



THE MONETIZED ECONOMY VERSUS CARE AND THE ENVIRONMENT: DEGROWTH PERSPECTIVES ON RECONCILING AN ANTAGONISM

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the question of how the current growth paradigm perpetuates existing gender and environmental injustices and investigates whether these can be mitigated through a degrowth work-sharing proposal. It uses an adapted framework of the “ICE model” to illustrate how ecological processes and caring activities are structurally devalued by the monetized economy in a growth paradigm. On the one hand, this paradigm perpetuates gender injustices by reinforcing dualisms and devaluing care. On the other hand, environmental injustices are perpetuated since “green growth” does not succeed in dematerializing production processes. In its critique of the growth imperative, degrowth not only promotes the alleviation of environmental injustices but also calls for a recentering of society around care. This paper concludes that, if designed in a gender-sensitive way, a degrowth work-sharing proposal as part of a broader value transformation has the potential to address both gender and environmental injustices.

KEYWORDS

Degrowth, gender inequality, sustainability, work sharing, gender working time equality, caring economy

JEL: Codes: B54, Q57, J16

INTRODUCTION

Feminist and ecological economics, despite having much in common, have to date engaged with one another in only limited ways. The potential for fruitful collaboration has already been pointed out more than twenty years ago, when Bina Agarwal stated that “environmental and gender concerns taken together open up both the need for re-examining, and the possibility of throwing new light on, many long-standing issues relating to development, redistribution, and institutional change” (1992: 152). One topic that offers ground for cross-fertilization is the critique of the structural

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devaluation of care and nature by the “growth-based capitalist economic paradigm” (Perkins 2007: 228). Up to this point, however, this issue has mostly been approached separately and a shared analysis, according to Perkins (2007), is long overdue. Such an analysis could be based on criticizing the overemphasis on the formal economy in the status quo, while at the same time integrating concerns of care and nature. One approach that attempts to combine environmental sustainability with social justice while being critical of the status quo is “degrowth” – a growing movement with its roots in ecological economics, which will be further discussed later. Since the concept was developed by and for the Global North, this article focuses first and foremost on affluent Western societies. By synthesizing existing literature on the structural devaluation of care and nature within a growth paradigm, we discuss to what extent degrowth can offer ground for structurally revaluing care and nature.

More concretely, this article addresses the question of how the current growth paradigm perpetuates existing gender and environmental injustices and whether these can be mitigated through a degrowth work-sharing proposal. Thereby we contribute to what Günseli Berik, Yana van der Meulen Rodgers, and Stephanie Seguino call a necessary next step in feminist economics, namely to “problematicize the nature of growth more broadly by using the principle of sustainability as the yardstick and goal in the pursuit of equality” (2009: 24). At the same time, we contribute to the degrowth discourse, which admits that so far feminism is a topic “that would require extensive elaboration” (Demaria et al. 2013: 201). Therefore, this article can be seen as a theoretical contribution that connects existing debates on care and nature with the arguments and proposals brought forward in the degrowth discourse.

THE MONETIZED ECONOMY: CONCEPTUALIZING THE ANTAGONISM

This article builds upon an adaption of the “ICE model” depicted in Figure 1, which was developed by Marc Jochimsen and Ulrike Knobloch (1997). The original model elaborates on the (inter-)relations between industrial economic thought and action (I), caring activities (C), and ecological processes (E).

The structure of industrial economic thought and action being at the top and ecological processes and caring activities at the bottom of the triangle reflects the underlying hierarchical order. Marilyn Waring (1988) was one of the first authors to problematize this hierarchy by criticizing the gross domestic product (GDP) for being structurally blind to women’s unpaid care labor as well as ecological processes. Jochimsen and Knobloch build upon this criticism by pointing out that “present day economic processes attribute value only to what can be priced and, therefore, they can only

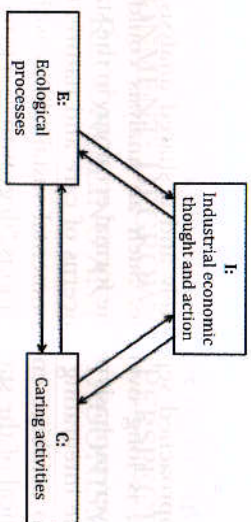


Figure 1 ICE model
Source: Jochimsen and Knobloch (1997: 109).

react to what is of exchange value" (1997: 109). This shift from use to exchange value led to the structural negligence of the triangle's base, thereby creating "major blind spots in the prevailing economic thinking" (Pietilä 1997: 20).

It is necessary to take a closer look at the (inter-)relations between industrial economic thought and action (I), caring activities (C), and ecological processes (E). First, regarding the relation between I and E, Jochimsen and Knobloch (1997) emphasize that despite industrial production being dependent on and limited by ecological processes, the former tends to destroy the latter. Jean-Paul Deléage conceptualizes nature as "tap and sink, or as first and last phase of economic activity" (1989: 16). Modern mainstream economics, however, treats negative effects on nature – if at all – as "externalities" and thereby fails to acknowledge the fundamental role nature plays for all economic production processes (O'Hara 1997).

Second, the relation between I and C is characterized by a similar power asymmetry. On the one hand, C "constitute[s] the social foundations that enable industrial economic thought and action" (Jochimsen and Knobloch 1997: 110), but on the other hand, caring activities are devalued by being regarded as a matter of course rather than real work (Folbre 1994). Pietilä puts forward the argument that instead of disregarding care work and artificially separating it from economic production, it should be considered the "primary economy" because it "works directly for the satisfaction of essential human needs," which cannot be served at the market (1997: 120).

