

Conference proceedings

Don't Forget the Rich A strategy proposal to spread the idea of degrowth

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**2nd Conference
on Economic
Degrowth
For Ecological Sustainability
and Social Equity**

**BARCELONA
26th-29th March 2010**



Abstract

How to spread the idea of degrowth and make it accepted in the society? This question appears as easy to express as difficult to answer since it could be analyzed through so many different ways. The paper deals with this question focusing on the role of individuals and especially individuals from the upper class of the developed countries.

Our main assumption is that the rich should act in priority in favor of a transition toward a socially sustainable economic degrowth. Some authors already advocate this idea but it is never explained how the rich could actually accept the economic degrowth. Moreover, ongoing initiatives that reflect ecological sustainability and social equity which the notion of degrowth supports, do not include the participation of the rich as we define them in the paper, including the wealthy people and the upper middle class individuals of the developed countries. Nevertheless, it seems that we could obtain their support in favor of a socially sustainable economic degrowth if we follow a strategic path.

The paper suggests a strategy proposal identifying three main obstacles that prevent to spread the idea of degrowth. The first obstacle that arises is that there are still some misunderstandings about global issues which lead to call for the wrong solutions. The second comes from the fact that the individual behavior is a multiple and complex process that should be analyzing deeply to find the motivations that could make the rich more likely to accept the idea of a degrowth transition. The last obstacle is that a strategy intending to change directly the way rich people think will not be efficient, even counterproductive.

Later, the discussion will oppose some arguments to each of these obstacles, which represent our strategy proposal: (1) increase awareness; (2) create cooperation; and (3) favor concrete initiatives. By following this strategy proposal we expect the rich of the developed countries to become less reluctant to accept the idea of a necessary socially sustainable economic degrowth.

Keywords

Degrowth; strategy; individual; rich; social interaction; cooperation

1 Introduction

The general question of the how regarding the spread of the idea of degrowth at the individual scale brings its share of more specific questions which cannot be avoided if we want to understand the ins and outs of this process.

First, we should ask ourselves what the problem we are talking about is. Although, this question is easy to formulate, we will show that there is still some confusion within people in understanding what global issues actually mean and what their roots are. Then, we will show how these misunderstandings currently lead to claim for wrong solutions.

Second, we need to remember what our objectives are face to the global issues as we claim for an economic degrowth. We stand by the idea here that a transition of the current economic and social system is necessary given the urgency of responding to the current environmental, social, and now economical crises. It will be then demonstrated how such a transition should be in favor of an economic degrowth based on ecological sustainability and social equity.

That will bring us to the questions that the paper intends to answer such as who must initiate such a transition and how. Our main assumption is that the rich should act in priority in favor of a transition toward a socially sustainable economic degrowth. The problem is that other proponents of this idea, such as Flipo (2008) or Kempf (2007), do not explain how to make the rich initiate such transition or even simply to become less reluctant to it. Moreover, ongoing initiatives in favor of degrowth, such as voluntary simplicity, do not include the participation of the rich as we define them in the paper.

Although the social stratification is more complex than a binary approach, the rich or upper class individuals will mean here individuals who belong to the generally adopted definitions of upper class and upper middle class of the developed countries, while lower class individuals will include individuals from the lower middle class as well as working poor and underclass ones. Indeed, it seems to be sufficient here to consider the society as being divided into two main classes, upper and lower classes, since the middle class tends to disappear in the developed countries of this early twenty-first century as social inequalities increase.

Nevertheless, it seems that if we follow a strategic path we could make the rich more likely to accept the idea of a transition of the society, and so to become less reluctant to the idea of a socially sustainable economic degrowth.

2 A necessary sustainable degrowth transition

2.1 From wrongly understood global issues to wrongly formulated solutions

There is still a lot of confusion among the general public face to global issues. This phenomenon is not limited to lower class individuals since our study ¹ shows that even people who consider themselves as being “wealthy above average” not always consider environmental issues as being part of the global crisis (see **Appendix A**).

As far as environmental issues are concerned, especially on climate change, only 57% of American people think that “there is solid evidence the world is actually warming” (Begley, 2009). This short majority of people being convinced that the environmental crisis is real demonstrates the work which still has to be

¹ A short survey has been executed among a sample of 19 people being mostly MBA students at Northeastern University (Boston, MA, USA). This survey intended to help to understand the relation between wealth and concern about global issues. The results are presented in Appendix A.

done to achieve awareness about the ecological emergency. This is all the more important since the situation is getting worse in the U.S. with a figure down from 71% in 2008 (Begley, 2009).

Although the lack of awareness regarding global issues should not be related to the solutions which are currently proposed by policymakers and then ratified by decision-makers, the fact that these issues are wrongly understood leads to apply wrongly formulated solutions.

Indeed, enthusiasm in the past few years for sustainable development has been now adopted in each and every aspect of the political and business actions. Unfortunately, sustainable development, as it is formulated by the mainstream economic theory, and so implemented in developed countries, cannot lead to actual sustainability since “the specificity of environmental phenomena [...] cannot be reduced to market logic that controls this research perspective” (Vivien, 2008). Indeed, this marketization of the environment tries to convince people that consumption of green products will lead to solve environmental issues. In fact, we are following the same path leading inevitably to the same errors of the past when well-being of every one was supposed to be reached through infinite consumption. Sustainable development as it is now implemented in policies and behaviors is “not actually a vision of the future” since it “suggests new means but still old ends” (Ehrenfeld, 2008).

