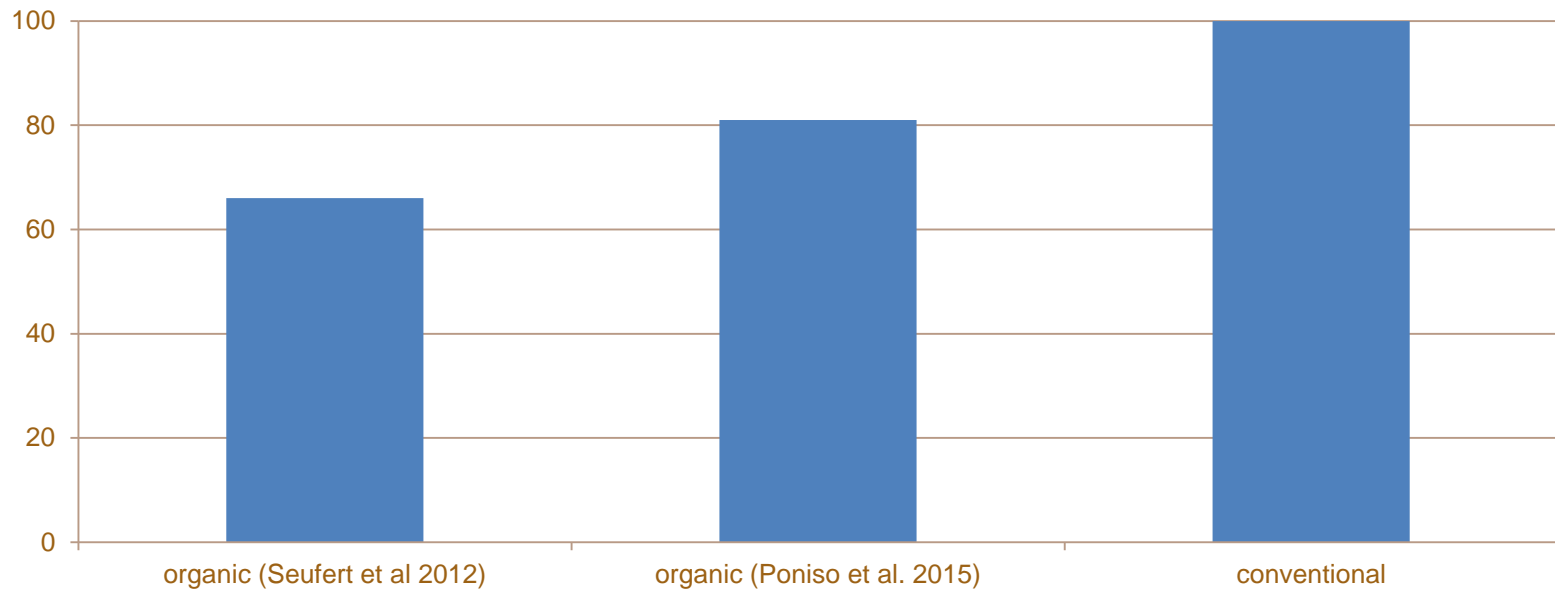
GHGs of organic vs. conventional agriculture

Organic agriculture emits 30% less GHGs than conventional (Pimentel et al. 2005)

