



On the Narrative of Growth

Unlearning Dogmas

STUDY & DEBATE

Acknowledgements

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The **Green European Foundation** (GEF) is a European-level political foundation whose mission is to contribute to a lively European sphere of debate and to foster greater citizen involvement in European politics. GEF strives to mainstream discussions on European policies and politics both within and beyond the Green political family. The foundation acts as a laboratory for new ideas and offers cross-border political education and a platform for cooperation and exchange at the European level.



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Transición Verde builds on the principles of environmentalism, social justice and feminism with the mission of contributing to the necessary transformations to achieve a just transition for the whole of society, towards a model in balance with the natural environment. To this end, it aims to influence the development of public policies, increase citizen participation, analyse key environmental and social problems, and propose solutions.

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Preface

Dirk Holemans is Co-President of the Board of Directors of Green European Foundation

Making New Discourses Work

by Dirk Holemans

Already half a century ago, the American economist Kenneth Boulding famously quipped: “anyone who believes that exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist.” Now, more than fifty years later, the joke seems to be more realistic than ironic. Every day we witness the devastating effects of transgressing planetary boundaries, from biodiversity loss to climate disruption. There is no longer scientific doubt that the current economic system is unsustainable and untenable.

At the same time, our societies are built on the discourse of the accelerating growth in GDP. For decades, economic growth has been used as a synonym for prosperity, and a core and unquestioned feature of our economy and society. Studies such as this one are therefore important, because they make the dominant discourse visible, which allows us to critically engage with and explore how alternatives discourses can be developed and promoted.

Moreover, this report is not only based on a literature study, but also on workshops with both experts and lay people. It shows why many proposals that go ‘beyond growth’ are not met with great public support: as growth is considered as the ‘natural’ condition, proposals envisioning another future create a feeling of uncertainty. There are however positive avenues to explore, linking to already emerging alternative discourses

like the role of paid work in people’s life. Putting work outside of the center of one’s life - an emergent discussion in our societies – provides a space where other ways of living, of understanding the world, and of building one’s identity are possible.

These are promising results that are also relevant for European policies and politics. It is clear that if we want to put the European economy back into planetary boundaries – which besides reducing greenhouse gas emissions includes building a real circular economy (reuse of resources) and restoring ecosystems – we have to move away from a growth-based vision. The EU Green Deal has brought, compared to the policies of preceding European Commissions, a shift of direction towards sustainability, taking climate disruption and biodiversity collapse as serious issues. But it is still a growth-based perspective.

The good news is that alternative discourses, proposals, and practices are flourishing all over Europe and beyond, as for example the *Beyond Growth* conference organised by the European Parliament in 2023 showed. It is in the interest of all to further pursue this ‘beyond growth’ path, not the least at the European level, as it is the most powerful lever that we have to realize the urgent and massive transformation of our society. We thank GEF and the authors for this valuable contribution to piercing the growth narrative.

Part One

Raúl Gómez is the Director of Transición Verde Foundation.

On Growth

by Raúl Gómez

Introduction

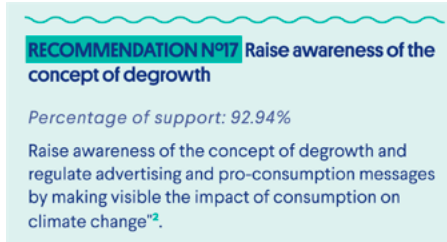
In our capitalist system the economy must grow, full stop. We all take it for granted that if it did not grow for a prolonged period of time, everything would collapse; so it must grow almost constantly and forever. But this growth, on the one hand, brings with it a problem and, on the other hand, faces an unsolvable paradox that is at the root of the great environmental problems of our time. The problem is that growth is not linear. The economy is not satisfied with growing X per year, but seeks exponential growth, it has to grow by X per cent per year. The paradox is that this growth, theoretically unlimited, takes place in a limited physical framework, such as the planet itself. So, if logic tells us that unlimited growth is not possible (with its consequent consumption of resources), how is it possible that the entire world economy, our entire civilisation, is based on unlimited growth? Why is it so difficult to propose an alternative? And why is it that the majority of the population does not even want to consider these questions, this great paradox?

There are already many of us who believe that we need to talk seriously about the future prospects of human society, and the

climate emergency has left us no room for procrastination. Nevertheless, in political, economic and media forums, this topic is still in the minority and can become a target for ridicule. Sometimes we are even accused of wanting to return to the caves, precisely those of us who want to discuss proposals to avoid this. This is because society is not yet ready to talk about alternatives to growth. And it is not because of a question of narrative. Because the dominant discourse has convinced us that infinite growth is an axiom when, in reality, it is a dogma.

But we consider it essential to work on the narrative of growth in order to open a serious debate in society on the future of our socio-economic model. And it is so because of the amount of noise and disinformation (or the opposite, the most absolute silence) that is produced around any point of view that goes against its current inertia. We are convinced that when citizens are confronted with present and future problems and these are explained to them without polarisation, without partisanship and without short-termism, the vast majority respond in a way that is very well oriented towards measures that would make us avoid the worst effects of those problems. This is not just our belief;

there is evidence for it. A telling example of this, in terms of the growth narrative, is Recommendation 17 of the Spanish Citizens' Climate Assembly¹:



The percentage of support among the members of the Assembly, as we see, was 93%. And this is particularly noteworthy because the Assembly was “made up of one hundred people representing the diversity of Spanish society”³. In other words, they were people of diverse age, culture, economic situation, ideology... And 93 of the 100, after having received precise information from a group of experts who also contributed varied approaches and positions, supported a recommendation that proposed working on the narrative of degrowth.

Last year, 2023, the Green European Foundation (GEF) launched several projects already trying to reflect on a no-growth scenario. One of them, coordinated by Richard Wouters and in which we also participated, was called *Geopolitics of a Post-Growth Europe*⁴. This project has brought experts in degrowth together with experts in geopolitics to debate. In this context, which is necessary and interesting, there is freedom and open-mindedness to make proposals and even some political fiction. But bringing these ideas and debates to the places where decisions are made is much more complex. Without a conducive social environment, it is likely that even conscious political options that want to improve the situation of the majorities will not dare to do so, as it may have a high electoral cost.

The questioning of growth as an economic engine is a debate for which we are not yet ready. First of all, it is necessary to make more people aware of the economic origin of environmental imbalance and inequity. This requires breaking through the wall that has been built by the dominant narrative in the collective conscious and unconscious. There are changes that can only be achieved through great social pressure, but that should not discourage us; throughout history, we have seen significant changes driven by public awareness, social pressure and the demand for accountability. We must move towards a correct diagnosis of the situation. But without forgetting that the wall formed by the growth narrative is high and resistant like few others. That is why, in order to analyse and combat the hegemony of this narrative, we proposed to the GEF the project of which this publication is a consequence.

There are no magic solutions to social and environmental problems. We know that unlimited economic growth breeds a problem that will reveal itself sooner or later; and it is inevitable that it is a serious problem. We want it to be discussed and debated. But the aim of this study is not to talk about alternatives to growth, but to contribute to a preliminary step: to facilitate the conditions that will allow a debate on these alternatives. We are convinced that in order to help this debate to take place in society, we need to know how the growth narrative operates and what, if any, are its weaknesses. That is the starting point of this project. We want to say that the emperor is naked, not what clothes he should wear.

On the nature of growth

When I was a child, I really enjoyed playing chess against my stepfather. One day when we were at the chessboard, my mother told me the old and well-known (not to me then) legend of the invention of chess, the legend of Sissa. There are many versions, but the

one my mother told me more or less went as follows:

“In a kingdom in ancient India there was a Brahmin who was so rich that he possessed everything he ever desired and was bored with everything. So he ordered Sissa to invent a game that would entertain him and match his intelligence and strategic skills.

After a few months, Sissa returned with the chess set, handed it to the Brahmin and explained how to play. In a short time the Brahmin revealed himself to be a great chess enthusiast. Such was his enjoyment of the new game that he decided to reward Sissa.

-Sissa, how can I thank you for creating this game? Do you want a mansion, horses, riches?

-No, sir, I am not ambitious and I only want wheat.

-Wheat? Wow. And how much wheat do you want?

Sissa then placed one grain of wheat on the first square of the chessboard, twice as many, two, on the second, twice as many, four, on the third, and told the king that he wanted the number of grains of wheat resulting from following this progression to the last square of the chessboard. The Brahmin, surprised by Sissa's lack of ambition, ordered a sack of wheat to be brought.

-Take a whole sack with you, since you are content with so little.

-No, sir, thank you. I prefer to have the exact number of grains of wheat to take

with me calculated and that quantity delivered to me.

-I am truly astonished, but what you ask will be done. I will instruct the mathematician of the kingdom to calculate the number of grains of wheat to be delivered to you.

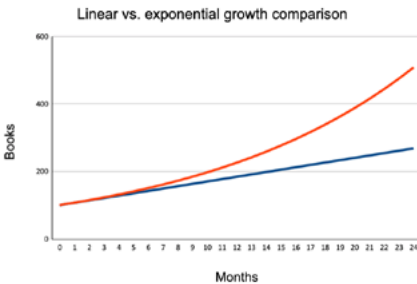
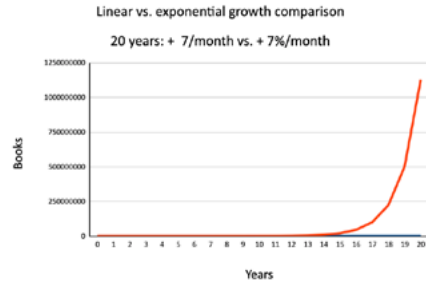
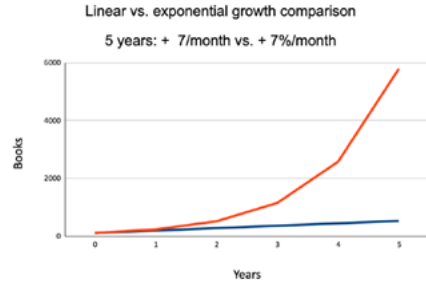
After a while, the kingdom's mathematician appeared with an unhinged expression and said to the king:

-Your Majesty, we are lost. There is not enough wheat under the sun to reward Sissa”.