We claim here that the addiction of developed countries to economic growth is the cause of the environmental and social crises we face today (see **Section 1.2**). Sustainable development which is evoked to be the solution for fixing the global crisis is considered here still being relevant of the same paradigm of pursuing an infinite economic growth. Indeed, even though sustainable development was initially introduced to take care of the social, environmental and economical aspects of the human activities, it has become a “source of strongly diverging interpretations in the field of economic analysis” (Vivien, 2008) leading to have the economical aspect still dominating the social and environmental ones.

The belief in the green economy leads people to think that ready-to-use solutions will appear as if by magic. They also hope that a ‘hero’, such as Al Gore who is sometimes qualified as an “eco-prophet” (Begley, 2009), will be strong enough to address problems that even policymakers still do not understand what their roots are. In this context, convincing people that global issues are real and that they will require involvement from each and every force to help to solve environmental and social crises might be much more difficult to achieve.

That points out the necessity for going further than simply reforming the existing system as it is currently done through the so-called sustainable development. Therefore, another way of thinking, or even being (Ehrenfeld, 2008), appears necessary if we wish to find solutions to address global issues.

2.2 Understanding the roots of global issues to advocate a transition

If we assume wealthy people being aware of global issues, we still need to make them understand what the roots of this multiple crisis are. Degrowth proponents claim that the principal source of global issues is our addiction to economic growth (Latouche, 2004, 2009) which frames each and every aspect of the economy. Therefore, growth is considered as being indirectly responsible for the global issues we face today as it is the primary policy goal of most countries whose current economic system have been now driven by the paradigm of economic growth for several decades.

In all cases, the current economic system relying on the paradigm of growth will lead the economy as we know it to come to an end anyway. If this situation could be anticipated enough, it could open the path to “a smooth transition toward a degrowth society”, but this would require to “decolonize our imaginary” from our addiction to growth as Latouche (2003) advocates. Realistically, an “involuntary confrontation with degrowth is more likely” to occur (Schrieftl et al., 2008), which brings a risk of a barbarization of the society in developed countries (Raskin et al., 2002).

That risk justifies the need for rethinking the current economic system and preparing ourselves to a radical (in the sense of being total) and smooth (in the sense of being prepared) change of the western lifestyle beyond the limited (but necessary) “technological fixes” as advocated by the proponents of the current economic system (Brown and Garver, 2009). This lifestyle transition concerns in priority the rich of developed countries (see **Section 2**).

2.3 A transition that calls for a sustainable degrowth

First, we explained that a transition of the current economic system is necessary to address global issues. Second, we argued that our addiction to growth increases, and even more creates these global issues. Therefore, we logically claim here for a transition towards an economic degrowth for ecological sustainability and social equity which represents a temporary step towards an optimum steady state equilibrium.

Going over such an economic degrowth will certainly stop the degradation of the environment. But to achieve actual social equity, this degrowth would have to be a democratic collective decision instead of being imposed by an economic crisis (Schneider et al., in press).

To be socially accepted by people, especially the rich, the socially sustainable economic degrowth should take into account all the social obstacles it might raise (Martinez Alier, 2009). Considering these obstacles probably means finding other incentives which could bring the rich to be less reluctant to this idea and adapting the strategy accordingly. Such incentives could be found through the study of the motivations of the rich based on their specific individual behavior.

3 Why the rich should act first

3.1 The limits of the lower class individuals

Lower class individuals seem to be much to go over a transition since, first, they state that their well-being is not as they expect it to be; second, they hope that it could be higher in another socio-economic system (Matthey, 2008).

However, lower class individuals are at the same time those who seem to be most favorable to the idea of radical changes in the society and those who benefit the least from the capacity to actually initiate these changes. Indeed, these individuals will face many obstacles when trying to change the way the society is, and so, even at their own level. This is due first to the lack of investigative and diversified information on each particular subject, such as global issues, which prevents from understanding the complexity of the whole society. Second, even if we assume that such individuals reach a sufficient level of awareness by being well informed and have an adequate analytical capacity, they will rapidly find other barriers, such as financial ones that prevent them from initiating these changes.

By not being able to act, lower class individuals feel a certain frustration which ultimately results in fatalism. And the problem is that such fatalism does not only affect lower class individuals but also upper class ones even if they benefit from a large influence and capacity of action (Noiville, 2009).

3.2 The key role of the upper class individuals

We previously pointed out the inability of lower social classes to initiate a transition of the society in which they settle. On the contrary, upper classes seem to possess the material and intellectual resources to participate actively in such a transition since they are generally more influential and more educated than lower class individuals.

Some proponents of the economic degrowth support the idea that rich countries should initiate the transition of the current economic system thanks to their material capacity to do so (in addition to their responsibility as being the main contributors to the global crisis) (Flipo, 2008; Kempf, 2007). The material wealth of developed countries has been gained at the expense of resources and cultures from other countries. Therefore, their capacity of action is coupled with a moral duty to repair the social and ecological damages by being the supporters of a new socio-economic system that is ecologically sustainable and socially equitable.

