

AN EVALUATION ON THE IDEA OF GROWING OR SHRINKING AS AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO THE SOLUTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

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Abstract

The idea of not growing in economic terms, widely known as degrowth, is an ecological solution method developed as an alternative to the understanding of classical economic growth. It's a reaction to the understanding of unlimited growth of classical economic growth. Fundamentally, it can be regarded as a sub product of green idea philosophy which developed in 1970's as a counter action against capitalist economic system. It claims that unlimited growth of economic activities disturb the ecological balance and depletes the resources. Based on these allegations, it advocates that the economy call growth process shall firstly be stopped and degrowth shall be gradually. Though some tangible proposals have been made in order to maket he above mentioned arguments real, the question as to whether degrowth is possible within capitalist economic system has yet to be answered clearly. The relation between the idea of degrowth and development is also a determinant. When one looks from only prosperity of more than 1 billion people starving in the rest of the world. Therefore, even thouth the idea of degrowth fundamentally stands on a correct ground, it can not produce a tangible, comprehensive and sustainable solution against today's world's bitter realities. Accordingly, the idea of degrowth seems not to go beyond argumets of only ecological activist and some sensitive scholars living in developed western countries.

Keywords: Economic Growth, Degrowth, Environmental Problems, Capitalism

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1. Introduction

The mainstream economic theory, which has emerged with the Industrial Revolution and continues its influence today, recognizes that the basis of human welfare is based on material prosperity. Material welfare depends on economic growth and development. Therefore, it is accepted that higher economic growth means higher development and prosperity. It is assumed that the average income per capita will increase as the country's economy grows, and people will increase their personal well-being by consuming more goods and services. In the 1990s and early 2000s, problems caused by environmental pollution and income distribution inequality began to affect almost all people living on the world without exception. Today, humanity and civilization face climate change and global warming problems as a result of the cumulative effect of environmental problems. Due to global warming, it is estimated that the ecological balance will completely disappear at the end of the 21st century and that the existence of the humanbeing will end. The global system and humanity have to tackle economic and social inequalities as well as global warming. In summary, in the first quarter of the 21st century, human beings are facing an ecological and economic crisis (Yalçın, 2017: 1).

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It is understood that classical economic growth approach is the main source of the problem. Today, the debate on whether there is a limit to economic growth is very important in terms of diagnosing the problem. The question of economic growth without a boundary on a finite planet is the main argument of the debate on the degrowth or shrinkage of economically. Excessive production and consumption activities caused by the classical economic growth approach lead to excessive carbon emissions, while excessive carbon emissions accelerate the global warming and climate change process. Therefore, the number of scientists and politicians who say that it is impossible to prevent global warming and climate change without changing the economic policies based on classical economic growth and development is increasing every day. Today, as an alternative to the classical economic growth approach, there are solutions based on solutions such as the green economy and green growth, as well as different economic alternatives that push the boundaries of the capitalist system and even seek solutions out of the capitalist system.

In this study, the concepts of degrowth or economic downsizing which push the boundaries of the capitalist system to the destructive environmental problems caused by classical growth, and which often define itself outside the capitalist system will be discussed. This paper primarily focus on the historical and theoretical foundations of degrowth or shrinkage, In the second chapter, it will be discussed whether the degrowth and capitalism will be compatible. In the third and last chapter, the relationship of degrowth with the current development paradigm will be examined.

2. Economic Degrowth

Economic degrowth is the choice of alternative economic policies against environmental threats that threaten the future of human beings such as climate change and global warming. In recent years, many researchers who investigating the relationship between environment and economy have entered the search for a new economic paradigm that will not halt the progress of civilization without retreating the level of civilization except for classical economic growth. The concept of downsizing in the literature is used to include economic degrowth. In this respect, the concept of downsizing in the rest of the work will also be used to include economic degrowth.

The idea of economic degrowth, unlike the idea of sustainable development, rejects the idea that environmental problems can be solved by green and environmental investments. The advocates of degrowth argue that the problem of economic growth is the obsession with economic growth and economic-oriented consumption-based consumption-oriented understanding, which can only be changed by the destruction of this structure of thought. In addition, degrowth advocates argue that, as can be seen at first glance, a more selective downsizing scenario in geographic and sectoral terms should be implemented, not a general scale down in the world economy (Koyuncu ve Özer, 2017: 176).