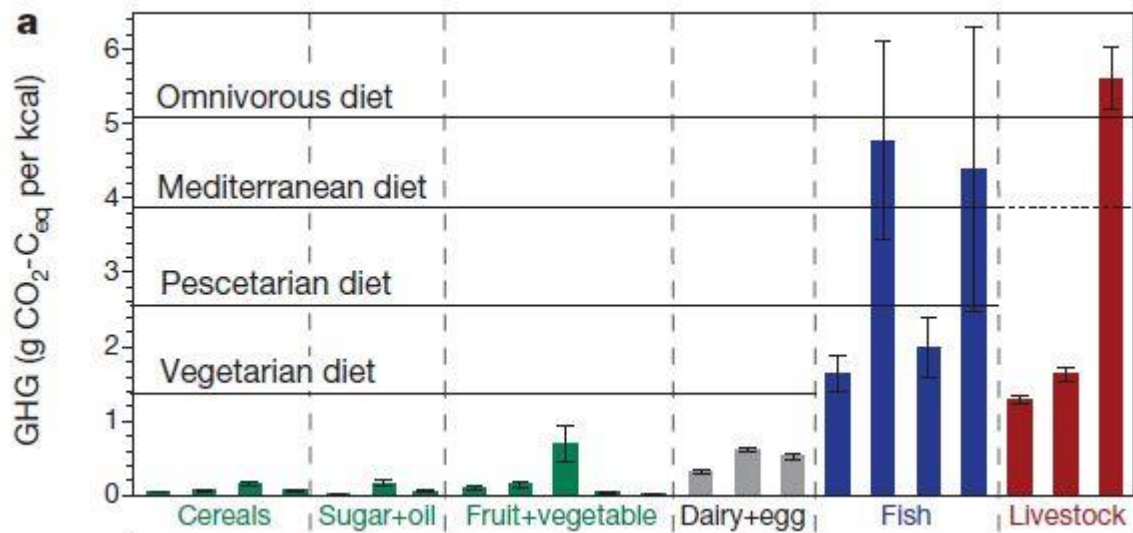


Can we feed the world with 100% organic food?

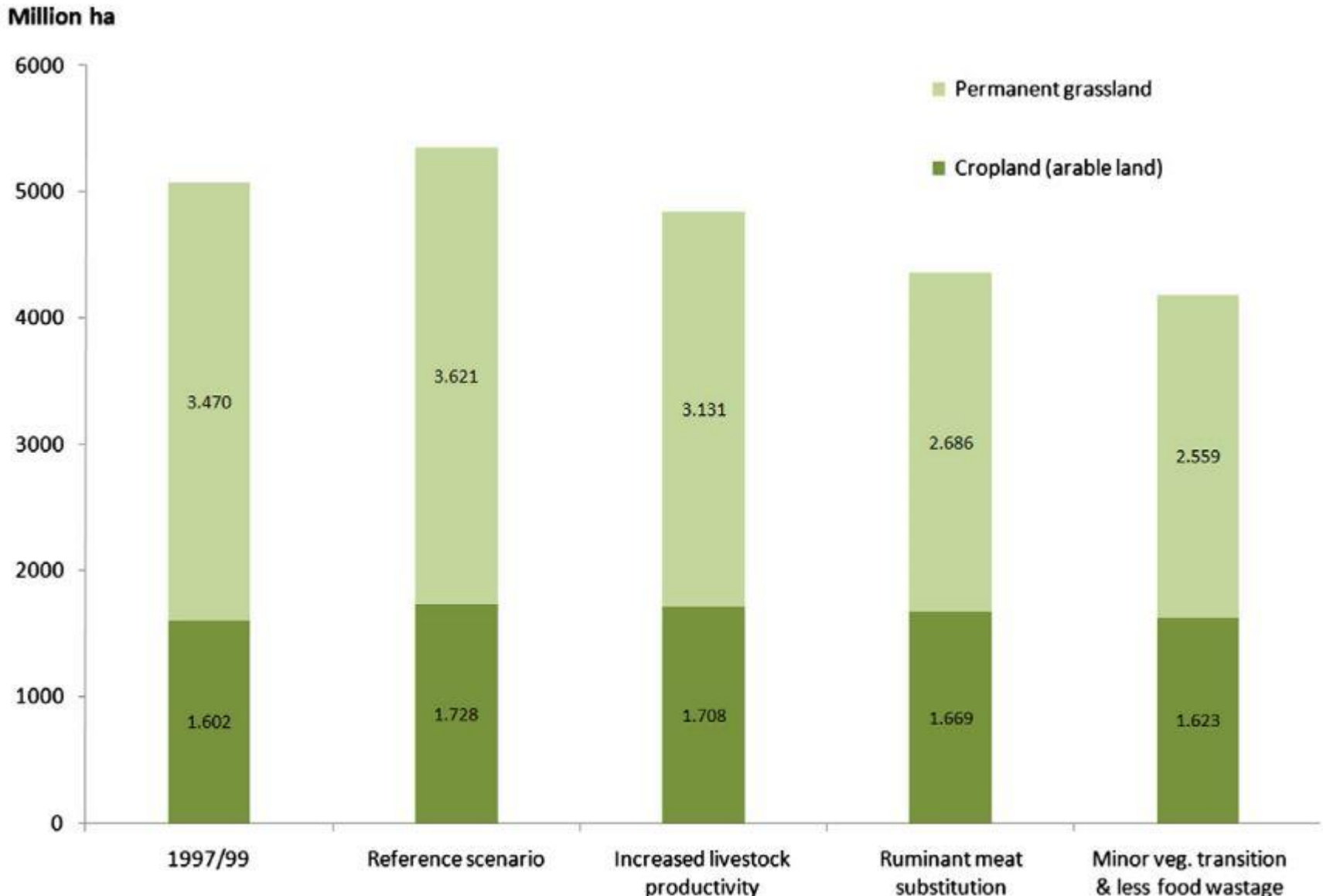
Organic farming produces lower yields than conventional agriculture (19-34% less food)



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



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)