Since developed countries are necessarily those from which the transition should begin, upper class individuals should play a key role at the level of their society and even at the level of the planet. Many benefits could arise from the participation of the upper classes in this transition. Indeed, the fact that people from upper classes have influence on actions they generate (as being decision-makers) has more significant effects than if they were only dealing with their own destiny. In addition to that ability to play such a role, upper classes of developed countries represent a model in the eyes of the lower classes (and also the new rich from developing countries) which try to adopt through unconscious imitation their habits synonymous with wealth. Indeed, we are in times of “the dream of western lifestyle of the lifestyles of the richer ones” (Veblen (1899) quoted in Kempf, 2007; and in Schneider, 2008).

For all of these reasons, the rich benefit from the unique chance to support the transition of the socio-economic system. We could ask now what strategy we should adopt to make them actually initiate such a transition.

4 Increase awareness about global issues and economic degrowth

4.1 Do the rich even consider themselves being in times of global crisis?

The problem of getting global issues obvious for people, especially the rich in the developed countries, will remain until most of them accept the necessity of a transition of the society. To do so, wealthy people need to accept first that they are in times of global crisis.

However, since there is confusion in understanding the roots of global issues, how could wealthy people know if they are affected by global issues or not? Our study shows that people who consider themselves as being wealthy tend to be more concerned about global issues (see Appendix A). However, although they are concerned, that does not make them affected by these issues in their everyday life, and so willing to support a transition.

As far as environmental issues are concerned, 36% of American people believe that “global warming is caused by human activity” which is down from 47% in 2008 (Begley, 2009), while at the same time, “it has finally become widely accepted [by academics] that climate change was caused by man-made emission of CO₂” (Fournier, 2008). This huge gap in awareness between academics and general public shows how much improvement still needs to be done in that area. Having said that, we cannot expect people to consider that they could play a role in solving environmental issues, and so global issues, if they simply do not consider that they are partly responsible for them! On the contrary, although they contribute for a large part to the current global crisis upper class individuals do not seem to feel guilty (Kempf, 2007). Moreover, the rich have increasingly tended to socially and mentally withdraw into themselves (Laval, 2007), which does not show that the rich are ready to solve the global crisis.

Beside the economic crisis, the main reason why people, especially the rich, do not consider themselves affected by both environmental and social crises is probably that “global issues are usually framed in terms that many people see as remote from their everyday lives and that some refuse to accept at all” (Abdallah and Thompson, 2008). This raises the importance for bringing the debate from the global virtuality to the local reality in order to make people more concerned about global issues. Indeed, by

focusing on information which deals with issues that are far from their daily basis, both in space (anywhere else but where they live) and time (consequences expected to come far in the future), mass media miss that environmental and social problems already exist at the local level and are due to the same reasons as global issues are, which is our unsustainable western lifestyle. Therefore, we argue here that information should focus on local aspects rather than global ones, which are less concrete for people.

4.2 The first impression of economic degrowth on the rich

It has been demonstrated that people generally do prefer information that supports their own point of view (Hart et al., 2009) rather than data that upset them. This tendency is even worse when information deals with moral values or politics.

Now, degrowth theory calls for a necessary “decolonization of our imaginary” as Serge Latouche often says (2003; 2006; 2007). That means renouncing to the unsustainable aspects of our western lifestyle and some of the values related to it. Therefore, at first sight, the idea of degrowth seems not to stand a chance to convince people.

Moreover, although it has been demonstrated that once an acceptable level of income has been reached well-being does not necessarily improve (Abdallah and Thompson, 2008), the idea of degrowth could also be rejected because it will lead to feelings of loss (Matthey, 2008). In one word, the paradigm of economic growth is still colonizing our imaginary while on the contrary consumption growth can be detrimental to well-being (Abdallah and Thompson, 2008).

Feelings of loss are partly due to the negative consequences of economic degrowth already experienced in the past (Schriefl et al., 2008) which might affect the chance for the idea of degrowth to be accepted as part of the transition. It is all the more harmful since these feelings of loss are much higher among wealthy people than lower class individuals who already consider themselves as being affected by the current socio-economic system.

This rejection will remain active if we keep trying to explicitly advocate economic degrowth when trying to convince people, and so do the rich. Indeed, as far as the terminology is concerned, degrowth (*décroissance* in French) has been considered by its proponents as a “missile concept” (Ariès (2005) in Fournier, 2008) to question our addiction to growth. However, we should admit that degrowth theory will not be able to convince general public using such a thought-provoking approach unless it takes the risk of being marginalized, which is obviously not the objective when it comes to make the idea of degrowth dominant in society.

If we want to avoid this rejection at first sight, degrowth proponents should adapt their communication strategy directed to the general public, especially to the rich, in the sense that they should not explicitly advocate the idea of degrowth. Other ways of communication should be preferred instead. For instance, it should be insisted on the infinite positive changes that an economic degrowth transition could bring to the society and its citizens, such as a much more simple life for everyone in respect for the environment and other people; a richer life with less needs for money and stuff; more time for leisure activities and education; etc.

This raises the question of how such fundamental changes advocated by the degrowth theory could be accepted by people belonging to the upper class considered as those who benefit the most from the current socio-economic system (Laval, 2007) since they are especially the wealthiest.

5 Create non-material vertically-oriented cooperation

5.1 From economic interests to non-economic cooperation

5.1.1 *Limits of homo-oeconomicus' motivations*

When trying to get the idea of economic degrowth accepted by upper class individuals, and so to solve the dilemma mentioned above, it is necessary to understand before what the motivations of such individuals to act in groups are and how they interact with each other.