Finally, Jochimsen and Knobloch (1997) describe the relation between C and E, and therefore the base of the triangle, as a fruitful and indispensable symbiosis. Caring activities take place within a larger biophysical context and, in contrast to industrial economic production processes, "modify ecological processes with a strong tendency to sustain them" (Jochimsen and Knobloch 1997: 110). Regarding the relation of both E and C with I, it becomes evident that ecological processes and caring activities have much in common. Ecological processes and caring activities resemble each other in being frequently overlooked and devalued by industrial economic

thought within the economic mainstream (Nelson 2009). Moreover, as O'Hara points out, ecological processes and caring activities both "contribute countless, essential services to the production processes of the official economy" (1997: 142). Thus, despite being socially devalued, both constitute the foundation on which the formal economy rests. Because of this, Jochimsen and Knobloch (1997) summarize the base of the triangle as the maintenance economy that is contrasted with the monetized economy. Our adapted conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 2 and builds upon the distinction Jochimsen and Knobloch make between the "maintaining and the monetary" and the putatively insurmountable boundary between those two worlds (1997: 111).¹

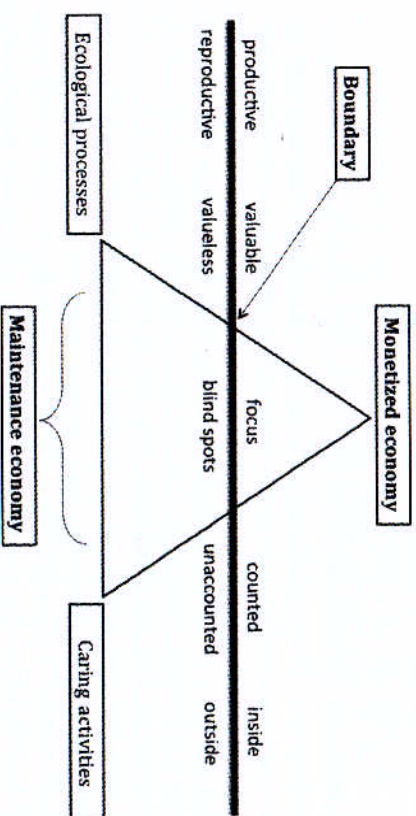


Figure 2 Adapted ICE model, own depiction

As we show in the figure, the boundary has been attributed with different conceptual dualities by various feminist scholars (Agarwal 1992; Jochimsen and Knobloch 1997; O'Hara 1997; Pietilä 1997; Mies 2005; Biessecker and Hofmeister 2010). For example, O'Hara highlights that

[t]he qualitative distinction between counted (valuable) and unaccounted for (valueless) production promotes a focus on the production process itself, that is, an "inside focus." The "outside," that is, the social and biophysical context within which production takes place, remains external to this focus. (1997: 142)

Similarly, Mies distinguishes the visible tip of the iceberg from the bigger, invisible part of the "iceberg economy" that is under the surface (2005: 270). There is broad consent among the above-cited feminist scholars that the boundary between the monetized and the maintaining, the productive and the reproductive, the valuable and the valueless, the

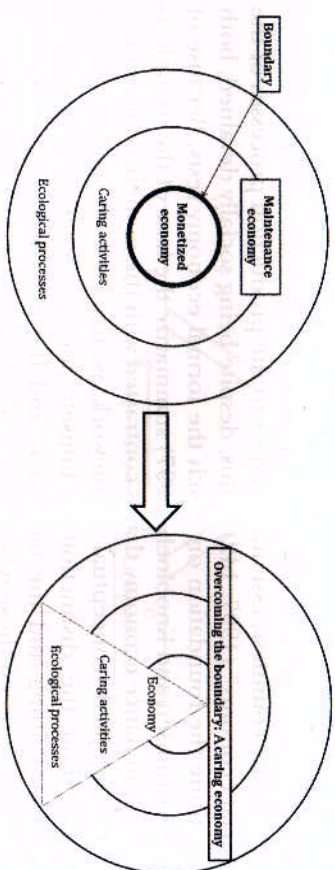


Figure 3 Overcoming the boundary, own depiction

counted and the unaccounted, and the visible and the invisible needs to be overcome. Transcending the boundary has, however, not only been an issue for feminist economists, but has also been a recurring topic in ecological economics (Biesecker and Kesting 2003; Common and Stagl 2003). As early as 1944, Karl Polanyi (1944/1957) describes the economy as embedded in society, which in turn is embedded in the natural environment. Figure 3 illustrates our adapted framework, which combines Polanyi's embeddedness approach (left circle) with the adapted ICE model (Figure 2).

In Figure 3 (right circle), we illustrate what Jochimsen and Knobloch (1997) call a "caring economy." The concept takes care as its starting point and considers industrial production processes, ecological processes, and caring activities equally important.² O'Hara developed a similar concept for an economy that surpasses the artificial boundary between the monetized and the maintaining, namely that of "sustaining production," which "seeks to 'internalize' production into the concrete biophysical and social context within which it takes place" (1997: 142). In a more recent contribution, Biesecker and Hofmeister developed the concept of (re)productivity as a "category of mediation, of bridging between the reproductive and productive, between nature and society" (2010: 1707). All three concepts describe a society in which the boundary between monetized and maintenance economy has been overcome, yet, in current mainstream economics, the boundary itself remains largely unchallenged.³

Thus, the central question of how to proceed remains. What most proposals in feminist and ecological economics have in common is that they see a broadened definition of the subject matter of the economic discipline as substantial for overcoming the boundary. Instead of merely focusing on the monetized economy, transcending the boundary would need an expanded definition of economics being "about how societies organize themselves to provide for the survival and flourishing of life"

(Nelson 2009: 4). For that, Marilyn Power introduces the methodology of social provisioning, which treats "the analysis of economic activities as interdependent social processes" (2004: 6). Yet, the question arises how interdependencies can be tackled in a system that values only what is included in the GDP. As Peter Victor (2015) points out, a rise in a country's GDP and thus economic growth lies at the very core of current industrial economic thought and action (1). One question that has rarely been tackled explicitly in existing literature is whether a caring economy is compatible with the growth paradigm. We argue below that it is not compatible, by elaborating on how the current growth paradigm perpetuates existing gender and environmental injustices.

