

A definition of sustainable degrowth

The "degrowth" is a concept raised in the 1970s by the Romanian-American economist Georgescu-Roegen. The economic system, seeking a steady increase in its material wealth, reduces the natural capital of the World. As this capital is limited, logically, growth leads to the bankrupt by natural resource depletion or accumulation of pollutants at a level such that the biosphere can no longer absorb them. The traditional answer is that technological advances can prevent these risks by continuous improvement of the efficiency of raw material use and by substitution of old materials with new ones.

Except that, with "rebound effect", improvement of industrial processes in terms of eco-efficiency, paradoxically, results by an increased material consumption. Indeed, lower cost allowed by this improvement generates additional income available for new consumption that are transferred to other products or services. For example, gains on energy savings can be used to travel more. "

According to Serge Latouche "to save the planet and ensure acceptable future for our children, we must not only moderate the current trends, we must straight give up development and economism."

This degrowth would have to be "sustainable", that is to say it would not generate social crisis challenging democracy and humanism. Indeed, a sharp reduction in consumption would create a significant reduction in overall demand, and thus an increase in unemployment and social unrest.

The key is therefore in a different distribution of preferences, so that consumers choose immaterial wealth based on human relations rather than material products being harmful to the environment. The material degrowth will be social relational and spiritual growth or it won't be.

For more information on the degrowth (in French) :

<http://www.decroissance.org/>

in English :

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Degrowth>

<http://www.degrowth.net/>