In the last box alone the total number of grains would be 9 223 372 036 854 775 808 (just over nine quintillion), and in the whole board there would be 18 446 744 073 709 551 616 grains of wheat. Calculating 20,000 grains of wheat per kilo, that is 922,337,203,685 tonnes. It would take the world harvests of 1195 years⁵ to add up to that amount of wheat.

That was my first face-to-face with the monster spawned by exponential growth. Coincidentally, I came across this same legend again two decades later, when I started to think seriously about these kinds of issues, in a paper we will talk about later: *The Limits to Growth*. And I speak of “monster” because the human brain seems perfectly equipped to understand and anticipate linear growth, but has problems with exponential growth. Let's compare the two. Let's imagine that I start a library with 100 books; in a linear growth, I acquire seven new books every month, while in an exponential one, I increase my number of books by 7% every month.

CALCULATION BY MONTHS			CALCULATION BY YEARS		
MONTH	BOOKS		YEAR	BOOKS	
	LINEAR	EXPONENTIAL		LINEAR	EXPONENTIAL
0	100	100.00	0	100	100.00
1	107	107.00	1	184	225.22
2	114	114.49	2	268	507.24
3	121	122.50	3	352	1,142.39
4	128	131.08	4	436	2,572.89
5	135	140.26	5	520	5,794.64
6	142	150.07	6	604	13,050.65
7	149	160.58	7	688	29,392.55
8	156	171.82	8	772	66,197.66
9	163	183.85	9	856	149,089.82
10	170	196.72	10	940	335,778.84
11	177	210.49	11	1024	756,238.28
12	184	225.22	12	1108	1,703,193.48
13	191	240.98	13	1192	3,835,918.04
14	198	257.85	14	1276	8,639,222.34
15	205	275.90	15	1360	19,457,183.89
16	212	295.22	16	1444	43,821,305.89
17	219	315.88	17	1528	98,693,976.55
18	226	337.99	18	1612	222,277,743.86
19	233	361.65	19	1696	500,612,065.13
20	240	386.97	20	1780	1,127,474,282.43
21	247	414.06	21	1864	1,754,336,499.73
22	254	443.04	22	1948	2,381,198,717.03
23	261	474.05	23	2032	3,008,060,934.33
24	268	507.24	24	2116	3,634,923,151.63
			25	2200	4,261,785,368.93
			26	2284	4,888,647,586.23



In the first 24 months, two years, we see that the number of books is higher if the growth is exponential, but it is not twice as high as in the same period with linear growth. It can already be seen, however, that linear growth is a straight line while exponential growth is a curve. Let us now look at the same data graphically, but with increasing time periods. First to five years and then to twenty. This is where the surprises come

In the first example, five years (60 months), we see how the difference between the two growth rates increases enormously. At the end of five years in a linear growth, I would have 520 books and in an exponential growth I would have more than ten times that amount. And if we follow the progression, after 18 years, while in a linear growth he would have 1612 books, in an exponential growth he would have more than 220 million books, more than the total number of different books published in the whole of history. A couple of years later this figure would have multiplied by five and in a few more years the number of copies of that library would be greater than all the copies of all the existing books. Exponential growth cannot be sustained over long periods of time, or it ends up devouring everything. Before the age of 70, the books in this “Borgian” library would weigh more than the planet Earth.

We struggle to understand exponential growth because it initially seems controllable... until it is no longer controllable. That makes it difficult to foresee reaction margins. Let's look at that with a riddle:

“Imagine an empty glass into which you put a bacterium at 23 hours. This bacterium reproduces, generating a new bacterium, every minute. At 23.01 it generates a second bacterium and at 23.02 each of the two generates another, making four. We leave the glass with the bacteria reproducing and the glass is completely full at midnight. At what time was the glass half full?”

It is normal that, if you ask for a quick answer, most people say it would be at 23.30, but the reality is quite different: the glass is half full at 23.59; just one minute before midnight. And the bacterial cluster grows in that last minute as much as in the previous 59 minutes, because every minute it doubles in size. The problem is that if instead of a glass we were to put a bacterium that replicates every minute in a swimming pool, so to speak, and instead of an hour it filled up in a week, the pool would again be half full... one minute before it was completely full.

It is true that in the examples we have seen, both chess and bacteria, the percentage growth was very high, doubling every cell or every minute respectively. In the example of the library, the growth rate is 7% per month, which is also high when compared to economic growth. Let's look at a real fact: China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)⁵ grew in the first decade of this century by an average of 10% per year⁶. Knowing this, we can deduce that its GDP doubles every 7 years⁷.

⁵ GDP is an economic indicator that measures the total value of all goods and services produced in an economy during a specific period, usually one year.

⁷ There is a formula that helps us calculate how long it takes for something growing exponentially to double in size: if we divide 70 by the percentage of growth, the result tells us how long it takes to double in size. In this case 70 divided by 7 gives us ten. The result of the formula is not exact; it is always a little less than double.

This means that in 7 years it produces twice as much. This growth usually goes hand in hand with an increase in resource consumption (energy, mining, water, etc.) and environmental impact (although a good part of these “costs” can be “outsourced” to other countries). But if it continues like this, in 14 years it will have increased twice as much, i.e. four times as much, and in 21 years its GDP will have multiplied by 8, etc. The growth is exponential and, as we have already seen, maintaining this growth over time is exaggerated. If China were to grow like this for a hundred years, its economy and resource consumption would increase by a factor of 13,780. The bad news is that for two centuries we have been pursuing growth to the extreme as the ultimate goal. Growing at 10% means moving one square up every seven years on Sissa's chessboard. And we know how the story ends.

Be fruitful and multiply

The concept of growth, as we handle it here, has developed from physical evidence but interweaving the fabrics of economics, psychology, art and sociology. It is plausible to imagine that, from the earliest thinkers, in the contemplation of nature, growth was perceived as something positive. Living organisms grow in order to reach their full development. Trees grow from a seed and we marvel at the tallest ones; animals grow and whales impress us with their grandeur. All living things grow and/or multiply. And this growth is necessary and beneficial for our development. Nowadays we even speak of “personal growth” to refer to a process of development and improvement of oneself on an emotional and mental level. To grow is to become more.

In pre-industrial societies, narratives were heavily influenced by agricultural cycles and the rhythms of nature. The Earth was the immobile centre of the universe and circularity, cyclicity, seasonal and

climatological variations conditioned human understanding of growth. Thus, growth was perceived as one vital phase, followed by another. In the Renaissance this worldview began to change. Nicholas of Cusa was the first to assert that the universe was infinite and therefore could not have a centre, paving the way for the Copernican Revolution, which greatly changed human self-perception. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, not only societies and economies were transformed, but also the way societies understood growth. The cyclical perception gave way to a linear view of growth; progress was no longer seen as a periodic return to an earlier state, but as a steady march forward, towards novelty and improvement. From the beginning, the capitalist economy was based on the growth of production; and so the concepts of production and growth became indivisibly associated with those of development and progress. The rise and rise of the capitalist economy coincided with great social, cultural and technical changes. The development of the Enlightenment, of science, of technology and the advances towards modern democracies were assumed to be the progress of humanity, as could not be otherwise, and the promoters of capitalism succeeded in making it a given that the new economic system, which required growth in order to function, had not only coincided with them in time, but had actually brought them about.

The 20th century came; the whole earth was trampled; two world wars were fought; nuclear weapons were developed; and they were used against civilian populations. The French poet and thinker Paul Valéry condensed the *zeitgeist* of the new times in one sentence: “The era of the finite world has begun. [...] Henceforth we must relate all political phenomena to this recent universal condition”⁷. But the metabolism of capitalist society, instead of considering moderation, accelerated wildly, spurred on by the ever-increasing use of fossil fuels. The

so-called Cold War brought about a tense geopolitical division between capitalist (and mostly democratic) countries, with the USA at the forefront, and communist-inspired (non-democratic) countries, with the USSR at the forefront. The supremacy of the capitalist bloc definitively established the single discourse on capitalism by adding the missing jewel in its crown: “communism and democracy are incompatible; outside capitalism there is no freedom”. It is true that in order to add this to the crown, attempts to develop socialist democracies had to be crushed, as happened in Spain and in several Latin American countries. And it was also necessary to accept, with undisguised hypocrisy, that an important part of the global machinery was driven by non-democratic nations (such as China or the Arab oil countries), when it did not directly contribute to maintaining weak democracies or non-democratic regimes in countries with scarce raw materials (as is still the case with gold and coltan in Africa, for example). But, always in control of the narrative, capitalism convinced us that it had won and that it was the guardian of democracy; now the whole planet was to be its playground. It could relax now, but that is not in its nature, because “Capitalism can no more be ‘persuaded’ to limit growth than a human being can be ‘persuaded’ to stop breathing”⁸.

In 1972, *The Limits to Growth* was published, the first serious and scientifically grounded warning of the risks of exponential growth. But instead of heeding this warning that our increasing global impact on the natural environment was not sustainable, in the following decades it was accelerated even more brutally in the form of neoliberalism. Humans continued to multiply exponentially as the means of transport and communication made the planet smaller and smaller. And so we have reached a point where, having left behind the global threat of the Cold War, it is now Climate Change that darkens our horizon. And in the most

prosperous societies (materially), although the economy continues to grow, welfare has stagnated. Social democracy is in a process of progressive surrender to neo-liberalism and we live in a continuous and paradoxical sense of economic crisis, which often hinders labour mobility or the search for vocations. Inequalities are growing at the same rate as global wealth and young people look to the future with concern (if not with eco-anxiety) while they are told that there is no alternative and that, if there is one, it is to fall into the arms of the extreme right. Faced with new scenarios, capitalism always offers the same response: grow and grow; accelerate, more and more. The metaphor here would be the crazy final scene of *Go West*, the Marx Brothers' film⁹, in which, in order to increase the speed of the train, they use the train itself as fuel, to the cry of "Timber". The difference is that you can get off a train after destroying it if you get to the station, but getting off the Earth?