HOW DOES THE CURRENT GROWTH PARADIGM PERPETUATE GENDER INJUSTICES?

Starting with the relation between industrial thought and action (I) and caring activities (C), feminist economics offers a considerable amount of insight. Feminist economics is "not identified with one particular economic paradigm" (Power 2004: 3), yet various strands do share a critical stance regarding the role women have historically played in the study of the economy, as well as the roles that women take up today. For a long time, economics as a discipline had its sole focus on the monetized economy, thereby structurally excluding women who were traditionally considered responsible for the maintenance sphere. Although the role of women in the monetized economy has changed in the past decades, the ramifications of the historical divide are still present today. Even now, the career model of employment seems to favor men, who are assumed to be more free of domestic responsibilities (Sirinani and Negrey 2000; Craig 2016). Women, in contrast, are still the ones who provide the lion's share of unpaid care work and are thus often assumed "not to be available for long hours of work or for extra hours at short notice, assumptions which may exclude them from core or male-dominated jobs" (Rubery, Smith, and Fagan 1998: 93).

What relevance does this structural inequality have for the link between economic growth and the perpetuation of gender injustices? As Nancy Forsythe, Roberto Patricio Korzeniewicz, and Valerie Durrant (2000) point out, there are several theories about the relation between gender equality and economic development, which they largely equate to economic growth. They outline three general approaches:

- (1) The modernization–neoclassical approach, which assumes that economic growth will contribute to enhancing women's human capital attainment and thus in the long run eliminates employment and earning gaps among genders, which is considered as eliminating gender inequalities.

(2) The Boserup Thesis and the "Women in Development" (WID) approach, which claim that in the earlier stages of economic development, economic growth leads to a "hierarchization of men's and women's work roles" (Boserup 1970: 140) and thus widens the gap between genders. However, it is argued that in the long run, the exclusion of women from wage work will lead to tight labor markets, and the rising demand for women workers will increase policy efforts to promote women's access to education and training, which in turn will lead to women's greater labor participation and greater gender equality.

(3) The "Gender and Development" (GAD) approach, which remains rather critical of the assumption that "development" is conducive to greater gender equality. According to Forsythe, Korzeniewicz, and Durrant (2000), this approach contains two interpretations. The first one is that there is no relation between economic growth and gender equality, and that institutional arrangements independent of growth (such as the patriarchal value system) are the reason for persisting gender injustices. The second interpretation holds that economic growth may in fact exacerbate gender inequalities, since it has led to a reduction of women's status relative to men's. In this view, the "improvement on some measures of status is often matched by the exacerbation of other, and sometimes even the creation of new, problems" (2000: 578).

In this contribution, we argue that the view of approaches (1) and (2) – namely, that economic growth leads to women's labor participation and thus to greater gender equality – should be regarded with caution for a number of reasons. It may be true that economic growth does lead to women's greater labor participation, but we disagree with the often implicit assumption that this, in turn, automatically translates to greater gender equality.⁴ In fact, we argue along with approach (3) that this view of "empowering" women by simply increasing their participation in the monetized sphere can be highly problematic: while it may increase the status of women in some respects, it creates new problems in others. Care responsibilities must eventually be taken up by someone, and, due to persistent gender roles, the responsibility for domestic care work is generally still assumed to lie with women (Craig 2016). This often leads to women being exposed to a double burden of paid and unpaid work. Therefore, we argue that the first two approaches outlined above, which see equal wage labor opportunities as the main yardstick for gender equality, offer too narrow a definition of the term. Assuming that a woman engaging in wage labor has to choose between either enduring a double burden or neglecting "her responsibility" for domestic care certainly does not solve the problem of persisting structural gender injustices.

Surely, many dual-career couples in the Global North avoid this problematic choice by outsourcing their former care responsibilities to markets for hired care providers (Siriani and Negrey 2000; Sassen 2002). As Mies (2005) points out, many women therefore did indeed profit from the strategy of increasing women's labor participation. Yet, this often happened at the expense of other people (again, mostly women). In this context, Lise Isaksen, Devi Sambasivan, and Arlie Hochschild elaborate on care migration from the East to the West, resulting in what they call a significant "care drain" or "global nanny chains" (2008: 406). Similarly, in her article about global cities and survival circuits, Sassen (2002) establishes a clear link between globalization, dual-career couples in the Global North, and an increasing demand in the Global North for maids, nannies, nurses, and sex workers from the Global South. Thus, the boundary between maintenance and monetized economy might no longer be strictly dividing white, middle-class women and men, but nonetheless persists between vulnerable persons and those who profit.

One can moreover argue along the lines of Mies that strategies of "economic empowerment" that merely address gender inequality in terms of increasing white, middle-class women's participation in the monetized economy do not only leave the boundary unchallenged but are furthermore "co-opting concepts and the language of women's liberation and the demands for equality" (2005: 272). Rather than overcoming the boundary, such strategies may even strengthen the hierarchical dualism between paid and unpaid work. Val Plumwood points out that a strategy of uncritically absorbing women "into institutions and culture which in terms of the dualism are masculine" does not liberate them, but rather strengthens the devaluation of that which is associated with femininity and care (1986: 130). Instead of merely adopting a strategy of getting as many women out of unpaid care work, thereby reaffirming its unattractiveness, we need a strategy that reclaims care work as attractive for men and women. Julie Nelson (2016) recently proposed one such strategy by suggesting that a rich narrative of "husbandry" enables men to reclaim their responsibility for care. Similarly, Siriani and Negrey refer to Emily Stoper (1982) when arguing that what we need is a "profound transformation of values, so that both men and women would not experience work and family commitments 'as doubly burdened but as doubly enriched'" (2000: 72).

