

Summary in English

Title: Degrowth: An operationalisation in an urban context – in search of alternative development paths

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Limits to further economic growth became clear to the scientific community, and various alternative development strategies have appeared. One such strategy is degrowth, a socio-economic development concept based on ecological economics and social equity ideas. The main idea of degrowth is to decrease the size of the global economy by fair reductions in global production and consumption levels.

Interest in degrowth is constantly increasing, though clear ways of operationalisation of degrowth transitions are still lacking. A degrowth transition requires clear criteria for its implementation, especially in an urban context, to which little attention has been paid so far in degrowth debates. However, since last year we have seen an increase in the number of publications on degrowth in cities.

The key research problem addressed in this PhD thesis is how to operationalise the concept of degrowth, especially in an urban context. The main goal of this PhD thesis is to create a set of comprehensive proposals for the operationalisation of degrowth in cities.

This thesis consists of an introduction, three related scientific articles published in international journals, and a discussion and conclusions wrapping up the whole series of articles. It is written in English.

In the first article, I connect degrowth to the field of sustainability transitions. I put forward a thesis that degrowth would benefit from formalisation within the framework of sustainability transitions and formulated two goals for this article:

1. To investigate the linkages between sustainability transitions and degrowth to formulate a common ground for both of them.
2. To study how the analytical framework of sustainability transitions can help to make degrowth more specific and operational.

I applied the multi-level perspective analytical framework to describe the desired degrowth transition and conceptualised degrowth initiatives as transition experiments. The sustainability transitions analytical frameworks and conceptual notions proved to be helpful interpretative lenses for looking at degrowth. They can help to systematically structure its main postulates and help design and plan a degrowth transition.

In the second article, I aim to create an alternative urban development narrative. I put forward a thesis that it is necessary to move beyond the discussions between those who share similar opinions and enter into dialogue with those within mainstream and influential areas, such as urban economics. The article aims to find ways to operationalise degrowth in cities by juxtaposing degrowth proposals with the main themes analysed in urban economics. As a result, I formulated 24 proposals to support the degrowth transition in cities that address the key themes raised in urban economics. I conceptualise them as the agenda for urban degrowth economics.

In the third article, I apply these proposals to assess if some of the existing urban phenomena and networks have the potential to implement a degrowth transition. The article is based on two theses: that a new narrative of urban degrowth economics is necessary to operationalise degrowth on a larger scale; and that analysing the strategies and policies of cities that represent selected networks or phenomena through the lens of such a narrative can demonstrate which of the current approaches to urban development are the closest to degrowth values. The goal of the article is to assess which of the analysed urban phenomena – C40, doughnut cities (based on the doughnut economics of Kate Raworth), Transition Towns or shrinking cities – have the biggest potential to support a degrowth transition in cities.