What we have lacked in positively perceiving growth by imitation of nature itself, is to understand that in nature you grow, yes, and sometimes that growth is exponential, but you only grow up to a certain point. Once you reach that point, you don't grow any more. In individuals, genetics defines the maximum size. When, for whatever reason, an individual grows larger than is appropriate for its species, its organs have problems, they fail. With regard to groups, when the right conditions exist in nature, they tend to grow larger, until they reach a point, the so-called "carrying capacity of the ecosystem", where their own numbers compromise the availability of resources and the group stops growing and shrinks. Sometimes such reductions can be very abrupt. If we think about ourselves, if we grow too large as individuals, it is because of a serious hormonal disease called gigantism. And if it is some cells in our body that are growing out of control, it is a terrifying cancer. So, in nature, growth is good, but

there are genetically or ecologically defined limits. What about the economy? Is it possible to grow unlimitedly in a finite framework such as the planet? Are there limits?

But have we hit the limits of the planet?

One of the founding documents of the environmental movement is the report *The Limits to Growth*, commissioned by the Club of Rome from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and led by Donella Meadows. Using the best computer simulation technology available at the time of its publication in 1972, it reached the following conclusions:

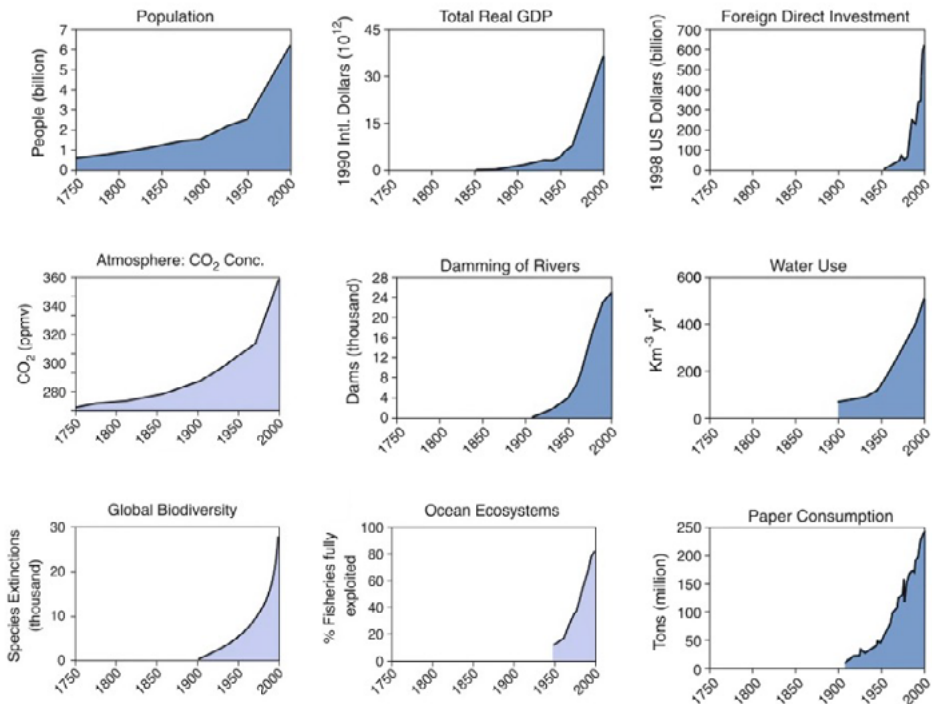
"If current trends of global population growth, industrialisation, environmental pollution, food production and resource depletion continue, this planet will reach its growth limits within the next hundred years"¹⁰.

The other two conclusions were, on the one hand, that it was possible to alter these trends and establish some lasting ecological stability, and, on the other hand, that the sooner they were altered the greater the likelihood of success. Fifty-two years have passed since the publication of the report and, yes, the document has had an enormous impact and has done much to spread the idea that we can ruin the conditions that make possible the very existence of our civilisation; but growth has advanced relentlessly, both in the global economy and in the collective imagination. In fact, as we mentioned earlier, the second half of the 20th century is when the great acceleration of neoliberalism took place. This Great Acceleration is the one that, a few decades later, was detected by scientists who, like Will Steffen, were developing the theory of the Earth System, the study of the planet as an integrated and complex system composed of multiple interconnected subsystems. As we see

below, it is clear that the curve reflected in the human development data analysed here closely resembles the exponential growth curve we saw earlier.

Both the development of the Earth System and the concept of Planetary Boundaries, which we will see below, are the result of the (also exponential) increase in the computational capacity of computer systems which, in the 1990s, made it possible to model climate and other natural processes as never before. One of the great collaborations of the aforementioned Will Steffen was with Johan Rockström and the interdisciplinary team of scientists he led at the Stockholm Resilience Centre. There they were working on identifying Earth system processes that have critical planetary boundaries. In 2009 they published their findings

and highlighted nine processes: climate change (greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere); biodiversity loss (which can affect ecosystem functioning); biogeochemical cycles of nitrogen and phosphorus (disrupting ecosystems); ocean acidification (affecting marine life); freshwater consumption (overexploitation); land-use change (especially conversion to crops); ozone layer integrity; atmospheric aerosol loading; and chemical pollutants. For each of these limits, a safe operating space for humanity was defined to maintain the stability of the earth system; and this safe limit was quantified. To give two examples, for climate change the limit is 350 parts per million CO₂ in the Earth's atmosphere (pre-industrial values were 280 and by 2023 we were already at 424) and for biodiversity loss, the limit is the annual loss of 10 species per



Some of the indicators studied by Steffen *et al.*¹¹ in the period 1750 - 2000. From left to right and from top to bottom: population (in billions); world GDP (in 10¹² dollars); foreign direct investment; concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere (in ppm); dams built on rivers (in thousands); freshwater consumption (in Km³ per year); global biodiversity loss (in thousands of extinct species); exploitation of ocean ecosystems (in percentage of fully exploited fisheries); paper consumption (in millions of tons)

million, but the current rate exceeds that amount by more than ten times.

The definition of these nine planetary boundaries is based on the global ecosystem importance that scientists have identified, and their quantification was established according to the best estimates that science is capable of today with the best available technology. They are, of course, the ones who must answer the question that heads this chapter: have we hit the limits of the planet? In the 2023 data update, the answer is that we have already exceeded six of the nine limits¹². The most worrying thing, however, is not just that we are exceeding planetary boundaries, but the trend. Consider climate change and how, despite the near consensus on the need to address the climate emergency, it is proving extremely difficult to reduce CO emissions². And, by the nature of exponential growth, more than half of all emissions since the beginning of industrialisation have been made in the last 30 years¹³, just since the United Nations unequivocally recognised climate change as a serious problem for humanity at the Rio Conference in 1992.

What if growth were green?

Many intellectuals, more or less close to the environmental movement, tried to find a meeting point between the needs of the capitalist system and environmental protection. To this end, the term “sustainable development”, coined by Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, was widely used. It would achieve worldwide notoriety when it was incorporated into the United Nations Brundtland Report in 1987. There, its most widely accepted definition was established: “27. Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”¹⁴. The

United Nations has continued to use it and we can find it, for example, in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), launched in 2015. But capitalist marketing, following its line of merging “growth” and “development”, turned it into a synonym for “sustainable growth”, a much friendlier expression to be used by politicians of all stripes, but a radical paradox. When both terms have been abandoned by social movements, the expression “green growth” has begun to be used, which is also a contradiction in terms if we are thinking of sustainable growth. If by “green” we mean truly sustainable, growth cannot be an end in itself, as “balance” should be. Those who claim that growth can be sustained indefinitely argue that at some point it can be decoupled from the consumption of non-renewable resources. They point to the massive use of renewable energies to replace fossil fuels as an example. But it must be borne in mind that the technologies needed to harness wind and solar energy are not renewable. The sun and the wind are, but the vast majority (if not all) of the material parts of these technologies (from the gigantic windmills to the computer servers required for management, to the storage batteries) are not only non-renewable, but also generate their own environmental problems and intensify extractivism and resource consumption, as can be seen in several reports we have collaborated on or translated into Spanish in recent years¹⁵. The wear and tear of mechanical parts and the degradation of batteries (the gradual decrease in the energy storage capacity of a battery as it ages and is used) means that all these components must be replaced within a few decades and, to make matters worse, many of the minerals used are scarce and difficult to recycle. So, for any energy model to be truly “green”, the first thing it would have to do is to reduce energy consumption as much as possible; and “reduce” does not go very well with “growth”.

To explore this question further, we will borrow an excerpt from the report by the Green European Foundation, *Geopolitics of a Post-Growth Europe*, the result of the project mentioned above, and, more specifically, from the introductory essay written by Richard Wouters, the project's coordinator:

“In the face of the deepening ecological crisis, science is increasingly expressing doubt as to whether continued economic growth is compatible with a liveable planet¹⁶ ‘It is unlikely that a long-lasting, absolute decoupling of economic growth from environmental pressures and impacts can be achieved at the global scale’, according to the EEA¹⁷ [European Environment Agency].

It seems that ‘green growth’, the narrative underpinning many environmental strategies including the EU’s Green Deal, may well be an illusion”.¹⁸

The European Green Deal and the Next Generation funds have been the tool proposed by the European Union in recent years to encourage European countries and, above all, their large companies to move forward in the energy transformation, towards a model based on renewable energies, and digital, intensifying digitalisation in all spheres of society. This shift is called green because it is expected to reduce the euro zone’s CO₂ emissions, but it is still too early to analyse the real environmental, geopolitical and social consequences it will entail. Moreover, it seems to many of us that these initiatives are not on the right track, as they tend to prop up the socio-economic dynamics that have led us to the current situation. Not to say that they have no serious environmental protection components beyond CO₂ emissions. But it is

true that the almost unanimous consensus on the need to act in the face of the climate emergency makes it very useful as a starting point from which to begin working with other people and social actors (organisations, politicians, businessmen, etc.) with ideas far removed from our own. But, in any case, it is undeniable that environmental degradation is growing exponentially. Following on from GEF’s report, the European Environment Agency itself acknowledges that “biodiversity continues to decline at an alarming rate” in the EU and warns that “the amount of materials extracted both within and outside the EU to meet European demand exceeds the safe operating space for humanity, with no signs of abating”. Moreover, more and more people, especially young people, are aware of this.