The Research and Degrowth Collective, which makes corporate representation of the idea of economic degrowth in the world, defines economic degrowth as reducing the production and consumption in a way that improves human well-being and improves ecological conditions and existing inequalities (<http://degrowth.org/defination> E.T. 25.02.2019).

According to Kallis et al. (2015), economic growth cannot be sustained ecologically, economically and socially. These three factors are the three main factors that play a role in the rise of the idea of economic degrowth.

One of the first studies on degrowth was a study by Georgescu and Roegen in 1987. Georgescu and Roegen state that the world is a limited planet and that it is not possible to grow on this limited planet without any boundaries. According to Georgescu and Roegen, the use of unlimited resources is not possible and therefore the traditional economy must be replaced by the bio-economy. In other words, a strong link must be established between the biosphere and the economy (Grinevald, 1993: 6; akt. Turgut, 2014: 147).

In contrast to supporters of sustainable development and green growth, degrowth advocates argue that scientific and technological developments cannot solve environmental problems and economic inequalities, but that degrowth does not mean reverting back to primitive life prior to modern civilization. Instead, a new social order should be established by maintaining the level of knowledge and technology achieved by modern civilization (Illich, 2011: 6).

In order to economic growth to continue forever, it is necessary to have unlimited space, unlimited energy and unlimited resources. According to Schumacher, in fact, everyone believes in growth and it is right. Because growth is a reality that exists at the core of life. On the other hand, it is important to determine the qualitative limit of the concept of growth (Schumacher, 2010: 123).

According to Demaria et al. (2013), there are six main sources that feed the idea of economic degrowth;

1. **Environmentalism Approaches** that attach an internal value to ecosystems and emphasize the negative effects of economic growth on nature.
2. **Post Structuralist Studies** criticizing both development and mainstream utilitarian-based economics approach.
3. **The Well Being Approach**, which advocates voluntary simplicity for people, on the contrary it does not bring much happiness to much produce and much consume.
4. **Ecological Economics Approach** summarized by Georgescu and Roegen with the concept of bioeconomics.
5. **The More Deeper Democratic Structures or Direct Democracy Approaches** advocated by economists such as Illich, Gorz and Castoriadis.
6. Thoughts about providing justice in income, wealth and resource distribution both inside and outside the country.

The advocates of classical economic growth argue that economic growth is necessary to achieve human well-being on earth, while the economic degrowth advocates argue that human welfare can be increased even if the economy shrinks and economic growth does not always provide prosperity. Cuba is the most obvious example of how human well-being increases without growth. Cuba is in the high human development ranking, on the other hand it has the lowest environmental footprint (Turgut, 2014: 150). Nowadays, the countries with the highest environmental footprint value are the countries with the highest human development level and the highest per capita income. In contrast, African countries with the lowest environmental footprint have the lowest levels of human development. This shows that the economic growth paradigm that as a development prescription presented to the underdeveloped countries is diametrically opposed to the approach of economic degrowth. This contradiction brings to mind the idea of degrowth and whether the capitalist economic system overlaps with each other.

3. Does The Idea Of Degrowth Overlap With Capitalism?

In the literature on the idea of degrowth, the most serious criticism against degrowth is its relationship with the capitalist economic system. Whether it is possible to economically degrowth in the capitalist system, or is the economic degrowth inherently anti-capitalist?

D'Alisa et al. (2015) emphasizes that non-capitalist rules, institutions and policies need to be developed in order to implement the idea of downsizing, which would directly diminish the importance of the capitalist system. According to Koyuncu and Özer (2017: 180), it can easily be seen that the idea of economic degrowth is incompatible with capitalism. On the basis of capitalism, the search for new markets, new products, and modes of production is continuous, in order to protect or further increase the profits of capital owners under competitive pressure. While these searches create an increasing degree of labor exploitation and environmental pollution, they are only possible within a capitalist economic system.

Serge Latouche, a prominent proponent of the downsizing movement in France, opposes the total rejection of capitalist institutions, though he says a contraction-based society cannot exist in the capitalist system. According to Latouche, the complete elimination of capitalist institutions, the prohibition of wage labor, money and the private ownership of the means of production would lead society to chaos. According to him, there should be another alternative where private property, money and markets are not abandoned but growth will be abandoned (Koyuncu ve Özer, 2017: 180- 181).

In 2009, Tim Jackson, a report he wrote for the British Parliament, called for an alternative system based on economic growth. According to Jackson (2009), the notion that growth cannot be questioned in an economic system dominated by global companies, so that the global companies' sovereignty in the economic structure is ended, but the idea of economic degrowth can be discussed.