Yet, as we argue, this transformation is hard to achieve in the current growth paradigm. This paradigm must necessarily value wage labor over unpaid labor, since it is based upon GDP increase and thus captures only that which is quantifiable (O'Hara 1999). This is not a matter of malintent, but simply a consequence of narratives inherently produced and reproduced within the growth paradigm. Nelson (2013) points out that while one might say that it is not an economist's task to deal with narratives, we have to be well aware of the fact that the current economic mainstream is

a narrative in itself. A change in narratives with regard to the maintenance economy is certainly difficult to bring about in a growth paradigm, which is fundamentally based on economic measures that "lend themselves more readily to monetary evaluation than do measures of environmental health or social well-being" (O'Hara 1999: 85–6). Attempts to include caring activities in the monetized economy by accounting for it in GDP face severe challenges: domestic care work is fundamentally different from wage work, as the language of efficiency is often not applicable where care is involved. On the one hand, it is inseparable from the person doing it, and on the other hand "few or no productivity gains are possible" (Donath 2000: 118). Thus, simply including domestic caring activities in an "unchallenged category of work" does not seem to be the way toward a caring economy (Himmelweit 1995: 14).

To conclude, we have shown that it is difficult to reconcile the asymmetric relation between industrial economic thought and action (I) and caring activities (C) in a growth paradigm, if our definition of gender equality exceeds a mere increase in women's labor participation. Yet, as depicted in our framework (Figure 2), the maintenance economy consists not only of caring activities but also of ecological processes (E). In order to answer the question of whether overcoming the boundary within a growth paradigm is possible, we thus also have to take a look at the relation between I and E.

HOW DOES THE CURRENT GROWTH PARADIGM PERPETUATE ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICES?

Throughout the past four decades, environmental challenges have received increasing attention, starting with the 1971 *Club of Rome Report* and the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. A number of conferences followed, most importantly those in Rio de Janeiro (1992), Johannesburg (2002), Copenhagen (2009), Rio de Janeiro (2012), and Paris (2015). All of them aimed at establishing internationally binding agreements on addressing environmental challenges, which are a matter of both intragenerational and intergenerational justice (Ikeme 2003). It is an obstacle to intragenerational justice, for example, that small island states in the Global South suffer more from climate change than countries in the Global North, despite the Global North's being by far the larger producer of carbon emissions (Hamilton 1999). Regarding intergenerational justice, degrading environmental systems does injustice to future generations, who may find harder conditions to sustain themselves if resources are highly depleted and climate change makes their environments unlivable (Gardiner 2006).

The concept of sustainable development that goes back to the 1987 *Brundland Report* has often been regarded as a means to address environmental injustices and thereby reconcile economic, social, and

ecological aspects in a growth paradigm. A core assumption of the sustainable development concept is that economic growth can be "green" and hence decoupled from negative environmental effects. The desirability of "green growth" was made very explicit in the United Nations Environmental Program (2011) report, *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways for Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*. In this view, a green economy would no longer "modify" ecological processes with a strong tendency to destroy them" (Jochimsen and Knobloch 1997: 110), but rather sustain them.

However, there is a problem with regarding a green economy as the solution to overcoming the boundary between the monetized and maintenance economy, since the notion of green growth "fails to adjust to the scientific evidence of the limitations of the endless growth paradigm" (Ehresman and Okerke 2015: 19). Advocates of ecological modernization do claim that economic growth can be sustained through technological fixes of "greening" production and consumption. However, William Stanley Jevons observed already in the context of the Industrial Revolution in 1865 that the required coal input per unit of smelted iron decreased, while at the same time total coal consumption rose. From that he concluded that "technological change which increases the efficiency with which a resource is used increases rather than decreases the rate of consumption of that resource" (Alcott 2015: 121). This phenomenon became well known as the Jevons paradox. The explanation of this paradox is that in a growth paradigm, efficiency gains are offset by so-called rebound effects: lower costs of resource input allow an increase in production. Through efficiency gains, technological change can indeed decouple production from negative environmental consequences in relative terms, that is, per unit (Herring 2006). However, as long as the growth in units happens faster than the rate of decoupling, only relative but no absolute decoupling can be achieved. Wolfgang Sachs points out that an "increase in resource efficiency alone leads to nothing, unless it goes hand in hand with an intelligent restraint of growth" (Herring 2006: 15).

The reliance on economic growth and efficiency gains will thus not be the solution to environmental injustices. In fact, as Isabelle Anguelowski points out, growth is "part of the process that creates [environmental] injustices" (2015: 35). Therefore, instead of hoping for future technology to bring about a far-reaching dematerialization of the economy, we should discuss solutions that go beyond efficiency increases and growth. The fundamental problem with the ideas of sustainable development or the green economy is not that it is a bad idea to integrate economic, social, and ecological concerns. Rather, the problem is that they constitute a false consensus, which is proposed as a panacea for environmental challenges, thereby prioritizing technical fixes over debates on basic principles (Andreucci and McDonough 2015). Nelson claims that environmental challenges such as

climate change show "that our profession requires a major shift" (2013: 152). We would argue that such a shift includes a critical stance toward the growth paradigm and a strengthening of bottom-up approaches in order to create a more inter- and intergenerationally environmentally just society.