But, beware, the capitalist system itself has narrative weapons to prevent people who become aware of the problem from acting against its interests. Examples of these narrative weapons are hopelessness (“the situation is inevitable and nothing I do can change it”) and paralysing fatalism (“humans are a cancer on the planet”). We must identify the elements of these narratives and rebel against them: “Are humans the cancer of the biosphere? No. The capitalist economy is the cancer of the biosphere”¹⁹. To think that there are no alternatives to capitalism, or that the only alternatives are the 20th century models of communism, is also part of the narrative that deactivates citizens’ will to change. It is true that there is no clear alternative that guarantees the maintenance of welfare levels in rich countries, but that does not mean that we should not foresee scenarios and identify the most desirable ones, as many scholars are already doing.

A post-growth Europe?

And indeed, reflection on post-growthist⁵ scenarios has undoubtedly already begun in Europe. In September 2018, «238 academics call on the European Union and its member

■ We use this term, “post-growthist” and its derivatives, to encompass all those people and theories that analyse and/or outline strategies for a future scenario in which growth ceases to be the sole direction of the economy. We therefore include a heterogeneous sector of thought critical of current capitalism, where we could include those who speak of de-growth, stationary growth, post-growth...

states to plan for a post-growth future in which human and ecological wellbeing is prioritised over GDP»²⁰. Since then, the will to open a debate on this issue has been growing stronger and stronger.

“It is in this context that the ‘degrowth’ movement is gaining traction. Degrowth advocates a shift from accumulating material wealth to promoting wellbeing in a more equal society with high-quality public service provision. This shift should first take place in rich, industrialised countries where economic growth no longer positively impacts well-being. Reducing overproduction and overconsumption by the Global North (and by rich elites elsewhere) should not only bring us back within planetary boundaries but also free up natural resources for the Global South. In many low-income countries, human needs cannot be met without increasing resource use.

The most widely used definition of degrowth comes from economic anthropologist Jason Hickel: ‘Degrowth is a planned reduction of energy and resource use designed to bring the economy back into balance with the living world in a way that reduces inequality and improves human well-being.’²¹ It follows from this definition that degrowth is less about reducing gross domestic product (GDP) than about reducing the throughput of energy and

materials. However, Hickel argues that ‘it is important to accept that reducing throughput is likely to lead to a reduction in the rate of GDP growth, or even a decline in GDP itself, and we have to be prepared to manage that outcome in a safe and just way’²².

We bring up this excerpt, also from the GEF report²³, to introduce a concept that is becoming increasingly popular among the general population and which inevitably had to appear here: “degrowth”. At the same time, bringing in this term brings us to something we cannot avoid: the terminological problem within the post-growth movement. As we will see later on⁶, one

of the problems of the alternatives to growth is that the terminology that is usually used has

■ See below under “Difficulty of constructing anti-growth concepts”.

been generated in opposition to that which is widely established in society as a whole. And “degrowth” is a clear example of this. Post-growthists generally recognise that economic degrowth is not optional; it is something that is going to happen. Therefore, it is best carried out in as orderly and fair a manner as possible. Nevertheless, “degrowth” is a term that some experts (and many politicians) do not want to use because it generates rejection. The economic powers do not even want to talk about a change in the rules of the game that currently favour them, and the few politicians who cannot bend to the will of the economy are also reluctant to use the term because it is very easy to turn the public against it. It is enough to raise the spectre of empty supermarket shelves and a return to the caves.

We wanted to open this small crack on degrowth but, as we have already said above, the aim of our project is not to talk about alternatives to growth, but about the narrative of growth. It is therefore remarkable that, although the difficulties in contesting the space for growth begin with

the terminology itself, the reflection on how to overcome the scenario of growth as the sole engine of today's capitalist society has begun to gain momentum in Europe. We highlight Europe, without detracting from the work of thinkers and movements in other parts of the world, because here, and more specifically in the European Union, post-growth analysis and proposals have begun to transcend the academic and activist spheres and have reached the political class. A study carried out by researchers from the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology (ICTA-UAB) and the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University Pompeu Fabra, in Barcelona, published in the journal *Nature Sustainability* in last November determined that politicians in the European Parliament support post-growth and eco-socialist positions to face the climate crisis, and not just green growth²⁴. A good example of this was the dimension acquired by the *Beyond Growth Conference* held from 15 to 17 May 2023²⁵. It is undoubtedly the largest event on such a topic ever organised by official institutions. Hosted mainly by the Greens/EFA Group led by Philippe Lamberts, and supported by other parliamentary groups, the event brought together 2,500 people in the European Parliament for three days of talks, debates and informal meetings involving many of the leading experts on the issue. It was indeed a noteworthy event with a diverse and truly committed participation on the socio-environmental issues of our time. To give us an idea, some of the calls made to the EU institutions themselves were: the creation of a vice-presidency for future generations, establishing a pact on sustainability and well-being, reforming well-being indicators so that they go far beyond the merely economic, strengthening citizen participation in policy development, and so on. Well-targeted initiatives, many of them already common among social movements, but this time they were pronounced and debated widely and vehemently at the heart of the EU.

A few days before the *Beyond Growth Conference*, an interview with researcher Olivia Lazard appeared in the *Green European Journal* in which she mentioned another remarkable initiative. She was asked:

“Ideas such as planetary boundaries, wellbeing and postgrowth are making their way into EU policy. The degrowth community and European Union bureaucrats and MEPs are two different communities, not to say planets. Where might this growing dialogue lead?”

And Olivia's response was:

“They used to be very distant planets but the planets are trying to come together, maybe through Saturn-like rings. I take as great hope the fact that the European Commission is funding a 10-million-euro research project that Giorgos Kallis, Julia Steinberger and Jason Hickel are leading. It's one of the largest Horizon grants. It is an incredibly positive sign.

I know from private conversations that even people working as chief economists within various DGs are engaging in these conversations behind closed doors. They are grappling with the question of what is degrowth and what does it mean? It's an entirely different way of thinking about economics and everyone needs time for everyone to adapt. It's not as if people within the EU—and I insist on the notion of people rather than institutions—are not concerned about the situation”²⁶.

Both the effort of the Green political movement to organise the *Conference* and the decision of the European Commission to financially support a research project with this approach are worthy of recognition, but we know how difficult it is to turn good words and good ideas into real policies. Moreover, the need for change is urgent and we are not naïve enough to believe that this will bring

about major changes in the short term. We do not forget how French President Nicolas Sarkozy claimed during the 2008 crisis that it was time to “refund capitalism”²⁷ on ethical foundations, but in reality this reform consisted of intensifying neoliberal policies and implementing austerity measures (misnamed as such) that strangled Greece and threatened Spain to the point of making it amend its constitution to ensure that debt repayment would take precedence over the rights of Spaniards. Nor does it help that nowadays, when society presses for the environment and climate balance, political change is slow, but when pressure is exerted against it, political change at the highest level is immediate. Just look at how diligently the EU drops the environmental aspects of the European Green Deal when there are farmers’ protests such as those that took place in February 2024²⁸.

In any case, it is undeniable that post-growth is being discussed at an increasingly high level in Europe; something is changing. In March 2024, barely a week after this text goes to press, the *Growth vs Climate Conference 2024*²⁹ will take place in Barcelona, organised by the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology of the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (ICTA-UAB), with leading experts and high-level institutional presence (the Vice-President and Minister for Ecological Transition, Teresa Ribera, and the Secretary of State for Social Rights, Rosa Martínez). That the debate on how to move away from growth is no longer a “niche” debate and has gained a place on the public agenda is very good news. But the fight has just begun and it is necessary to keep working, as we modestly intend to do with this project, to generate a suitable breeding ground in society to open up courageous debates and to make people understand that the ecological crisis should not be separated from social crises. If we manage to detach our gaze from the most absolute short-termism, we will be able to see that what is in crisis are our

societies and especially their relationship with nature, which harbours them and makes them possible. It is our societies and today’s biodiversity that are under threat, but not the planet, which has been through worse than this one. In a few million years, when the planet has completely forgotten this bad dream called neoliberalism, it will still be full of life, revolving around the sun.

How to open the debate

As we have already briefly mentioned above, the aim of this project and this study is to look for tools to be able to open up the debate on growth in the broadest possible layers of society. But when it is not enough to argue the environmental situation, the evidence of climate change, the conclusions of Röckstrom’s planetary boundaries study, etc., to get the majority of people to want to open this debate, what is left? How should we act?

“It is not enough to expose the absurdities and chimeras of the economically dominant ideology for it to naturally lose favour. And seeing that reason is lazy to think that unthought or underlying part that orients and values a system of thought, it is worth asking what it is that makes certain ideas and ways of thinking triumph and remain immune to criticism while others are pushed into a corner”.³⁰

If we do not achieve our goal by appealing to reality, it is because narrative can be more powerful than reality. That is why we focus the core of this project on narrative; because it is a central aspect of human life; a storyline that allows us to understand our own existence. To the extent that “we learn to become the narrator of our own story without becoming entirely the actor of our life”³¹. Many Instagram *stories* and *selfie* tourism, for example, are symptoms of what Paul Ricoeur announced in that quote: we tell our life instead of living it.

Obviously, the first step in developing a line of work “against” a narrative is to analyse and describe it perfectly. There are many magnificent works that have been dedicated to this task, both from the perspective of the human sciences, as well as from that of economics and ecology. Among the literature in Spanish, we recommend, for example, José Manuel Naredo’s *Raíces económicas del deterioro ecológico y social. Más allá de los dogmas* (Economic roots of ecological and social deterioration. Beyond dogma), the second part of which deals directly with “On the persistence of dogmas”. Naredo is an economist of great reputation who, several decades ago, placed environmental degradation at the centre of his concerns.

