

**Degrowth** (in French: *décroissance*,<sup>[1]</sup> in Spanish: *decrecimiento*, in Italian: *decrescita*) is a political, economic, and social movement based on environmentalist, anti-consumerist and anti-capitalist ideas. Degrowth thinkers and activists advocate for the downscaling of production and consumption—the contraction of economies—as overconsumption lies at the root of long term environmental issues and social inequalities. Key to the concept of degrowth is that reducing consumption does not require individual martyrdom and a decrease in well-being. Rather, 'degrowthists' aim to maximize happiness and well-being through non-consumptive means—sharing work, consuming less, while devoting more time to art, music, family, culture and community.<sup>[2]</sup>

At the individual level, degrowth is achieved by voluntary simplicity. Global solutions, for 'degrowthists', involve a relocalization of economic activities in order to end humanity's dependence on fossil fuels and reduce its ecological imprint. Degrowth opposes sustainable development because, while sustainable development aims to address environmental concerns, it does so with the goal of promoting economic growth which has failed to improve the lives of people and inevitably leads to environmental degradation.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> In this way, degrowth stands in sharp contrast to current forms of productivist capitalism that consider the accumulation of capital and commodities a desirable end<sup>[citation needed]</sup>.

## **[edit] Background**

The movement arose from concerns over the perceived consequences of the productivism associated with industrialist societies (whether capitalist or socialist):

- The reduced availability of energy sources (see peak oil)
- The declining quality of the environment (see global warming, pollution)
- The decline in the health of flora and fauna, including humans themselves
- The ever-expanding use of resources by first-world countries to satisfy lifestyles that consume more food and energy, and produce greater waste, at the expense of the third world (see neocolonialism)

## **[edit] Resource depletion**

Main article: Resource depletion

As economies grow, the need for resources grows accordingly. There is a fixed supply of non-renewable resources, such as petroleum (oil), and these resources will inevitably be depleted. Renewable resources can also be depleted if extracted at unsustainable rates over extended periods. For example, this has occurred with caviar production in the Caspian Sea.<sup>[3]</sup> There is much concern as to how growing demand for these resources will be met as supplies decrease. Many people look to technology to develop replacements for depleted resources. For example, some are looking to biofuels to meet the demand gap after peak oil. However, others have argued that none of the alternatives could effectively replace versatility and portability of oil.<sup>[4]</sup>

Proponents of degrowth argue that decreasing demand is the only way of permanently closing the demand gap. For renewable resources, demand, and therefore production, must also be brought down to levels that prevent depletion and are environmentally healthy. Moving toward a society that is not dependent on oil is seen as essential to avoiding societal collapse when non-renewable resources are depleted.<sup>[5]</sup> "But degrowth is not just a quantitative question of doing less of the same, it is also and, more fundamentally, about a paradigmatic re-ordering of values, in particular the (re)affirmation of social and ecological values and a (re)politicisation of the economy".<sup>[6]</sup>

## **[edit]** Ecological footprint

Main article: Ecological footprint

The ecological footprint is a measure of human demand on the Earth's ecosystems: It compares human demand with planet Earth's ecological capacity to regenerate. It represents the amount of biologically productive land and sea area needed to regenerate the resources a human population consumes and to absorb and render harmless the corresponding waste.

According to a 2005 Global Footprint Network report,<sup>[7]</sup> inhabitants of high-income countries live off of 6.4 global hectares (gHa), while those from low-income countries live off of a single gHa. For example, while each inhabitant of Bangladesh lives off of what they produce from 0.56 gHa, a North American requires 12.5 gHa. Each inhabitant of North America uses 22.3 times as much land as a Bangladeshi. Of the 12.5 hectares used by the North American, 5.5 is located in the United States, and the rest is found in foreign countries.<sup>[7]</sup> According to the same report, the average number of global hectares per person was 2.1, while current consumption levels have reached 2.7 hectares per person.

In order for the world's population to attain the living standards typical of European countries, the resources of between three and eight planet Earths would be required.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> In order for world economic equality to be achieved with the current available resources, rich countries would have to reduce their standard of living through degrowth.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> The eventual reduction of all available resources would lead to a forced reduction in consumption. Controlled reduction of consumption would reduce the trauma of this change.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

## **[edit]** Degrowth and Sustainable Development

Degrowth thought is in opposition to all forms of productivist economics. It is, thus, also opposed to sustainable development. While the concern for sustainability does not contradict degrowth, sustainable development is rooted in mainstream development ideas that aim to increase capitalist growth and consumption. Degrowth therefore sees sustainable development as an oxymoron,<sup>[8]</sup> as any development based on growth in a finite and environmentally stressed world is seen as inherently unsustainable. Since current levels of consumption exceed the Earth's ability to regenerate these resources, economic growth will lead to their exhaustion.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> Those in favor of sustainable development argue that continued economic growth is possible if consumption of energy and resources is reduced.