THE NEED FOR A RE-POLITICIZATION OF ECONOMICS

From the above it has become clear that industrial economic thought and action (I) in the current growth paradigm systematically undermines the maintenance economy (both C and E), which constitutes its very basis. The current growth paradigm thereby perpetuates existing gender and environmental injustices rather than alleviating them. Promoting growth and efficiency increases as universal remedies for current injustices avoids addressing power, wealth, and distribution issues, and may thus be politically more convenient. However, as Herring points out, "the key questions are ethical not technical, cultural rather than economic" (2006: 19). Is it just to live our resource-intensive lifestyles at the expense of future generations? What kind of society do we want to live in? Can there be a good life for all? These are deeply normative questions that are not addressed in the rather technocratic, apolitical discourse of sustainable development (Kallis, Demaria, and D'Alisa 2015). In line with this, context-specific knowledge systems, including those of women in local care work situations, have been largely marginalized (O'Hara 1999).

In order to address contemporary gender and environmental injustices, we need to reclaim these knowledge systems and questions. As Mies points out, "there is no ready-made blueprint for such a society or economy anywhere. Yet, if one looks around one finds a surprisingly large number of persons, groups, organisations, grassroots initiatives and movements who ask the same questions we are asking" (2005: 273). One such movement is the degrowth movement, which positions itself as a "response to the lack of democratic debates on economic development, growth, technological innovation and advancement" (Demaria et al. 2013: 199). It attempts to repoliticize the debate around these topics in order to find new ways of addressing current environmental and gender injustices and thus to pave the way to a more socially just and environmentally sound society.

DEGROWTH: A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO A MOVEMENT

The degrowth movement is a relatively young, growing movement that aims to combine academic research and political activism and has its origins in schools of thought such as ecological economics, social ecology, and economic anthropology (Martínez-Alier 2012). Referring back to the use of the term by André Gorz and Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen in the early 1970s, the social movement of *Décroissance* arose in France from 2002 onward,

proposing a "multifaceted vision for a post-growth society" (Muraca 2013: 147). The English term "degrowth" was introduced at the first degrowth conference in Paris in 2008, which was followed by further conferences in Barcelona (2010), Montreal (2011), Venice (2012), Leipzig (2014), and Budapest (2016).

Kallis, Demaria, and D'Alisa (2015) point out that degrowth as an international research area can be defined first and foremost as an interpretative frame for a growth critique, which puts forward the diagnosis that "social and environmental crises are related to economic growth" (Demaria et al. 2013: 194). However, although the term itself might suggest otherwise, degrowth must not be understood as an essentially economic concept, nor is it merely a call to shrink GDP (Demaria et al. 2013; Muraca 2013). Instead, the focus lies on abolishing economic growth as an inevitable, unquestioned social and political objective. The important aspect is not to achieve negative GDP growth, but precisely that what happens to GDP is of secondary importance. Of primary importance, instead, are aspects of well-being, social justice, and ecological sustainability (Schneider, Kallis, and Martínez-Alier 2010). A reduction of GDP as currently counted is, however, indeed a likely consequence, since degrowth implies a transition to a regime with lower levels of production and consumption (Kallis, Demaria, and D'Alisa 2015). Yet, as this is a voluntary and conscious shift, it has to be clearly distinguished from a recession and thus "unplanned degrowth within a growth regime" (Schneider, Kallis, and Martínez-Alier 2010: 511). Rather, when we talk about degrowth we mean *sustainable* degrowth, which aims at a "socially sustainable and equitable reduction (and eventually stabilization) of society's throughput" (Kallis 2011: 874).

An essential part of the idea of sustainable degrowth is that it "does not mean across the board degrowth" (Schneider, Kallis, and Martínez-Alier 2010: 512). Certain sectors as well as regions may still selectively need growth. On the one hand, there are sectors in the economy that still have to flourish, such as education, care work, health, or renewable energy. On the other hand, with regard to regions, it has to be noted that degrowth is a concept by and also primarily for the Global North. Yet, in the context of global capitalism, a lowering of consumption in the Global North does affect both the Global North and the Global South. It must be acknowledged that degrowth in the Global North may lead to (short-term) adverse effects on employment opportunities and income in the Global South. Degrowth in the Global North implies a decreasing demand for imported goods and services, which are often exported by the Global South (such as garments made in India or Bangladesh, or nannies from the Philippines). Arguably, the complicated implications for class, race, and global inequality must be taken into account to a greater extent by degrowth scholars. Yet, at the same time, degrowth is an answer to precisely

those patterns of global unequal exchange, which ultimately reinforce social and environmental injustices. Along these lines, degrowth scholars argue that the "imperial mode of living" in the Global North restrains the Global South and constitutes an impediment to global environmental justice (Brand and Wissen 2013). According to Kallis, Demaria, and D'Alisa, degrowth should be pursued in the Global North "not in order to allow the South to follow the same path, but first and foremost in order to liberate conceptual space for countries there to find their own trajectories of what they define as the good life" (2015: 5).

If degrowth is neither an economic strategy of shrinking GDP, nor a call for abolishing economic growth altogether, then what does it mean precisely? At the core of degrowth is a "criticism of the belief in ecological modernization which claims that new technologies and efficiency improvements are key solutions to the ecological crisis" (Demaria et al. 2013: 198). This criticism opens space for asking specifically the kinds of questions that we have argued above need to be asked in order to repoliticize the strategies we use to address social and environmental crises. Demaria et al. argue that degrowth challenges the "growth-based roots of the social imaginary" of Western societies to open up conceptual space for new narratives (2013: 209).⁵ These new imaginaries imply a value change away from economic rationality as the most dominant political goal. Instead, economic growth is only justified when it serves the goals, which a given society deems relevant for a good life for all.