For this study, therefore, we are not going to attempt an in-depth characterisation of the narrative, as there are already those who have done that much better and in more detail than we could here, but we are going to analyse those characteristics that help us to look for the possibilities of weakening it, not thinking of the academic sphere, but of ordinary people; of the majorities. To this end, when we devised the project, we considered it necessary to seek the help of a team of sociologists.

■ Semiology is a discipline that focuses on the study of signs and symbols in human communication and how they are not only used to convey meanings in communication but also contribute to constructing meanings themselves in culture and society in different contexts.

To get closer to our objectives, we asked them to carry out a brief semiological analysis[■] of the growth

narrative and to use the results to conduct a workshop with experts, on the one hand, and a focus group[■] with people of different origins, ideologies and social conditions, on the other. All of this so that, later on, they could provide us with a report of conclusions, knowing our objectives.

■ A focus group is a qualitative research technique that brings together a group of people to discuss and share their views on a specific topic under the guidance of a moderator.

All this, both a detailed explanation of the process mentioned in the previous paragraph and the conclusions, is what makes up the second part of this study, which is directly written by them, although it is presented here in an abridged version. Interestingly, quite a few weeks after they had given us a draft of their findings, and while they were carrying out other tasks for other sociological studies, they made a finding that they had not counted on and which turned out to be really relevant for the present study. We have added it to the end of the paper in the form of an “Addendum” and recommend that it be considered a key part of the findings of this second part.



Endnotes

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- 2 ASSEMBLY, 2022. Page 31
- 3 ASSEMBLY, 2022. Page 6
- 4 <http://geopoliticspostgrowth.eu>
- 5 Equivalent to the 2017 world harvest according to FAO data. https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problema_del_trigo_y_del_tablero_de_ajedrez
- 6 World Bank data: <https://datos.bancomundial.org/indicador/NY.GDP.MKTPKD.ZG?locations=CN>
- 7 VALÉRY, 1931. P. 11.
- 8 Murray Bookchin, quoted in HICKEL. 2020. P. 81.
- 9 *Go West!*, 1940. Director: Edward Buzzell. Screenplay: Irving Brecher and Nat Perrin.
- 10 MEADOWS, 1972. P. 40.
- 11 Data from "Global Change and the Earth System: A Planet Under Pressure", by Will Steffen et al. cited in BOONSTRA, 2023. P. 997-998.
- 12 RICHARDSON, K. et al. 2023
- 13 STAINFORTH, T. 2020
- 14 United Nations, *Brundtland Report*, 1987. P. 16.
- 15 *Metals for a Green and Digital Europe. An Agenda for Action* (WOUTERS, 2021); *El lado oculto de lo digital. Una huella energética insostenible* (FLIPO, 2023); *Behind the Figures: understanding the environmental impacts of ICT and taking action* (BORDAGE, 2021 [a]); *Digital Technologies in Europe: an environmental life cycle approach* (BORDAGE, 2021 [b]).
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- 18 WOUTERS, 2024. Page 7
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- 20 «The EU needs a stability and wellbeing pact, not more growth». *The Guardian*. 16 September 2018.

- 21 Jason Hickel, "What does degrowth mean? A few points of clarification", *Globalisations*, 2020
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- 23 WOUTERS, 2024. P. 8
- 24 Kallis, G., Mastini, R. & Zografos, C. «Perceptions of degrowth in the European Parliament». *Nature Sustainability* (2023)
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- 26 "Moving Europe from Extraction to Regeneration", in *Green European Journal*, 13 May 2023.
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- 30 NAREDO, 2006. P. 114.
- 31 RICOEUR, 2006. P. 21.

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Part Two

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The Growth Discourse and its Weaknesses

by Aurora Rodríguez del
Barrio and Juvenal García

About this study

Background

This study was commissioned to our team by the Green European Foundation and Transición Verde. The general objective was to briefly analyse the growth narrative and try to find cracks in the dominant discourse. We will also see how, in the face of the growth discourse (with different names: “unlimited”, “sustainable”, etc.), a more or less combative opposing discourse has arisen that speaks of “degrowth”, “post-growth” and other similar terms.

The great value of the present proposal is to take the side of those who think that there is a job to be done against the dominant, predatory, ruthless discourse: perhaps to find its weak points or its leaks in order to undermine its apparently impregnable framework. How can a discourse be constructed that can enter through the weak points of the growthist wall?

The study presented here has tried to approach its objectives in three ways:

- a) a study of a limited but significant corpus of explicitly pro-growth texts.
- b) presenting the results of this work to a panel of climate change and environmental experts, in order to confront them as well with the construction of the dominant discourse.
- c) presentation and workshops with people of different ages and social niches, to see how they put together their perception of this dominant discourse and whether they had in their speech (consciously or not) tools to discover fissures in it.

Objectives

As just described in the background, the **overall** objective was to find out whether the so-called *growth* (or “*growthist*”) discourse has weaknesses whereby its dominance could be challenged.

Secondary objectives would be, around this:

- To find out the structure, the framework, of the growth discourse.
- Establish the points of articulation of such discourse in order to examine the strengths and weaknesses of such articulation.
- To lay the foundations for the construction either of oppositional discourses that would exploit the weak points in the framework of the “*growth*” discourse, or of alternative discourses to this discourse.
- Recommend ways of developing alternative discourse(s) to the growth discourse.

Methodology

The work has been carried out in two methodological ways: semiological analysis of texts and qualitative study through working groups with experts and non-experts.

For the semiological analysis, a *corpus* of significant articles and books was selected in order to establish a theoretical and analytical basis for growth and its discursive elements. In some cases, a certain belligerence towards discourses opposed to growth was also sought. In this document they are collected in a final index.

The work with both panels of experts and non-experts was semi-directed in order to contrast the main findings of the aforementioned analysis. In other words, the methodology was not strictly that of Discussion Groups to collect open discourse, but rather it was a real Focus Group, groups directed towards the objectives of the study.

The group with the expert knowledge panel was carried out in a hybrid way, with two attendees online and the others in person, while the group with the general public was carried out online (Zoom). The groups were recorded on audiovisual support for analysis.

For more details on the characteristics of the semiological analysis carried out, see the text “Some Notes on Semiological Discourse Analysis” as Annex I to this document.

The growth discourse

Characterisation

When we have analysed the discourse of growth, we have seen in all its crudeness two of the fundamental characteristics of the semiological definition of discourse:

- **It configures reality in such a way** that it is impossible to think or perceive any other reality than the one defined by this discourse.
- **It is naturalised**, i.e. individuals assume them as “natural”, as “it cannot be otherwise”. They are masters of logic.
- **It has an anti-historical vocation**, it is not subject to the ups and downs of geopolitics, nor is it affected by changes. This is the way things are, always have been and always will be. This is relevant, because it means that it is invulnerable to time and, if we follow its own functioning, to space.
- **It intervenes as a paradigm**, that is to say, in a transversal manner, in many discourses that are not directly related to its field of birth: the discourse of growth, which is essentially economic, is transversal to the scientific-technical, anthropological, historical and social discourse.... It feeds and nourishes

the very core of the framework of our culture.

- **Its structure is both rigid and flexible;** it is capable of incorporating criticism, changes, questioning, and returning them conveniently reinserted into the structure of its stories without affecting the solidity of its core structure.

- **Its most basic approaches remain hidden.** Its most essential principles, those that shape its structure and make it what it is, are hidden, taken for granted and denied critical scrutiny.

- **It defends itself by victimising itself.**

Terms such as /evolution/, /progress/, /improvement/, /advancement/, /extraction/, development/, /achievement/ are planted in the discourse of growth without being examined, without analysing their historical provenance and, of course, without any negative assessment; on the contrary, they always appear as threatened values that must be defended against the counter-values of the narratives that try to question them.

■ The words between slashes refer to the signifiers, to the term stripped of interpretation or attribution of content. When they are inserted in the explanation of the structure, they will appear in italics.

All these features of the discourse of growth show it in all its potency: it is solid but adaptable, it shapes what we can think and exiles any reality that does not fall within its definition of the world, it cuts across narratives and discourses that are more on the periphery of our worldview, and it presents itself as something logical, naturalised, with a vocation for eternity and which needs to be defended.

When we have analysed the discourse of growth in the texts we have selected, we can clearly see that we are at the very core of a system, not only of defining and configuring reality, but also of defining and configuring

our thinking, the permitted scope of our conceptual tools. The functions (terms that relate, in the world of growth, subjects to objects) that we find most frequently are very significant:

/Growing/ /Generate/

/Produce/ /Develop/

/Improve/ /Reach/

/Subdue/ /Increase/

/Continue/

When we have analysed the place of all these signifier-functions in the structure of the narratives, they are all dynamic terms. They not only speak, moreover, of a movement, but they express an upward movement and, moreover, a valued movement: for the better. This is the Rosetta stone of the whole analysis:

Movement is always for the better.

So stopping (let alone going backwards) is always a bad thing.

Moving always for the better ⇒ /growing/

This sequence is at the base of the framework of progress. It is something that we have uncritically socialised, something that we express in our everyday stories and that we have been able to pick up, both from the experts - sometimes in spite of themselves - and from the people who took part in the Focus Group of the general public.

All combinations and substitutions, that is, all rhetorical figures, metaphors, metonymies, synecdoches... are assembled, go out and return to this cardinal point, to this origin of all coordinates that define and express our culture. This is what we all carry within us.

This is what makes us, whether we are environmentalists or not, whether we criticise the blind growth of capitalism or not, happy to read the headline “Spain grows by 2.5% in the second half of the year”. Or “consumption grows and drives employment”. Growth boosts, dynamises, develops...

We like growth. Even if we fight against it, our first reaction is one of appreciation. Not to mention among the general public in our culture.

But what is the place of /growth/ in the discourse?

It is interesting to note that /Growth/ is a **subject**. Although it may occupy, as a term, an actantial object position in some circumstances.