In spite of the increasing number of thinkers who research and write on the subject of degrowth today, there is no concrete strategy for degrowth. The main reason for this deficiency is the contradictory relationship between degrowth and capitalism. According to Latouche, who is trying to put forward a number of concrete proposals, although not exhaustive, the proposals for internalizing the costs of pollution-creating sectors such as transportation by corporations and the high level of taxation of advertising expenditures are, in fact, it is based on that the idea of internalizing the negative externalities that Pigou expressed years ago through taxes. With this approach, Latouche did not break away from the capitalist thought form.

Fotopoulos (2007) states that the idea of economic degrowth is focused not only on the ecological aspect of the multi-faceted crisis in which the capitalist system is involved, and therefore cannot be a universal approach. Fotopoulos states that environmental problems are only one of the common problems facing human beings, that the capitalist economic system leads to other very important social problems that create inequality, whereas the idea of degrowth misses these social problems and does not emphasize the class.

The idea of degrowth is criticized by Marxist economists, in contrast to liberal economists. On the basis of this, as Fotopoulos pointed out, the essence of thought is that exploitation and inter-class relations are ignored. For Marxist economists the idea of degrowth is an ecologically valuable idea. For them, the idea of degrowth can have a value as a critique of capital accumulation and as part of a more egalitarian social order.

4. The Relationship of Sustainable Development and Degrowth

The thinkers, who advocate economic degrowth, establish the relationship between economic downsizing and development through the concept of sustainable development. According to Turgut (2014), the idea of sustainable development continues to follow a neo-liberal line in the 1990s, although economic growth emerged from destructive environmental problems and inequalities.

Sustainable development, which has a history of more than 30 years, has been highly influenced by the impact of globalization at a time when the environment has been most destroyed and economic and social inequalities are growing. Sustainable development has not been able to provide a comprehensive and concrete solution, which has been widely accepted in intellectual circles, but which will produce permanent solutions to environmental, social and economic problems. In recent years, concepts such as green economy and green growth, which are shown as the road map of sustainable development, suggest that economic growth and development are possible within the free market system. In particular, the concept of green growth is more concrete than sustainable development. Because it focuses not only on ecological destruction caused by classical economic growth, but also on economic and social inequalities.

The main factor that distinguishes green growth from the idea of economic downsizing; Green growth is to recognize that economic growth is an inevitable reality for the future of societies and the welfare of human beings. According to the green growth idea, in order to sustain the development process economic activities based on fossil energy should be abandoned and a new economic order based on zero carbon emission should be established instead. The idea of economic degrowth suggests that human beings' material welfare expectation is constantly increasing, and that when we add an increasing population, it is not possible to grow unlimitedly. While the concept of green growth claims that the economic order based on zero carbon emissions can be possible within the capitalist system, many of the economic degrowth advocates claim that such a solution cannot be possible within the capitalist system.

5. Conclusion

Thanks to the economic growth model of capitalism, the production of goods and services in the world in the last 250- 300 years has developed at a dizzying pace. Increasing production and consumption activities increased the material well-being of humanity to very high levels. However, this enormous amount of economic growth has created serious economic and social inequalities and problems, including climate change and global warming. The idea of degrowth is the result of the devastating environmental problems posed by the classical economic growth paradigm and the social and economic inequalities. Although the concept of economic degrowth opposes the concept of classical economic growth, it could not offer an economic system based on a concrete and comprehensive solution to the solution of the problems. Because, the idea of many solutions mentioned in the idea of degrowth contradicts the principles of capitalist free market order. Therefore, we think that an alternative economic approach that offers a solution to environmental problems should offer a consistent solution. The question of whether the idea of economic downsizing is an alternative in the capitalist system has not yet been answered. Today, more than 1 billion people are starving and have no access to electricity and healthy water. It is possible to ignore the expectation of the prosperity of billions of people living in

extremely bad conditions who are starving, when we approach the problem only from the level of consumption of developed countries and the destructive environmental problems caused by this level of consumption.

While global politics and the current economic order are aware of the environmental and social destruction of economic growth, they have not yet been able to develop a new economic alternative that this insane understanding can put in place. Alternatives such as green growth developed within the capitalist system have not yet touched the daily life of billions of people. The idea of downsizing has not yet been able to take political action at the government level, which is of interest to scientists and activists interested in the issue at the conceptual level. The reason for this is that, as mentioned above, it does not have a coherent social and political perspective other than an ecological perspective.

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