Alkire and Deneulin (2000) described from an historical perspective what the different aspects of the individual motivation in economic transactions are. It appears that the formulation of individual motivations based on the rational choice theory (Becker's model) is not valid since it considers that "homo-oeconomicus contains an adequate characterization of human motivation for co-operative within-group behavior" and assumes only motivations based on self-interest and revealed preferences which one intends to maximize (utility). Indeed, that formulation assumes the model of homo-oeconomicus as being the integral copy of the true human nature while this model was only an abstraction for laboratory (Deminski quoted in Alkire and Deneulin, 2000). Finally, the nature of individual's utility function remains exogenous (motivation not affected by the social and economic context) and individualistic, even though social capital and personal capital are included. This means that significant motivations and interaction between them cannot be taken into account in that modified Becker's model. The rational choice theory assumes that the motivation of an individual to act depends only on the basis of maximizing its own interests, and even more on a utility maximization. But, it has been shown that this approach involves fundamental problems since "each person is treated as a maximizing island and not a social being" (Alkire and Deneulin, 2000). It was then shown that the motivation of an individual is multiple and complex (see **Section 4.1.2**).

Therefore, any proposal intending to spread the idea of degrowth should definitely not rely on the rational choice theory of individual motivations, or Becker's model as described by Alkire and Deneulin (2000). Indeed, this theory assumes that the motivation of an individual to act depends only on the basis of maximizing its own interests, and even more on a utility maximization. But, the motivation of an individual is actually a multiple and complex process.

5.1.2 *Alternative individual motivations*

Some alternative motivational behaviors exist which make individual motivations a complex process in the sense that motivations interact between each others within a social context in which the individual acts. At first sight, these alternative motivations and their interactions could act as levers to spread the idea of degrowth among the rich.

The less heterodox motivator opposed to the rational choice theory approach of individual motivations is probably the long term self-interest. Although this motivator is still based on the interest approach of motivation, it differs from the rational choice theory in the sense that individuals take a long enough time horizon and do not limit themselves to immediate expectations. However, long term self-interest still does not consider interactions with other types of motivations.

Personal capital (past and personal history) and social capital (influence of past actions by peers and others in an individual' social network and control system) put individual motivations into a context which influences their decisions and actions. Although, it has been demonstrated that these two types of motivations are limited since they do not consider interactions with other ones (Alkire and Deneulin, 2000), they could help to spread the idea of degrowth. Indeed, individuals will use from their experience before they act. In a context of global issues, they will then be much in favor of economic degrowth if they are aware of successful past experiences of other individuals from the same social class. In a context of

degrowth, these successful experiences refer to people who have increased their well-being by changing their habits from the unsustainable western lifestyle to sustainable voluntary simplicity.

Social norms are not formal rules but rather represent shared expectations of behavior depending on the relevant society. They are imposed by the community such that their transgression leads to social sanctions (Alkire and Deneulin, 2000), being formal or not. On the one hand, we could conclude that if one's motivation is socialization, he (or she) will come to act in conformity with the norms of his society just because he wants to conform. In that case, social norms act as a barrier preventing people from differing from the others by accepting the idea of degrowth. On the other hand, social norms might have a different impact if one's motivation is to validate an identity. In that case, conforming to the social norms will demonstrate to the others that the one is a particular kind of person. This is already the case today when people try to be identified as eco-friendly people by consuming organic products, hybrid cars, and so on.

As far as the notion of identity being an alternative contributor to individual motivations is concerned, it corresponds to intrinsic form of motivation (membership in a particular community or a group to whom we belong to) which is limited since identity does not associate with socially constructed rules. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that certain types of identity lead to be competitive or exclusive instead of being cooperative (Alkire and Deneulin, 2000).

Foucault claims that individuals inhabit multiple forms of identities, the reason of which identity can be qualified as ambivalent, as explained by Scott and Marshall (Eds, 2005). Indeed, depending on the context, individuals are all subject to a range of possible and often contradictory versions of themselves. In addition to this diversity, all these multiple identities are linked to larger structures of identity which interact with each other, making identity not only ambivalent but ambiguous too, and so not as a lever to spread the idea of economic degrowth.

Individuals are also motivated by a certain part of altruism, i.e. the fact that they act for the good of others independently of their own well-being. Although altruism is often undermined by self-interest motivation which dominates within developed countries, this type of motivation should not be neglected while promoting the idea of degrowth. Indeed, there is a risk of increasing self-interest when policies are designed on the assumption of people being only motivated by that kind of interests, even if they actually behave altruistically (Alkire and Deneulin, 2000). Therefore, considerations about the motivation on which policies are based are not neutral. This also applies to this strategy proposal intending to spread the idea of degrowth which should not assume that people are self-interested. Instead, it should emphasize on the part of altruism existing in each individual unless it takes the risk of being inefficient, and even more counterproductive.

Lastly, we reach a point here where it seems difficult to find clear and unquestionable motivations, even alternative ones, willing to lead to actual cooperation between individuals. This is due to the fact that all these types of motivation try to conceptualize individual behavior in an economical context of trade. Now, if we want to find levers of cooperation among individuals, we need to escape from that economist approach and start to think differently the notion of action.