When the subject is the economy, understood as the structural subject that governs social relations in our business fabric and commercial activity, etc., the economy seeks growth. In this context, in economic texts, it appears as an object to be achieved, as something to be achieved, because it magically opens the door to other achievements: employment, control of inflation, consumption, lowering the risk premium, attracting investors...

However, when economists, who used the term /growth/ or the function /growth/ as an aspiration-object/ to achieve other goals, use it in their texts against degrowth, they use it as a subject. The /growth-subject/, so to speak, is a subject to be nurtured. In reality, as in the analysis of fantastic stories, or folklore, growth makes, drives, creates, improves, drags other subjects to improve, to reach goals, to achieve. Growth leads, guides and must be protected from all threats. We know nothing of its history, of its origin, of

its profound characteristics: we only see the result of the action, the consequences of its impulse.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that it is always more complicated to question a subject than an object. Growth, moreover, is not personalised: it is an /agent/, it is something that makes it happen, something that moves so that everything moves: in fact, it is an agent associated with another agent (the economy in its abstract, systemic sense). Growth has brought medicines that cure, foods that end hunger, technological solutions that have allowed an exponential increase in the quality of life in our society. It has even been able to build models for other cultures and societies.

In the stories analysed, growth is not an important element of what we call “the system” or “the capitalist system”, if you will. It is much more: it is its embodiment. Let us be strict: to be a **subject** is not to be a “person”, nor does it need a personalisation, a face. Growth is a *subject actant*, in Greimas’ terminology: it is an actant that sets in motion the elements of the world, its relations and its socialisation in people’s minds as a driver of the construction of reality in our culture.

This subject is, therefore, at the basis of all the stories as a subject who not only drives, but also demands: he demands that what he sets in motion does not stop. He demands that everything he sets in motion be positively valued. He demands that his whole set-up be maintained at all costs, without questioning the elements or the parts that make up the whole. It is also, as we hinted earlier, a claimant for protection. If he is in danger, everything and everyone is in danger. If he stops, everything and all of us will stop. And what is worse, the function most hated by the framework of discourse will appear: */we will retreat/*.

Backlash is the real villain. As two of the participants in the expert panel meeting pointed out, the backlash is the villain of this tale. The evil one, the blind menace that manifests itself in the form of metaphors:

back to the caves

we will go back to the Middle Ages

we will live in adobe houses

we will lose all the progress we have made

we will enter another dark age

Phrases that the experts heard (in many of their variants) or that people in the group use in softer, but no less threatening, figures:

no growth, no jobs

if everything stops, then...

we cannot go back (...)

Even the most moderate orthodox economists feel that growth has to be protected from any threat. It must be redirected, improved, re-educated, if it acquires a personality, but it cannot be abandoned, because everything we are, what we do and even, from the viewpoint of the most open economy, the only way to protect equity, the fair distribution of income, access to equal opportunities and the systems for correcting inequalities in our society, depends on it: if it has to be improved, dressed more appropriately, its behaviour must be redirected and it must be re-educated in other values, so be it. But without questioning their existence, their role or their universe of positive values.

Difficulty in constructing anti-growth concepts

During the analysis of growth texts we examined some texts on degrowth. What we found was a perplexing phenomenon that shows the strength of the discourse as a shaper of reality and its nuclear position in our culture. We believe that it can be seen immediately if the functions we described in the previous section as characteristic of the growth discourse are paralleled by those we found in the degrowth texts (which we wrote in green):

/Growing/ <> /Decreasing/

/Produce/ <> /Re-use/

/Improve/ <> /Worsen/

/Generate/ <> /Stop generating/

/Develope/ <> /Stop/

/Reach/ <> /Give up/ <> / Renounce/

/Subdue/ <> /Share/

/Continue/ <> /Stop/

/Increase/ <> /Decrease/

With the exception of /Subdue/, which requires a separate case study, it is very important to underline that **the narratives of degrowth are constructed purely in opposition to the dominant discourse of growth**⁴.

⁴ It should be noted that the study was conducted in Spanish, where the aforementioned opposition is most visible.

To put it more bluntly: the narratives of degrowth are constructed according to the discursive structure of growth, they play on its terrain and are not a real alternative, but pure negation. This, in areas other than those of this report, may explain why the proposals *against* growth, *against* climate change (note that we always use the **contra**) sound negative: their origin is frontal opposition expressed in negation. As they are constructed from the “*growthist*” language, they have no choice but to be its reverse, but inhabiting the same world, accepting the nuclear structure of the construction of reality.

This also explains why, as one of the panellists described:

“We are in a polarised fight: growth or destruction. And if we polarise, it does not become transversal”.

In other words, as the narrative of degrowth is a narrative that does not come from a discourse unrelated to growth, it becomes its opposite, polarises positions and prevents positive, cross-cutting communication aimed at the population as a whole.

Finally, it is easy to see how the functions on the right are functions which, in the majority of social narratives, carry a negative qualification, as opposed to the all-embracing optimism brought about by the definitions of technological, scientific and social progress.... Hence, moreover, the narratives that call for a halt are delegitimised as mere speculative, speculative, far removed from reality and even /laughable/.

[Expert panel] Expertise and perplexity

When we carried out the analysis we summarised in the previous paragraphs, we felt perplexed: in reality, there was no

discourse truly confronting the discourse of growth. There is only the discourse of growth and there is nothing in front of it but its own reverse side, its mirror image, the negative of its photo.

We decided⁴, together with the Green European Foundation, to modify the original approach of collecting the discourse of experts in order to simply present our analytical findings and see how it was processed by people who dedicate their knowledge or activism (or both) to combating the dominant discourse and narratives.

⁴ See the section on Methodology, which was so affected by this discovery.

The people on the panel shared our perplexity and gave some answers that failed to take the problem of polarisation and opposition out of the equation. They recognised the difficulty of putting together a truly alternative discourse, given the internalisation of the value of progress and growth that we have socialised for more than two centuries in our culture. And the panel also served to corroborate the strength of the dominant discourse. Let's look at some of the moments in which this strength was palpable:

- **Discuss or redefine the word / growth/:** the panel recognises that it is a word whose meaning is only acquired in the negative with respect to all the narratives associated with growth. So it does not go outside the wall of the strong discourse of the system.
- **One could find “bad growths”** or other figures of speech associating growth and its narratives with discursive counter-values. Several were put on the table: the shark that needs to swim endlessly to survive; tumour growth; addiction and the need for ever larger doses to maintain a fiction of quality of life. However, these proposals remained the reverse of the values associated with the triumphs of

social, scientific and economic progress of growth.

■ **Consult other values and other worldviews from other cultures.**

This option acquires its full meaning if we take as true the structural anti-humanist accusation, according to which humanism is ultimately defined, in the collected discourse and in the founding narratives of the dominant discourse, in the opposition or systems of oppositions between:

The Self vs. all the Other.

Man vs. Nature.

The Civilised vs. the Savage.

The problem with resorting to these dimensions and narratives external to our cultural core is that these other cultures are often or associated with “less advanced”, “more backward” societies, closer to “primitive” peoples and “dark ages” from which the industrial revolution and technical, scientific and economic progress took us out.

- In fact, if we take the left column, we see perfectly the actants of the dominant discursive nucleus; while the threat posed by degrowth to our reality is perfectly personified in the right column, where threats are subjectivised as such.

But something did emerge in the panel that, from the point of view of analysis, opens a door to something that we believe is important, and that can open a breach or, at least, build a path towards the construction of an alternative:

“The growth discourse is certainty

Degrowth is pure uncertainty: it doesn’t show where we are going”.

We are going to stop here for a moment, but without losing sight of this key intervention, because we are going to find something similar in the discourse collected from the people who participated in the Focus Group.

[Focus Group of Ordinary People]
To be able to think is to be able to say.
the horizontal way

To the people, of very different backgrounds, ages and areas, who participated in the group, we also showed our perplexity at the functioning of the growth discourse.

As happened with the panel, the first reaction was to redefine or provide growth with other contents: other parameters, other values... However, as was to be expected, all the narratives that people construct in order to analyse and critique the dominant discourse end up being constructed in opposition to how it is constructed and expressed. As one of these people said:

“Maybe we can’t think any other way. We’ve got it **nailed**”.

This person’s intervention is a perfect visualisation of how the language of growth has shaped our way of thinking about reality to the point of naturalising our vision without being able to “unhook” ourselves from the framework outside of which we cannot think.

Indeed, the people who participated in the group did not recognise any opportunity for the examples of “bad growth”. They simply noted the need to build an alternative, but could not see from where, in what terms. There was, however, a proposal that can be linked to what the panel indicated in relation to uncertainty:

“maybe it’s not about a bottom-up approach to growth but about **taking it in a different direction**”.

Beware: we are still afraid to stop, we are still advocating perpetual movement, dynamism, not stopping in order not to die. But this person proposed a change of dimension: from the vertical (from less to more, from worse to better) to the horizontal (reorienting our system towards “the other”). “The other”: what is not there, what we do not have, what we do not know or cannot know. An abyss on which experts agree: the abyss of what we do not know how to name. The immediate question arises: what is “the other”? That is the ultimate obstacle: no one knows what it is like, what that “other” is. Because outside the dominant discourse it cannot be thought of: it does not exist, it is outside the reality that constructs growth and all the narratives that sustain and express it; no one can know what “the other” is because it is inconceivable.

Ça parle. The encounter of uncertainty

Where experts met with people from outside the field of environmental thinking and activism was at the point of the abyss, of the inconceivable (in the literal sense: that which cannot be conceived).

“It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism”.

Imagining, devising, thinking, putting together a speech. You just can’t... or still can’t. What the people in the Focus Group expressed and what the members of the panel of experts worked on was the full recognition of the problem of constructing a discourse out of nothing, from a position outside the dominant discourse that constitutes us, allows us to think and tells us what is conceivable and what is not. Indeed, either in the analysis or in the descriptions collected, the discourse of growth has a recognisable pattern:

- It has a perfect timeline: from before=bad to tomorrow=good. It speaks, therefore, of the future
- It has a defined spatial brand. It is our western world, our culture, our countries, our economic and social fabric, our place of interaction. It places us in front of a solid, predictable world.
- It has the veneer of objectivity and naturalisation.
- It is dynamic. It has allowed us to overcome threats as a species and to open ourselves to other worlds: disease, famine, technological stagnation, space and scientific exploration...
- The values associated with growth are values associated with society as a whole and even with our ethics.