It is crucial to acknowledge that degrowth is not a single theory, nor does it refer to a single idea (Demaria et al. 2013). As Konrad Ott (2012) has shown, there are large varieties within the degrowth movement, ranging from a mere critique of GDP as an indicator of well-being to a radical rejection of capitalism. For degrowth proponents, this diversity of positions is not a contradiction, but can rather be seen as promoting complementary strategies to address issues of environmental and social justice (Demaria et al. 2013).

DEGROWTH, THE MONETIZED, AND THE MAINTAINING: OVERCOMING THE ANTAGONISM

Having introduced degrowth as an alternative to the current system, the question remains how degrowth counteracts the perpetuation of gender and environmental injustices identified in the growth paradigm. The link between degrowth and environmental sustainability is more clearly established than the link between degrowth and gender equality. One reason for this is that degrowth has its theoretical roots in bioeconomics and ecological economics, whereas feminist economics is currently rather seen as an alliance (Demaria et al. 2013). Furthermore, the link between degrowth and environmental sustainability may be intuitively

more straightforward, since by decreasing production it explicitly aims at alleviating environmental pressures. When it comes to issues of gender equality, matters are not as clear-cut.

Degrowth scholars do acknowledge that the feminist movement was among the first to criticize GDP (Waring 1988), and thus many of them see a fundamental commonality between the two movements (Schneider, Kallis, and Martínez-Alier 2010). Yet, they also admit that "further elaboration is needed on the gender dimensions of degrowth" (Demaria et al. 2013: 206). Up to this point, degrowth arguably "does not pay enough attention to the sex and class body-politics of social reproduction in the capitalist context we live in" (Picchio 2015: 210). It thus tends to share the general blindness toward gender inequalities in the division of paid and unpaid work (Bauhardt 2014). If these existing gender injustices are not addressed within the frame of degrowth, it runs the risk of stabilizing the status quo (Perkins 2010). It is thus crucial for degrowth to integrate feminist concerns into their discourses to a greater extent.

We argue that, albeit not yet elaborated upon extensively, there are already clear starting-points for such a debate within the degrowth discourse. In fact, as Giacomo D'Alisa, Marco Derini, and Federico Demaria remark, "in its strong claim for socio-environmental justice, degrowthers cannot ignore the feminist claim for a fairer distribution of care work" (2015: 64). Going a step further, they even argue that, "re-centering a society around care would pave the way to degrowth" (2015: 64). We share this view, but we furthermore claim that the argument can also be made vice versa: not only can a feminist perspective on care pave the way for degrowth, but also degrowth can pave the way for a caring economy.

Why do we argue that degrowth is more conducive to a caring economy than the current growth system? The narratives inherent to the growth paradigm grant value and social recognition based on what is quantifiable, for example, status symbols. In a degrowth society, on the other hand, social recognition would rather be related to concepts such as conviviality and simplicity, for which one does not need a high-paying career. As Kallis, Demaria, and D'Alisa highlight, "the degrowth imaginary centers around the reproductive economy of care" (2015: 4). This change in narratives might decrease the perceived gap in societal attractiveness between highly paid wage labor and unpaid care labor and thereby reconcile the division between monetized and maintenance economy. The imaginaries of a degrowth society thus lend themselves to a reevaluation of care work that is necessary to achieve a greater equality in the distribution of paid and unpaid work among genders.

As we have seen, the aspiration of degrowth to directly alleviate environmental pressures via reduced production may thus result in a re-evaluation of social recognition based on conviviality, rather than career. This change in narrative carries an inherent potential to revalue unpaid

work and caring activities. A structural change in work-time arrangements can constitute a first step toward this goal. Work sharing is a prominent degrowth proposal, which, if taking into account feminist concerns and acknowledging that putatively gender-neutral policies can have gendered effects, can go a long way to establishing both greater environmental and gender equality. In the following, we will discuss how a degrowth work-sharing proposal would have to be designed in order to live up to its potential of addressing both environmental and gender injustices.

WORK-SHARING: A DEGROWTH PROPOSAL

Since degrowth proposes a reduction of production, wage work would have to be reduced and, in order to avoid unemployment, shared (see, for example, Jackson [2009]; Schor [2010]; Knight, Rosa, and Schor [2013]). In their book *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*, Kallis, Demaria, and D'Alisa define work sharing as a "redistribution of work between the employed and the unemployed via a reduction of working hours in the paid sector" (2015: 13). Work sharing is thus a central degrowth proposal, in which everyone would spend less time in wage labor and the monetized sphere.⁶

However, one must acknowledge that the proposal is neither new, nor is it exclusively proposed by degrowth scholars. Firstly, as Klara Zwickl, Franziska Disslbacher, and Sigrid Stagl (2016) point out, work sharing has been frequently used not for environmental reasons but rather as a generally effective short-term economic policy to absorb economic recessions. The degrowth proposal differs from this understanding of work-sharing since it "aspires to expand work sharing in the Global North beyond its current status as a temporary policy" (Schor 2015: 196). It also differs from a second debate on work sharing that started recently in the context of "Industry 4.0." This debate regards work sharing as a necessity in times of increasing digitalization and automatization (see, for example, Frey and Osborne [2013]; Brynjolfsson and McAfee [2014]). In contrast to this debate, which generally frames work sharing as a possible solution to the threat of unemployment in times of digitalization, degrowth takes a more positive stance and aims at "transform[ing] underemployment and part-time work into a desirable way of living" (Schor 2015: 197). It is, however, crucial to remember that degrowth should be understood as sustainable and selective. As discussed earlier, this means that the care sector, similarly to, for example, education, will still need to flourish. Kallis, Demaria, and D'Alisa point out that a degrowth economy will thus "face less of an unemployment problem, since it will be a labour-intensive economy" (2015: 12).