Furthermore, growth-based development has been shown to be more effective in expanding social inequality, concentrating wealth in the hands of a few, than in actually generating more wealth and increasing living standards.<sup>[9][10]</sup> Critics of degrowth argue that a slowing of economic growth would result in increased unemployment and increase poverty. Many who

understand the devastating environmental consequences of growth still advocate for economic growth in the South, even if not in the North. But, a slowing of economic growth would fail to deliver the benefits of degrowth—self-sufficiency, material responsibility—and would indeed lead to decreased employment. Rather, degrowth proponents advocate for a complete abandonment of the current (growth) economic system, suggesting that relocalizing and abandoning the global economy in the Global South would allow people of the South to become more self-sufficient and would end the overconsumption and exploitation of Southern resources by the North.<sup>[11]</sup>

## **[edit] "The Rebound Effect"**

Main article: Rebound effect (conservation)

Technologies designed to reduce resource use and improve efficiency are often touted as sustainable or green solutions. However, degrowth opposes these technological advances on the ground of what is referred to as the "rebound effect". This concept is based on observations that when less resource-exhaustive technology are introduced, behaviour surrounding the use of that technology will change and consumption of that technology will increase and offset any potential resource savings.<sup>[12]</sup> In light of the rebound effect, proponents of degrowth hold that the only effective 'sustainable' solutions must involve a complete rejection of the growth paradigm and a move toward a degrowth paradigm.

## **[edit] Technological critique**

Supporters of scientific progress argue that it will solve the problems of energy supply, waste and the reduction of raw materials. This ideology draws inspiration from the Enlightenment to develop an optimistic technologist vision. They point to the reduction in the relation between energy consumption and production (or energy intensity) over the past twenty years. They propose that research into nuclear energy could provide temporary energy alternatives to the oil crisis, while technologies such as nuclear fusion come online.

This argument is contrasted by the data obtained by the Global Carbon Project in 2007, which notes the stagnation in the aforementioned decrease in energy intensity, which is one of the variables of the Kaya identity, which tends to show that either the economic downturn, or demographic decline are essential to prevent ecological disaster.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

# Light bulb conspiracy

- History

The **light bulb conspiracy** is a theory that the leading manufacturers of incandescent light bulbs have conspired to keep the lifetime of their bulbs far below their real technological capabilities. This way, they ensure the continuous demand for more bulbs and hence, long-term profit for themselves.

## Background Edit

The incandescent light bulbs were invented by British chemist Humphry Davy in 1809, however, it wasn't until Thomas Edison found a way to mass produce them that their commercial use began. In 1924, the leading light bulb manufacturers formed the international Phoebus cartel with the intent to standardize the light bulbs (e.g. the E27 connectors), which was officially disbanded in 1939.

## The theory Edit

The conspiracy theorists suspect that the primary goal of Phoebus was not to develop international standards but instead, to sink the lifetime of all light bulbs. It was noted that before 1924, said lifetime expectancy was slightly above 2000 hours. To increase the demand and hence, their profit, Phoebus members agreed to halve the life expectancy of all their bulbs by using lower-quality materials and production methods. The life expectancy decline was conducted gradually until the cartel's dissolution to avoid drawing public attention.

Although Phoebus was disbanded in 1939, say the theorists, its influence is still felt in the West. By comparison, Soviet light bulbs and those produced in socialist countries (which didn't adhere to Western standards) have been noted to have a twice as long lifetime. Modern Chinese bulbs have a life expectancy of 5000 hours. Moreover, light bulbs produced in Britain during or immediately after World War II, when the patriotic feelings could take over commercial interests, are still found in use to this day. These "ancient" light bulbs are sought after by manufacturers, who remove them from circulation "for study". The oldest lamp in the world, "Centennial Light", has been in use for 108 years, as of 2010.

Attempts have been made in Europe to circumvent the standards set by Phoebus. In 1975, German watchmaker Dieter Binniger invented a light bulb with life expectancy of 150,000 hours (in other words, 17 years of continuous use!). However, shortly after finally finding a manufacturer for his bulbs in 1991, Binniger died in a plane crash, which was officially regarded as an accident. His patent has since sunken into obscurity and oblivion.