How can an alternative be thought from the non-place? How can values be proposed from outside the structural framework of growth? Not, of course, from uncertainty. Another technological, economic, social system is not intelligible, with different values, with different measurements?

To speak positively of a post-growth (or degrowth, or however it is determined) world is an abstract idea, because nobody talks about that world as a whole. But the dominant discourse does have words to describe it: apocalypse, back to the caves, troglodytes, *Adamists*, loincloths... So, is it or is it not possible to attack the fortress of growth?

The possible way forward and some recommendations

The king is naked

In the old, very old, story, the subject who shouts “the king is naked” is not working a discourse on the monarchical institution, contrary to the figure of the monarch, he is not even attacking his figure. The subject shouts what is forbidden, what no one is allowed to say, what is inconceivable. The subject shows the king: he unveils in the sense that he tears the veil of concealment that the story has constructed to protect the king from the revelation of his nakedness. The truth is nothing but the unveiling, bringing down the veil, revealing what lies behind it.

The discourse of growth is naked, but it has managed to assemble a structure of conception, construction and limitation of the constructed reality, outside of which no one can think, much less assemble an alternative. Growth narratives have been constructed so that their nakedness is ineffable: no one can denounce, reveal the nakedness of growth because to do so is simply not possible, it is outside reality. The subjects who could confront the king would be from another kingdom, who would simply want to overthrow him in order to take over his lands, but without attacking his legitimacy. That is power and the discursive structure that sustains it: to make some things visible and others hidden; to make some things perceivable and thinkable and not

Semioclastia – general recommendations

Roland Barthes suggested a task that he himself christened “semioclastia”, that is: to consider that analysis in its literal sense of “cutting into pieces”, of “separating” and scrutinising the parts that have been

separated is already a weapon. And we believe that this is a clear case of the application of this term. What we are going to explain here is not only the call for the exercise of semioclasticity, but constitutes general strategic recommendations.

Analysis is already a weapon of combat against the solidity of what appears to be monolithic. Because its mission is to unveil what is veiled, to reveal what is hidden and, above all, to show the inner workings, the mechanisms that constitute the apparent impregnability of the system expressed in discourse. The conclusion of the analysis is “the king is naked”, but the prior work is more complex.

The discourse itself, and degrowth is no exception, has its weaknesses because these are built on the concealment that they can be seen as weaknesses. To be seen: that is, to be shown, to be made explicit. Let us see briefly how this works:

- **The discourse presents growth as eternal**, *ahistorical*, timeless and not subject to the currents of time. The analysis of history (political, economic, scientific-technical...) is able to locate its origin in time and space and how its conceptual apparatus grew.
- **The discourse is presented as objective**. The analysis can and should show that the discourse of growth is constructed on the basis of giving the *appearance of objectivity* to what are nothing more than ideological options that have been chosen and reinforced while other options have been discarded.
- **The discourse associates values with its construction of reality**: to grow is good, to advance is good, to move is good, to exploit resources is good, to progress is good. The analysis can and should show that these values are

an ideological construct that associates terms with qualifications and that this has been constructed in academic, social, fictional and everyday texts.

Let us summarise: every strength we find has the weakness that, in order to be a strength, it has been built on hidden weaknesses, and the unveiling of the analysis can only reveal those weaknesses. One by one.

The effort is to carry out these analyses separately in order to give an overall

view of what has been

revealed. That is the

“semioclastia”⁴ and

that is the task that

semiology proposes:

to unmask in order to

weaken; to show the

weaknesses so that they can be seen, so that everyone discovers, not only that the king is naked, but that once unveiled he can no longer hide his nakedness.

And what about us, the people? Well, that analysis has to include the elimination of uncertainty: we have to be able to show two things:

- That individual actions are effective (they are seen as such) when they are requested for a clearly attainable, visible, tangible

and targeted goal. In the Focus Group, this is what was said: “the question is what you can do, and orientate yourself to that, because beyond that you can’t, it doesn’t depend on you”. This “what can I do?”, accompanied by objectives, a timeline, a possible world to reach, is a possible world of positive legitimacy.

- That the analysis of each element of the dominant discourse, which will reveal its weaknesses, has to take the step of exposing alternatives of strength that do not oppose, but repair the cracks in the system while constructing another world, another visualisation, another certainty. We have to think spatially and temporally once the nakedness of the system is revealed. We have to show where we want to go once the fortress has cracked. Where we want to go and how to get there.

But the first task is to analyse in order to unmask. Emphasise what does not work and what is dressed up as the inevitable. Emphasise what seems eternal but had a beginning and will have an end. Emphasise that we can get to a better place. Much better.



Addendum

An unexpected finding

The team that carried out the research to characterise and find cracks in the discourse of growth has made a finding that had not been included in the main body of the article, and which also has operational consequences when communicating the environmental agenda, especially when addressing young people. Mariano Baratech, a member of Transición Verde's Board of Trustees and sociologist, participated in this finding. In the context of several formal and informal discussions after the previous report, we found an interesting field that opened up before us and that we consider useful in analysing and communicating an alternative to the "growthist" discourse. We will first explain the origin and content of this finding, and then we will make the communicative recommendations that derive from it. The origin is to be found in research and analysis work related to multiple sectors and activities, which we began to carry out twenty years ago.

External discourse - origin

For another study, the team that carried out this research conducted research among women on work-life balance. One of the most striking results was the fact that many of the women investigated were outside the requirements established by the dominant discourse regarding professional careers. Especially in the sense of having to follow an ever ascending path in terms of positions, responsibilities and salary. These women expressed a discourse of non-acceptance

of such a scheme for their careers, because their working life was not at the centre of their identity construction.

In order to be, to define themselves to themselves and to other people, they did not need to do so in reference to their employment status, to their current and future position in their work performance. As a result, they began to weave together different narratives in which they configured a personal, social and working reality outside the scheme offered by the dominant discourse in terms of their identity as people, as professionals and even as members of a family. In these studies we had the first evidence that family life was not defined in opposition to working life. And we also had the first indication that personal life and family life did not mean the same thing for some women.

The dominant discourse of a rat race in which one must always be promoted and must renounce and/or sacrifice personal dimensions in order to reach one's goals was faltering, not because it was questioned in itself, but because there were women who were beginning to position themselves outside this dominant discourse, constructing another and, therefore, another way of constructing personal, social and work reality. In subsequent research, we began to observe that there were also men who began to narrate from this discourse outside the dominant one.

It should be noted that this discourse is characterised by the fact that it is situated on the fringes of a general, internalised and

socialised discourse of continuous personal progress. The similarities of the latter with the dominant discourse of a society, a culture and an economy in permanent progress, in continuous ascent, are evident.

But there is more: in research with young people - not directly related to the topic at hand - we have also found discursive indications of something that may be, at the very least, a crisis in the dominant discourse on progress and that also stem from a structural repositioning of the discourse on the definition of identity in relation to the personal and employment dimensions (both of paid work and entrepreneurship).

Without going into too much detail, we have found that there are groups of young people, regardless of sociological variables such as gender, education or their socio-cultural class of origin, whose present and future identity is not constructed around their present or future working life. The question “what do you want to *be* when you grow up?”, in which “being” was synonymous with “working at”, has regained its “identity” sense and these young people do not base the construction of their identity or their presentation to their peer groups around their working life. They have developed a vision of work as something strictly instrumental - certainly in a world of work that is gloomy, hostile, exploitative and does not help them to become better people - that allows them, through economic obligation, to be able to carry out other activities that do relate to their vision of themselves and to their social and, in their case, family relationships. This gives rise to an emerging discourse which, like the

one we explained in the previous section in relation to women, is situated on *the fringes* of the dominant discourse[■]. And this discourse, which is born from *outside the* cultural prescription in which we

■ It is not the place here to calculate the quantitative extent of this discourse, nor to predict whether it will become a majority discourse. But it is a solidly constructed discourse, which appears clearly in groups and interviews with young people and which is appearing in research with very different objectives and themes.

live, also undermines the idea of a line of vital progression in which growth is associated with training and fulfilment is associated with advancement - continuous, ascending - in work or in business entrepreneurship.

External discourse - consequences

Therefore, in the two areas we have just described, we are witnessing the emergence of a discourse which, by placing the construction of identity outside the discourse of progress, progress, indefinite growth on the margins of labour (and therefore economic, educational, etc.) activity, undermines the very basis of the discourse of growth.

The fact that it does so for the time being in relation to the construction and presentation of self-identity does not detract from the potential value of a systemic critique of a way of seeing things dynamically oriented towards continuous and unlimited growth. The people who have expressed this discourse with personal narratives are not dismantling the dominant narratives of progress, of the sacrifice of personal life, of the construction of identity around the central core of work and promotion, i.e. personal progress. They are speaking from outside: they are situated elsewhere, using narratives that do not correspond to the repertoires and dictionaries of the discourse of progress.

It is important to note that these people do not renounce anything, or do not feel they are renouncing anything. If they did, they would be constructing their discourse in opposition to the prevailing discourse. And this is not the case: they are talking about another identity, another world, another job, another personal life, other aspirational dimensions.

Whether all this will lead to a move away from impulse consumption, from blind acceptance of the discourse of growth in other dimensions, remains to be seen. But

it is clear that, instead of finding a fissure in a dominant discourse that speaks of unlimited progress, of continuous personal growth, of success in terms of achieving ever more demanding goals, we have found the germ of a discourse that is outside the dominant margins of growth and progress. A discourse that places identity on axes that are not associated with material, economic progress through work and its dimensions. And it is very likely that the foundations of a crisis of the dominant model, of its narratives and of its nuclear articulation in our culture can be laid on these foundations.

