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PhD thesis

Degrowth at a Global Scale?

Geographies of Chile's Fruit Production and Export
between Extractivism and Socio-Ecological
Transformation

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Abstract

Degrowth is a critique of the societal goal of endless economic growth, as well as a political project for socio-ecological societal change, in the pluralist form of a “matrix of alternatives” (Latouche 2010), aiming at a socially just and selective reduction of production and consumption (Schneider, Kallis, and Martinez-Alier 2010; Demaria et al. 2013; Kothari, Demaria, and Acosta 2014; D’Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015; Paulson 2017). Degrowth has emerged from multiple sources, from ecological economics to post-colonial studies, but geography, urban studies and planning, have engaged with it only very recently (and viceversa). The fundamental spatial dimension of the profound societal transformation envisaged by degrowth has only recently been the object of more research and debate, beginning to evolve the associated ‘spatial politics’ from focused on the local scale, mostly proposing the relocalisation of economy and politics (e.g. Latouche 2014), towards a more nuanced account of how to ‘spatialise degrowth’: indeed, a simplistic local/global dichotomy is hard to hold in front of the complex city-hinterland relations of planetary urbanisation (Brenner and Schmid 2015) and a relational perspective on geography in general (Massey 2005). In this perspective, the proposal of a generalised relocalisation modelled on nowtopias, ecovillages and bioregions, appears unrealistic (Xue 2014; Mocca 2020; Krähmer 2022). Recent debates on the “degrowth city” have evidenced the challenge to develop possible degrowth trajectories at the urban scale (Nelson and Schneider 2018; Lamker and Schulze Dieckhoff 2019; Brokow-Loga and Eckardt 2020; Savini, Ferreira, and Schönfeld 2022; Krähmer and Cristiano 2022; Krähmer 2022).

A further way to overcome the “local trap” (Purcell 2006) and “methodological cityism” (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2015) of considering only the local dimension, is to recognise that cities are based on relations with hinterlands. The process of urbanisation regards both cities and hinterlands and so must its critique in a degrowth perspective. A step in this direction are contributions on the critical analyses of the green city strategy (Næss et al. 2011; Mössner and Miller 2015; Xue 2015; 2018b; Krähmer 2020), evidencing how growth-oriented cities cannot be sustainable as decoupling remains a delusion (Parrique et al. 2019) based on externalisation (Moore 2000; Hornborg 2006; Lessenich 2016). To counter this model, also defined as an “imperial mode of living” (Brand and Wissen 2017), a proposal is that of imagining a “Solidary Degrowth City” (Brand 2020b; Eckardt 2020) with the idea that a local urban degrowth politics must start with the deconstruction of global relations of unequal exchange and externalisation, building instead relations of mutual solidarity. In this context, the exploration of the geography of production and trade of a commodity in Chile for global city hinterland relations, analysed in the form of a commodity chain (Leslie and Reimer 1999; Cook et al. 2004; 2006;

Bakker and Bridge 2006), aims at reworking and overcoming the local/global dichotomy in degrowth's conception of space. This study confronts the 'conventional' and extractivist case of Chilean agroindustrial fruit production with 'alternative' cases in which attempts are made to foster commercial relations based on principles of solidarity, close to degrowth values: i.e. relations in which power imbalances are reduced and export does not favour extractive forms of production but is integrated in strong and complex local economies and respects the environment. As much as these alternative practices do not (yet) form a coherent model, their analysis, in comparison to the mainstream model, provides the basis for reflections about how a degrowth transformation could and should approach the networks of planetary urbanisation, informing a more grounded and multiscale 'spatial politics of degrowth'.

Keywords: Degrowth; Socio-Ecological Transformation; Relocalisation; Extractivism; Commodity Chain; Planetary Urbanisation; Fruit; Chile