5.1.3 Non-economic approach of action

According to Caillé (2009), the difficulty in trying to understand people's relation to action comes from the fact that we usually limit the analysis to the axiom of interest (utilitarian approach), even when considering some alternative motivators to their individual motivations. This point of view is even more questionable since it aims to have a systematic and an a priori approach of action. Moreover Caillé claims that there is a triple confusion of interests when (1) trying to explain all forms of interest through the self-interest; (2) confusing two diametrically opposed forms of interests (interest in and interest to); (3) missing the other modality for the notion of interest to being forced or passive.

On the one hand, the interest is not sufficient to explain all forms of actions since it exists as many different motivators as different situations, humans being both unique and uniform at the same time. On the other hand, only considering alternative motivations to interest will not allow us to find a solution to improve cooperation since we stay in an economic approach of action. Therefore, that requires thinking beyond the mainstream approach of action.

Caillé (2009) suggests that the notion of action can be conceptualized using four dimensions: interest (individualism) as opposed to *lovence*² (*aimance* in French); and obligation as opposed to freedom. Within that framework, the gift appears as a result of *lovence* and freedom, as opposed to passive interest being created from self-interest and obligation. Therefore, if we want to consider the approach of non-economic gift of individual motivation, we will need to shift from the “taking-refusing-keeping” cycle of utilitarian interest to the “giving-receiving-giving back” cycle of gift as suggested by Mauss (quoted in Caillé, 2009).

5.2 The path towards a non-material vertically-oriented cooperation

5.2.1 Differences between social interaction and cooperation

We stand by the idea that increasing cooperation between individuals represents a lever to achieve our objective of making the rich accept an economic degrowth. Cooperation is considered here as being a particular case of the more general term of social interaction. Indeed, cooperation is achieved when social interaction leads to a win-win situation for both parts, considered here being two individuals.

In this paper, we characterize social interaction, and so does cooperation, by two aspects: the direction in which the social interaction occurs and the type of social interaction in question.

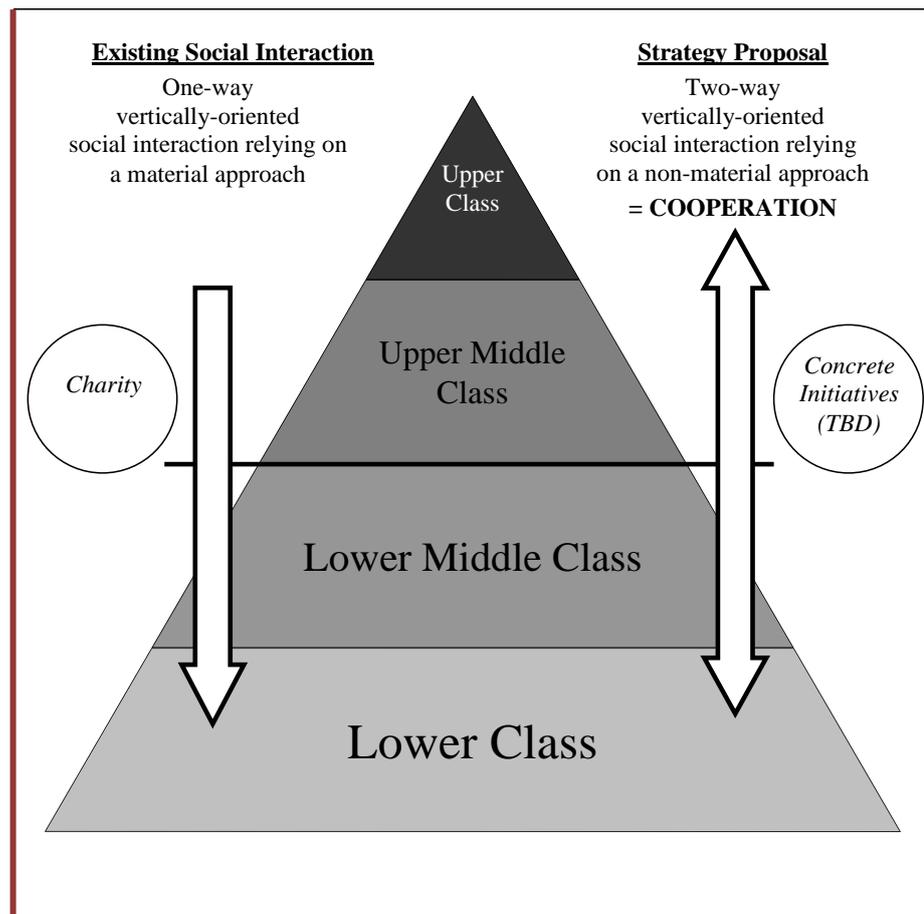
The direction is defined through the two ends (i.e. individuals) of the social interaction process. These could be either people coming from the same social class as we speak about horizontally-oriented social interaction or people from different social classes as we speak about vertically-oriented social interaction.

As far as the horizontally-oriented social interaction is concerned, it represents the major direction of social interaction since people usually interact in their everyday life with other people from the same social class through their various networks (family, friends, work, clubs, etc.). This direction of social interaction is developed continuously without even thinking about it. Although, it can occur within each class, the horizontally-oriented social interaction is more developed within the lower class than the upper class, and so for many reasons. First, lower class individuals are more numerous than upper class individuals since the social organization in developed countries is pyramidal (see **Fig. 1**). Second, the fact that money negates the need for socialization among the rich (Zhou et al., 2009) prevents horizontally-oriented social interaction to occur between upper class individuals. Even if it is broad, the horizontally-oriented social interaction between lower class individuals is not sufficient to initiate the necessary transition for the same reason as lower class individuals are limited in their ability to achieve it (see **Section 2.1**).