We cannot fail to note that the life pattern that predicted, for previous generations, the way of life insertion in social scenarios has disappeared, a disappearance probably accelerated by the global crisis that began in 2007-2009. When a young person was born, they knew that the thread of their life, in broad, majority terms, began with an education that prepared them for work, that work would allow them the material stability necessary to build a family, and then progress in working life would end with a peaceful retirement in the company of the successive generations. This scheme, this timeline socialised by every young person almost from birth, went into crisis and practically disappeared with the aforementioned crisis and the pandemic, which left young people without a legible future in the offer of the dominant culture. It is more than likely that this disappearance has brought with it the concretisation of what was pointed out a long time ago by the aforementioned women and of what was picked up among the youngest people: identity is no longer constructed on that axis, on that “hanger” on which to hang and develop who each one is individually, socially, culturally. It is outside. And that is why the narratives of this “being outside” are constructed outside the dominant structure and, therefore, may perhaps seriously challenge it.

A final note: this phenomenon does not have a clear discursive relationship with the phenomenon of *Big Retirement*, recorded above all in the USA, although sociologically it may have contacts on living conditions, material conditions of production, etc..

In terms of communication

In addition to the *semi-occlassification*, the unmasking that we recommended in relation to the bases of the dominant discourse of unlimited growth, the birth of this **external discourse** opens the door to the use of a novel strategy and, perhaps, indirect ways to achieve direct objectives.

The general strategy would consist of promoting, through specific stories, this being in another place; that is to say: the elaboration of stories and documents that reinforce the idea that it is possible to construct a socially intelligible identity from outside, from a place that does not demand continuous growth, that does not demand a sacrifice of the personal, of being who one is, in order to live a full and socially and personally acceptable life. Because this is intelligible for groups of women and young people.

In short. It would be a matter of creating culture around this new discourse through all kinds of stories that speak of being otherwise, of being otherwise, of not accepting the rat race, blind consumption, the always material, economic aspiration that forces us to a continuous sacrifice of the self on the altar of having. In this sense, attacking the discourse of growth head-on, by opposition, not only serves no purpose, but is less intelligent than encouraging the emergence, in as many dimensions as possible, of a discourse that is not alternative, but external, literally outside the system, but intelligible, born of flesh and blood people who, quite simply, are living in an alternative world.

Annexes

Annex I

Some notes on semiological discourse analysis.

This is not the place to describe Semiological Discourse Analysis in depth, but we believe it is useful to give some indications about the tool and its scope in order to then be able to develop the outcome of the use of the tool.

First, what is the reliability of our analysis? The reliability of the analysis is determined by two criteria: *redundancy* and *saturation*. When the collected discourse (whether verbal, collected from speakers or in printed materials, engravings, drawings, etc.) keeps repeating the same signs (terms, words, images, etc.) and when new expressions can no longer be collected in the corpus under analysis, we believe that the corpus is complete and saturated, i.e.: we are able to analyse what has been said, written, etc.

Secondly, it is necessary to know that semiology has a radical position with respect to the sign: what we exchange, hear, see..., is the part of the sign that we can perceive through our senses, its physical part, which we call the *signifier*. As we do not have direct access

■ It is normal to think that when we use a word, we use it in such a way that both the signifier and the signified are immediately perceived, decoded and understood by those who listen to us or see us or see our writings, paintings, videos... and this is not the case. For example: the colour black, which for western culture usually means, in ritual social contexts, mourning, is the colour of war and jihad in Islamic countries. In these countries, again as an example, the colour of peace is green, whereas in our culture it is usually white. With any other sign it is exactly the same.

to the meaning to which this signifier “calls”, we have to analyse a given set (in the *corpus* to be analysed) of signifiers in order to “fence” the meanings to which they allude[■]. For this we have three rules:

a) *Opposition*: the signifier acquires (“near”) its meaning by opposition to another signifier. For example: *growing* vs. *not growing*. But in a specific story, growing can be opposed to *shrinking*, *stopping*, *stagnating*... That is why we need, as with all the rules we show, the whole text (what is usually known as the context).[■]

■ Context is, for semiology, a short term, which is not used. It would take too long to explain that the whole text has other properties that “enclose” the meaning when analysed in its completeness.

b) *Combination*: the signifier acquires meaning by combination with another signifier or signifiers, as occurs in comparisons. For example: “the Spanish energy sector behaves like a person who has entered maturity”.

c) *Substitution*: the signifier acquires meaning by substituting another signifier or signifiers. In the example above, we can remove the connective and use a metonymy or a synecdoche: “investors believe that the growth of the energy sector has reached maturity”; “the Spanish economic ship has come to a standstill”...

The next thing we use for the analysis is a modelling of the discourses to be analysed on the basis of A.J. Greimas’ proposal of Vladimir Propp’s work on the analysis of Russian fairy tales¹. To put it very succinctly: Propp discovered that dozens of Russian folktales could be grouped into a very few categories, all of which shared the same basic structure: there is an established order,

the order is broken by an evil one, a wise man discovers (or anticipates) the looming danger and prepares, searches for or finds a hidden hero or heroine, and prepares, together with other adjuvants the heroic figure by increasingly hard trials until the final confrontation between the protagonist results in the consecration of the latter, the elimination of the evil one and his opponents (even from his or her place of residence) and order is restored. As this discovery analysed and presented story structures, the whole stream that embraced this kind of analysis applied to social, anthropological, economic and psychological study came to be called

structuralism⁴. We treat the texts we see and hear with this methodology. We call it Semiological Discourse Analysis.

⁴ In passing, let us say that for a long time Semiology and Semiotics were synonymous terms. Nowadays, it is common to assign semiology to the "French" current (Greimas, Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, etc.) and semiotics to the "Anglo-Saxon" current (Peirce, Eco...).

One last thing, which governs the whole basic approach of our type of analysis: the position of Semiology adds up to the Sapir-Whorf thesis: we do not speak as we think, but we think as we speak. Speech and the background structures of the language we learn as children shape our thinking and

thus determine - in the strongest sense of the word - what we are able to select and order from the reality we perceive.

This is very important for the analysis that follows: discourse is the speech of Ideology. Ideology is the set of structures that speech imposes to shape the reality we are able to handle. Outside ideology there is no reality. Reality is what we exchange in the narratives that discourse organises. Speech precedes us, it gives us the constructed reality and that is the power of discourse: it configures the reality we are able to manage. And that explains a lot. It also imposes a final essential distinction: what we exchange in our culture are stories that belong to an extremely limited number of discourses. Stories are manifestations of discourses, the ways in which they organise themselves into signifiers. Discourse is the language of ideology: the canon of reality that we can perceive and that "naturalises" our beliefs: it makes what we believe seem natural, universal and "logical", unquestionable.



Endnotes

- 1 *Morfología del Cuento*, Propp V. 1928, Ed. Española Akal, 1970. Greimas, A.J. *Semántica Estructural*, Gredos, 1987. We also use tools completed by Lévi-Strauss, but this is not the place to be too long-winded. In addition, our team developed later, around 1991, its own methodology from all these works. This methodology continues to be self-amending and to reach new areas.

Annex II

Some Materials Analysed for Semiological Analysis.

Various articles from :

- <https://degrowth.info/en/library>
- <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/09/29/bill-gates-youll-never-solve-climate-change-with-degrowth.html>

Materials from :

- <https://asambleaciudadanadelcambioclimatico.es/>

Materials derived from this still active Twitter call:

- <https://twitter.com/taraxaco/status/1641352682698084352?s=20>

Selected articles and books:

- Gale, W. G.: Fiscal Therapy, Cap. 10, Oxford Academic Press, 2019
- Beckerman, Wilfred: In Defence of Economic Growth; 1976; Random House
- Bardi, H. y Álvarez Pereira, C.: Limits and Beyond, Exapt Press, 2022
- Bagwati, jagdish N.: In defense of Globalization; Oxford University Press, 2004

- <https://www.naiz.eus/es/info/noticia/20230402/cuando-todo-es-sostenible-nada-lo-es-hay-que-cambiar-de-brujula>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/16/opinion/degrowth-climate-change.html>
- <https://climateandcapitalism.com/2022/01/05/a-critique-of-degrowth/>
- <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/13/economy/degrowth-climate-cop27/index.html>
- <https://www.enriquedans.com/2020/10/contra-el-decrecimiento.html>
- <https://www.wired.com/story/opinion-why-degrowth-is-the-worst-idea-on-the-planet/>
- <https://www.johanfourie.com/2021/05/17/how-do-we-save-the-environment/>
- <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/22408556/save-planet-shrink-economy-degrowth>
- <https://www.axios.com/2021/03/20/degrowth-economic-growth-climate-change-pandemic>
- <https://blogs.publico.es/dominiopublico/9039/los-errores-de-las-tesis-del-decrecimiento-economico/>

Annex III

Participants in the Panel of Experts:

- **Francisco Romero**, entrepreneur
- **Manuel Bermúdez**, university lecturer
- **Cote Romero**, energy consultant
- **Rosa María Tristán**, journalist
- **Raúl Gómez**, director of Transición Verde
- **Soledad García-Consuegra**, Transición Verde project manager
- **Maribel Martín**, economist and consultant
- **Marta García**, producer and cultural director
- **Fernando Prats**, urban architect

Focus Group Participants (Characteristics Only):

- Female, professional, 30 years old
- Female, self-employed, 41 years old
- Male, industrial engineer, 36 years old
- Female, student, 26 years old
- Male, computer engineer, 31 years old
- Male, retired, 61 years old
- Female, manager, 46 years old



Inequalities are growing at the same rate as global wealth and young people are looking to the future with concern (if not eco-anxiety) as they are told that there is no alternative and that, if there is one, it is to fall into the arms of the extreme right. Faced with new scenarios, capitalism always offers the same response: grow and grow; accelerate, more and more.

This report explores how the growth narrative managed to become hegemonic, how Europe is opening up spaces for the necessary debate on the future of our socio-economic model, and how we can look for fissures in that narrative that allow us to imagine true alternatives.

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