One argument that makes work sharing such a prominent degrowth proposal is that the current levels of work are environmentally

unsustainable (Schor 2015). Historically, there has been a significant reduction in working hours in the twentieth century that was mostly driven by productivity gains (Himmelweit 1995; Kallis et al. 2013; Zwickl, Disslbacher, and Stagl 2016). However, despite the reduction in working hours, production and consumption increased. Along these lines, the aforementioned digitalization discourse argues that work time reduction today is still first and foremost related to productivity gains and technology will necessarily lead to lower levels of employment, while levels of production and consumption remain high. However, in a degrowth scenario, technology-driven gains in productivity would precisely *not* be used to increase production (Nørgård 2013). Instead, the alleviation of environmental injustices through a decrease in production lies at the very core of a degrowth work-sharing proposal.

How exactly, then, is environmental sustainability affected by the relation between shorter working hours and consumption? In their comprehensive case study on households in France, François-Xavier Devetter and Sandrine Rousseau (2011) found empirical evidence for the so-called wealth effect. This effect links reduced working hours and consumption via the mediating category of income: more working hours generate higher income which then translates to more consumption and more environmental damage. Moreover, numerous empirical studies have recently established a *direct* link between (very) long working hours and unsustainable consumption patterns, especially with regard to food and transport (Jalas 2002; Sanches 2005; Schor 2005; Rosnick and Weisbrodt 2006; Devetter and Rousseau 2011; Knight, Rosa, and Schor 2013).

Yet, whether this also holds true vice versa, that a reduction of working hours translates to more sustainable consumption patterns, crucially depends on how the additional leisure time is used. If people engage in energy- and material-intensive activities such as going on vacation by airplane or shopping, work sharing might indeed be counterproductive. Degrowthers acknowledge this and maintain that when reducing working hours "[e]nvironmental benefits are likely but depend crucially on complementary policies or social conditions that will ensure that the time liberated will not be directed to resource-intensive or environmentally harmful consumption" (Kallis et al. 2013: 1545). Despite the necessity of taking social and political contexts into account, it remains a relevant finding that working time and environmental pressures are significantly linked, which makes it "an attractive target for policies promoting environmental sustainability" (Knight, Rosa, and Schor 2013: 698).

In addition to environmental sustainability, work sharing as a degrowth proposal aims to be "socially sustainable as well" (Knight, Rosa, and Schor 2013: 693). Gender equality is a major precondition for social sustainability and therefore it is crucial to tackle structural gender injustices in order to avoid their unintended reproduction in a degrowth society. Work-sharing

proposals come in a variety of forms: When focusing on the workday, one policy proposal suggests "five six-hour days, especially to mesh with children's school days" (Sirriani and Negrey 2000: 69). Another proposal is a four-day week, such as the "Friday off" proposal brought forward by Kallis et al. (2013). Furthermore, there are also proposals that focus on the year or even the life cycle by suggesting longer vacations, the option to go on sabbaticals, or longer maternity/paternity leaves. It is crucial to be aware that despite being framed as gender neutral, different work-sharing regimes can have deeply gendered effects. Rubery, Smith, and Fagan maintain that in order to "bring together the categorization of working-time regimes with the issue of gender equality we need to identify what types of working-time regime can be considered favorable for gender equality" (1998: 89).

Which work-sharing proposal, then, could be considered favorable for gender equality? The most elaborate degrowth proposal is arguably the "Friday off" proposal by Kallis et al. (2013). Although the authors speculate that reduced working hours "will benefit those who are more time-restricted due to non-enumerated work responsibilities, such as women, or care providers in general" (2013: 1557), their focus lies on ecological concerns, as one day less of commuting is assumed to alleviate environmental pressures. Feminist matters, in contrast, are considered as an add-on rather than as a crucial aspect that has to be taken into account from the very beginning. We argue, rather, alongside Sirriani and Negrey that a "feminist approach to work-time reduction would emphasize reduction in the length of the working day" (2000: 69). While men's contribution to the household often consists of occasional tasks such as fixing things around the house or gardening, women are often in charge of activities that occur on a daily basis, such as caring for other family members (Sirriani and Negrey 2000; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Seebacher 2016). Women have to deal with this daily "second shift" (Hochschild and Machung 2003) in combination with their job (the "first shift"). This leads to increased time pressure, compared to men who can often schedule their contributions to the household more flexibly, and are not faced with the constant "feeling of urgency" (Senior 2014) that daily caring activities, especially with regard to children or elderly family members, place upon women. A work-sharing proposal that focuses on the workday, by shortening first shifts for men and women, not only alleviates women's double burden by reducing the first shift, but most importantly also liberates space for a more equal division of daily caring activities among genders.

Moreover, a work-sharing proposal focusing on the workday might lead to different mobility patterns (Scholten, Friberg, and Sandén 2012; Solá 2016), and thus not be necessarily less ecological than the "Friday off" proposal. Solá states, "Women experience more time-space fixity constraints in everyday life than do men, due to their engagement in

housework and childcare activities" (2016: 32). In order to make their job and caring responsibilities compatible, many women work closer to their home and thus have shorter, that is, less environmentally harmful, commuting distances than men (Scholten, Friberg, and Sandén 2012; Solá 2016). It has also been found that women more often tend to use public transport to go to work, whereas men are more likely to use cars, which is not least related to "the car as a technical artifact and associated gender identity shaping processes" (Solá 2016: 33). Thus, as a work-sharing proposal focusing on the workday allows men to take up a greater part of daily caring activities, it might also lead to an adoption of more "female" and hence more ecological commuting patterns.

To conclude, what we argue here is that focusing a work-sharing proposal on the workday rather than the working week is (a) more feminist in the way that it takes into account the day-to-day character of many caring activities, and (b) not necessarily less ecological, because if men engaged more in daily caring activities this might lead to more ecological commuting patterns. While a shorter working week would not change a lot for women with regard to their everyday domestic caring responsibilities, shorter workdays are likely to alleviate women's double burden, by firstly shortening their "first shift," and by secondly opening up space for men to also take up daily care work.