In any case, horizontally-oriented social interaction could not support a transition because it does not lead people from different classes to interact with each other. To achieve such a social interaction, it must occur in the other direction, i.e. vertically.

² *Lovence* is the English translation in terms of French philosopher Jacques Derrida for the concept of *aimance* invented by Moroccan writer Abdelkebir Khatibi (1995). *Lovence* (*aimance*) corresponds to a “form of loving which goes beyond the socially determined forms of love and friendship, and beyond the existing cultures and traditions of love” (Ayers, 1999).

Fig. 1 Strategy proposal for cooperation



5.2.2 Vertically-oriented cooperation

On the contrary, vertically-oriented social interaction is underdeveloped since it requires interaction between individuals from different classes which is not part of their everyday life. In a context of developed countries being structured by social stratification, there is less opportunity to create social interaction between different classes. On the one hand, as explained previously, the rich tend to isolate themselves from the rest of the society (see **Section 3.1**). On the other hand, lower class individuals usually reject this kind of interaction because it often represents a dominant-dominated situation, unless they actually need it, such as with charity. These two aspects prevent the necessary vertically-oriented social interaction to be generalized.

The level of cooperation seems to depend on the type of pre-existing relations between individuals (Alkire and Deneulin, 2000). This highlights the importance of providing the right incentives having higher degree of communication and social interaction between individuals. Therefore, if we want to achieve cooperation between wealthy people and lower class individuals on the long run, we need to improve social interaction between these two classes.

5.2.3 Lessons from charity

Although vertically-oriented social interaction is globally underdeveloped, there are some initiatives that already exist such as charity. Charity is a form of vertically-oriented social interaction mostly based on a material approach, such as money, food, clothes, etc. Then, we can ask ourselves if charity can lead to cooperation.

Lloyd (2004) analyzed motivations that make the rich already give to lower class individuals using small scale qualitative methods with the aim of helping to understand how to promote philanthropy among those individuals. The author identified five main motivations that make people giving which are (1) the belief in the cause; (2) being a catalyst for change; (3) the self-actualization; (4) the sense of duty and responsibility; and (5) the fulfillment of relationships.

The first three motivators of charity do not seem to support cooperation. Indeed, qualified as “strongest motivator” of philanthropy by Lloyd (2004), the belief in the cause seems difficult to achieve when promoting the idea of degrowth, as we already discussed the reaction of the rich when facing the idea of degrowth for the first time (**Section 3.2**). The fact that rich people also give in order to be considered as catalysts for change or to achieve self-actualization makes them validate an identity which relies by definition on intrinsic form of motivation, and so does not allow room for cooperation (**Section 4.1.2**).

At first sight, the two last main motivators that make rich people give could be considered as motivators to spread the idea of degrowth. Indeed, supporting the idea of degrowth is obviously a way for people to show their sense of duty and responsibility face to global issues. As far as relationships are concerned, they will be fully improved through a sustainable degrowth which is by definition “an extension of human relations” (Schneider et al., 2010) which have been abraded through the current socio-economic system that promotes individualism. However, this motivation could be undermined since “a desire to join such networks [of donors] may influence some” (Lloyd, 2004).

Finally, the lessons learned from the charity show that its motivations increase the intrinsic value orientation of donors which prevents actual cooperation to occur. Moreover, we shall insist on the fact that such social interaction consisting in charity from upper class individuals to lower class individuals is a one-way process (see **Fig. 1**), which cannot lead to cooperation (see **Section 4.2.4**).

Therefore, charity and all other forms of vertically-oriented social interaction based on the exchange of material goods are not compatible with the idea of degrowth since they do not create cooperation between individuals.

5.2.4 Specifics of a non-material vertically-oriented cooperation

Having said that all types of vertically-oriented social interaction do not necessarily lead to cooperation, we should now identify the conditions that could actually create cooperation.

First, vertically-oriented cooperation can be achieved only if based on a non-material approach. Such an approach needs to rely on time spent or knowledge shared with others instead of simply money or material donations as for charity.

In addition to that, cooperation is achieved only if it creates a two-way interaction between individuals (see **Fig. 1**). This is because both individuals need to be simultaneously donor and recipient in that process of gift as defined by Mauss (see **Section 4.1.3**). The good news is that such a process is easier to achieve with a non-material approach rather than with in a material one. Indeed, lower class individuals will be able to also share time or knowledge on areas that the rich do not know well or have been isolated from, such as advices from the concrete situations of the everyday life which are more and more undermined in a context of “growing disjuncture between the real economy of production and the paper economy of finance” (Kallis et al., 2009). Nowadays, the less money people have the more they show practical imagination in their everyday life just because they need to. This knowledge will be useful to share if the rich want to learn how to live a more simple life advocated by the sustainable degrowth theory.

The only question is now how to convince wealthy people to give their time and make them accept to learn from lower class individuals.

6. Favor concrete initiatives

6.1 Give the rich some tools

Since a paradigm shift is necessary if we want to go over a voluntary transition toward a sustainable degrowth, another way of thinking appears to be unavoidable (see **Section 1.1**). However, multiplying the number of articles, books, interviews, or conferences trying to convince the rich that they have a key role to play in that transition towards a degrowth will definitely not be efficient enough. Even if information and education are necessary on the long run, we should prefer to indirectly sharpen the awareness of rich people and not only blame their unsustainable lifestyle. Indeed, we demonstrated previously that we cannot go against the first impression that degrowth will make on the rich if we explicitly advocate it (see **Section 3**). Moreover, even in the case where the rich become less reluctant to the idea of degrowth (hopefully thanks to this strategy proposal), they will not actually initiate a transition if they do not know how.

Buckminster Fuller used to say: “If you want to change how someone thinks, give up; you cannot change how another thinks. Give them a tool, the use of which will lead them to think differently.”³ By tools, we mean here some concrete initiatives which rich people could participate in and that promote cooperation between social classes. If they are rightly designed, such concrete initiatives could help to change the way rich people think without explicitly advocating for the idea of degrowth. Indeed, they are plenty of existing initiatives that can prepare them to ultimately accept the idea of degrowth and that use already known words from the same lexical field than cooperation such as solidarity, volunteering, etc. The point here is that we suggest such concrete initiatives being based on a non-material approach to achieve cooperation between upper and lower class individuals (see **Section 4.2**).

Our study also shows that the rich are more likely to be interested in getting involved in concrete initiatives to help to solve global issues rather than changing their consumption habits for example (see **Appendix A**).

6.2. Rely on the voluntary participation of both classes

The point was to make rich people eager to get involved but we need to add that any cooperation initiated from the upper class individuals should be accepted by the beneficiary prior to be started.

To be effective and productive the transition⁴ aiming to help to solve the global crisis must be supported, or even initiated, by individuals who constitute the society in question. Such a transition can indeed be sustainable only if it shows the necessary criteria for social equity. Then individuals should be able to state the social benefits brought by this transition on the long run. Since a transition is effective only if it benefits to the majority of people, which precisely matches the lower social classes, it is necessary that these classes are involved in this process. Nevertheless, we pointed out that lower class individuals are limited to initiate the transition (see **Section 2.1**).

Then, we should keep in mind that communism in Eastern Europe has failed internationally because it was isolated from the rest of the world including the Western bloc, but also domestically because policies for cooperation between individuals came from the top-down, i.e. imposed by the state.

Faced with challenges coming from the current global crisis, we should not repeat the mistakes of the past by trying to impose a new top-down system of policies because it would be doomed to failure. Indeed,

³ Buckminster Fuller quoted in Foreword by of Peter M. Senge in Ehrenfeld (2008).

⁴ The transition evoked here does not refer to a new green economy but rather to an ecologically sustainable and socially equitable economic degrowth.

environmental policies adopted by policymakers and then imposed to citizens are often ineffective, and even more socially and ecologically counterproductive.⁵

Therefore, involvement of lower class individuals in the transition seems to be necessary too since it will lead to have a collective movement as opposed to an exclusive and inadequate top-down approach. However, their will can be threatened by either financial or intellectual limitations, even if they are more likely to go over a transition.

We see here that one of the three key concepts of the Maussian approach of gift is that people should also accept to receive and not only to give (see **Section 4.1.3**). At first sight, receiving appears more easy than giving. However, the specifics of the rich are that they are usually more familiar with giving things rather than receiving help from others (see **Section 4.2.3**); and they are even reluctant to it (see **Section 4.2.1**). That highlights the fact that lower class individuals, although they are not able to act first should also give⁶ to the rich to make them participate to a Maussian approach of gift that creates cooperation.

We also considered here the notion of gift depending on the notion of love and freedom. This latter dimension of the notion of non-economic action suggests that the gift, and so does the cooperation, can only be achieved through a voluntary based process which degrowth proposals should consider. If degrowth proposals are based on mandatory policies, they will fall down into the utilitarian approach of action. In other words, such proposals will not lead to create vertically-oriented cooperation and will be rather counterproductive making the idea of degrowth more difficult to be accepted by the rich.

The interdependence between the two classes and the existence of such a cycle of gift justifies the need to simultaneously get the voluntary participation of both upper class and lower class individuals. If we manage to get them accept to voluntarily cooperate once, the cycle of gift will maintain itself and actual cooperation will be created.

This brings us back to the title of this paper Don't Forget the Rich because if so, we take the risk of never initiating such a cooperation which has been demonstrated here as being necessary if we want to go over a smooth transition toward a sustainable economic degrowth.

⁵ In an interview, Serge Mongeau (2008) clearly illustrates this idea by giving the example of a policy for the restriction of vehicle use adopted in some cities in Québec, Canada. This policy is based on restriction of vehicle use to alternate days, depending on whether the registration number of license plates is odd or even. At first sight, this policy aimed to encourage people to use public transportation or to carpool, and so to have positive effects on the environment. However, the opposite actually occurred. Indeed, it was found that upper class individuals, rather than changing their habits, had preferred to buy a second vehicle in order to drive both on odd and even days, which made the reform fail. Finally, this policy ultimately increases the existing social inequalities by keeping the possibility for people with sufficient incomes to turn this policy to their interest thanks to their financial advantage. Now ecologically speaking, it is not obvious that the overall result of this policy was a decrease in CO2 emissions since it led to a significant overproduction of new vehicles caused by a demand that did not exist before, phenomenon also called rebound effect (Schneider, 2008). Finally, this policy was counterproductive both environmentally and socially speaking. This example shows the limits of top-down policies that are undertaken independently and are not the result of a broad bottom-up consensus.

⁶ We obviously do not mean material gifts here but rather non-material gifts such as time or knowledge.