DEGROWTH: A POSSIBLE WAY TOWARD A CARING ECONOMY?

As we have seen in the previous section, degrowth work-sharing proposals can indeed be framed to addresses both gender and environmental injustices. However, this does not mean that the converse argument, namely that a degrowth work-sharing proposal automatically leads to environmental sustainability and gender equality, also holds. We did point out that there is an intrinsic link between reduced production, work sharing, and the mitigation of environmental pressures. Although work sharing as a degrowth policy proposal on its own does certainly not suffice to guarantee environmental sustainability, it can constitute an important step.

The link between work sharing and gender equality in a degrowth society is, however, not self-evident. We maintained that a degrowth work-sharing proposal that takes feminist concerns seriously and focuses on shorter workdays can indeed alleviate a woman's double burden. However, and this is crucial, gender equality cannot be achieved as long as we only tackle employment in the monetized economy. We do argue that a work-sharing proposal that focuses on shorter workdays (that is, five 6-hour days) does open up space for men to reclaim responsibility for care but this, of course, does not happen automatically. On the individual level, more free time for

all *might* translate to more male engagement in unpaid care work. On a macro level, the move away from GDP *may* lead to a societal revaluation of that which is not quantifiable and thus lead to a maintenance economy. However, whether this happens does not solely depend on political or institutional changes, but also on a change in values and narratives. Since work-sharing proposals by their very nature only address paid work in the monetized economy and cannot directly cause men to take up a larger part in daily caring activities, it is clear that work sharing as a stand-alone degrowth policy proposal will not suffice to bring about gender equality.

Yet, as part of a broader transformation toward a new narrative and what Linda Nierling calls a "societal definition of work" (2012: 241), work sharing can make a substantial contribution to both environmental sustainability and gender equality. As has been pointed out before, changes of values, narratives, and the "social imaginary" are an integral part of degrowth. Demaria et al. even state that "the change of individual values and behavior should be the main target in degrowth" (2013: 202). If this potentiality of degrowth is used to shed light on men's responsibility for domestic care work and goes hand in hand with a general revaluation of both paid and unpaid care work, degrowth proposals indeed have considerable potential to promote not only environmental sustainability, but also gender equality. If approached this way, we argue, degrowth can indeed help to overcome the antagonism of the monetized economy versus care and the environment.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this article, we posed the question: how does the current growth paradigm perpetuate existing gender and environmental injustices, and can these be mitigated through a degrowth work-sharing proposal? The conceptual framework of the adapted ICE model helped us to illustrate how both ecological processes and caring activities (summarized as the maintenance economy) are structurally devalued by industrial economic thought and action. We have shown that putative remedies, such as green growth, perpetuate rather than alleviate ecological injustices. With regard to gender injustices, we have argued that the double burden has been shifted rather than resolved. We have thus discussed that the problematic boundary between the monetized and the maintaining remains largely unchallenged in the growth paradigm, and have introduced degrowth as one possible way of overcoming this boundary. Degrowth, in the sense of sustainable, selective degrowth, has the alleviation of environmental injustices at its very core. Since degrowth also aims at a re-centering of society around care, it can furthermore promote a revaluation of paid and unpaid care work, and thus potentially greater gender equality. Work sharing has been discussed as a concrete degrowth policy proposal

that, if designed in a gender-sensitive way and as part of a broader degrowth agenda, has the potential to address both environmental and gender injustices.

As a concluding remark, we want to add that the aim of this article was not to establish yet another dualism of growth versus degrowth, but rather to discuss degrowth as a possible alternative that might help overcome the boundary between the monetized and the maintaining. In *Degrowth: Vocabulary for a New Era*, feminist economics is listed as an alliance, thereby being regarded as one of those schools of thought that "share a lot with the degrowth project but which have only had loose connection with degrowth up to now" (Kallis, Demaria, and D'Alisa 2015: xxi). We argue that this is unfortunate, as we believe that on the one hand feminist perspectives on care can pave the way for degrowth, but on the other hand, degrowth can also pave the way for a caring economy. We see much potential for cross-fertilization and hope that this link will be further elaborated upon in future research on both theoretical and empirical grounds.

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NOTES

- 1 In its depiction, our framework further resembles the Cake model developed by Hazel Henderson (1980) and the Iceberg model proposed by Maria Mies (2005).
- 2 Thereby, this concept can be distinguished from the – in feminist economics, arguably more common – concept of a “care economy,” which is primarily interested in caring activities.
- 3 However, as Nelson points out, one must not oversimplify matters by merely blaming mainstream economics because the structural negligence of the maintenance economy reflects a “deep cultural pattern of defining male as being opposed to, and superior to, female, and defining rationality as being opposed to, and superior to, nature, matter and emotion” (2009: 3).
- 4 Gwen Moore and Gene Shackman found that economic growth “may improve women’s status by increasing education levels, or decreasing fertility levels, but its direct effect on women’s authority positions is small or negative” (1996: 286). Thus, one must also consider that women often tend to end up in rather lower-paying and lower-status occupations.
- 5 While feminist economics seems to prefer the term “narratives,” degrowth literature rather refers to “imaginaries.” In this article, we use the two terms interchangeably.
- 6 This, of course, needs to be combined with a system of basic financial provision for people in financially insecure situations, who can otherwise not afford to reduce their amount of wage labor. For a comprehensive discussion of basic income from a feminist perspective, see, for example, Ailsa McKay’s (2005) book, *The Future of Social Security Policy: Women, Work and a Citizens’ Basic Income*, especially chapter 8.

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