7 Results

Through this paper we intended to answer the question of how to spread the idea of degrowth focusing on the individual aspect. The main assumption was that the rich should act first since they benefit from a unique chance to initiate a transition of the socio-economic system. The outcome is a strategy proposal that provides some criteria to achieve this goal on the long term. First, we found that there is a need for increasing the awareness of the rich regarding global issues and economic degrowth. To do so, information should focus on local aspects rather than global ones, which are less concrete for people. Moreover, since the rich are likely to reject the idea of degrowth at first sight, degrowth proponents should insist on the positive aspects that economic degrowth brings to people without necessarily explicitly advocating for it.

At that stage we reached a paradox since the fundamental changes that the degrowth theory advocates are claimed to be initiated by the people who benefit the most from the current socio-economic system. To overcome that paradox, we demonstrated here that it is necessary to work on the long run by improving social interaction between individuals which will help to get the rich accept the necessary transition.

We demonstrated that we could make the rich participate in such a social interaction process by simply understanding the fact that individuals are not only motivated by self-interests which correspond to an economic approach of interaction. Indeed, individuals have also the ability to interact with each other in a non-economic context. To achieve actual cooperation between individuals, we found that, first, social interaction should be vertically-oriented, i.e. between individuals from different social classes. Second, this vertically-oriented social interaction should benefit to both parts. Third, it should rely on a non-material approach, such as time and knowledge sharing, since material-based vertically-oriented social interaction, such as charity, still does not lead to cooperation.

Latter, it has been discussed that to make the rich actually change the way they think, degrowth proposals should offer them some concrete initiatives to participate in rather than simply ask them to change their lifestyle. Such concrete initiatives should intend to create situations of cooperation as formulated in the paper, and should rely on the voluntary participation of both classes rather than only the one of the rich.

8 Discussion

This strategy proposal tried to find a way to spread the idea of degrowth among the rich considered here as being the ones who should initiate the transition. As expected, the road to the acceptance of the idea of degrowth seems to be difficult to walk according to the various limits and paradoxes we face, and so especially among the rich. This highlights the fact that the battle can only be won on the long run which this paper takes into account in its strategy proposal. Nevertheless, this proposal lets some open questions which require further investigations.

First, the concrete initiatives that are part of the present strategy proposal will have to be designed since the paper provides criteria which these initiatives should rely on but did not describe what they could actually look like.

Second, as far as the voluntary participation of both classes is concerned, a paradox remains. Indeed, on the one hand, if we do not include the concrete initiatives in policies, we will certainly find issues to make the rich eager to participate. On the other hand, how to maintain the free participation of people if such concrete initiatives are implemented within policies that are mandatory?

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Appendix A: Wealth vs. Global Issues Concern

The survey was executed among a sample of 19 people being mostly MBA students at Northeastern University (Boston, MA, USA) contacted via email. The surveys have been completed anonymously on a voluntary basis between Dec. 1 and Dec. 8, 2009.

Note on question "To what extend do you consider yourself as wealthy?"

The fact that nobody considered themselves as being wealthy might correspond to the fact that people are usually not comfortable saying that they are wealthy. Moreover, this question relies on the subjective interpretation of wealth by people who answered the survey, and so, is subject to be relative to their social class and not to the overall population. The large majority of people who answered this survey are students in MBA who can be considered as wealthy in the sense of the present paper, i.e. taking part of the upper social class (including upper class and upper middle class). Moreover, the ones who answered "below average" to that question correspond mostly to students who are currently not working or temporarily doing internships, and so consider themselves being below average relatively to their social class.

		To what extend do you consider yourself as wealthy?					Total	%
		Wealthy	Above average	Below average	Poor	No resp.		
Would you like to answer additional questions about global issues?	Yes	0	6	2	0	1	9	47%
	No	0	7	3	0	0	10	53%
	Total	0	13	5	0	1	19	100%
To what extend do you consider the global issues in general as being important?	Very important	0	4	0	0	1	5	56%
	Important	0	2	2	0	0	4	44%
	Unimportant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
	Very unimportant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
	Total	0	6	2	0	1	9	100%
What do you consider the global issues being composed of? ¹	Environmental issues	0	3	1	0	1	5	23%
	Social issues	0	5	2	0	1	8	36%
	Political issues	0	5	2	0	1	8	36%
	Other	0	0	1	0	0	1	5%
	Total	0	13	6	0	3	22	100%
To what extend do you consider that global issues are affecting your everyday life?	Definitely	0	1	0	0	1	2	22%
	Probably	0	4	2	0	0	6	67%
	Probably not	0	1	0	0	0	1	11%
	Definitely not	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
	Total	0	6	2	0	1	9	100%
Do you consider wealthy people could have a role in solving global issues?	Strongly agree	0	5	0	0	1	6	67%
	Agree	0	1	1	0	0	2	22%
	Disagree	0	0	1	0	0	1	11%
	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
	Total	0	6	2	0	1	9	100%
How wealthy people could have an impact on solving global issues? ¹	Involving in concrete initiatives	0	4	1	0	1	6	29%
	Changing their consumption habits	0	2	0	0	0	2	10%
	Improving their awareness by education/information	0	4	1	0	0	5	24%
	Sharing their knowledge with others	0	5	1	0	1	7	33%
	Other	0	1	0	0	0	1	5%
	Total	0	16	3	0	2	21	100%

1. Multiple choice question.



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