

## **The Motion**

*“The only realistic option for addressing the environmental crisis is a Green economy based upon popular support, any more radical transformation is doomed to failure.”*

## **Arguing For the Motion**

*Clemens Gattringer, Maria Langsenlehner, Marina Rizzi, Melanie Wolf*

Green growth is the only feasible and realistic solution within the current system, as the institutional set-up and the distribution of power make it extremely difficult to act outside the box i.e. the growth paradigm. Green growth will receive popular support by people, firms, countries, and institutions, because it creates business opportunities and incentives for innovation, and allows for both, countries and firms, to flourish within the system. This congruence of involved interests makes the concept politically feasible and thus again a realistic option for change. Changing in a more fundamental way, as suggested by degrowth proponents, is neither realistic nor possible. Insights from psychology, behavioral economics, and neuroscience prove that people very unlikely give something up that they already possess (the so-called endowment effect). This implies that societies who have achieved a high standard of living will unlikely be willing to give them up voluntarily. Moreover, hoping for behavior changes i.e. change in habits, norms, institutions, and attitudes, to achieve a broad cultural change take a long, too long, time. An entire re-thinking of the whole system including its actors is unrealistic in the short-run and impossible in a democratic way. Rather, an “enlightened dictator” or an authoritarian regime would be needed, forcing a transformation onto society. However, this is highly undesirable from a democratic point of view.

Apart from the constraints imposed by the system, the current political reality does not allow any radical solutions, including unpredictable events. Rather, what is needed is immediate action for tackling the environmental crisis while simultaneously ensuring socio-political stability. Despite the fact that environmental degradation has become a major concern of the 21st century, tackling it should not mean at the expense of citizens. Currently, the European Union records high unemployment rates of 23% in Spain and 25% in Greece. Since achieving a high level of employment is essential to ensure socio-political stability, the green economy therefore calls for attracting investments, bringing forward measures that encourage green innovations, and creating job opportunities in environmental-friendly sectors. Moreover, by increasing taxes on activities that harm the environment, and reducing taxes on labour, the environment can be improved and more jobs created. Hence, the strength of the green economy is that it addresses both, environmental as well as social issues, and that it can be implemented now without major interventions into people’s lives.

Technological progress plays a crucial role on the pathway towards a sustainable low carbon economy. It will drive increases in resource efficiency, renewable energies, and closed resource cycles, which will finally lead to a low-carbon economy. This will not only reduce the environmental impact but also substantially enhances people’s well-being. Although this relies heavily on the development of technologies, supporters strongly believe in the innovative power of humanity and that we have by far not exhausted all technological possibilities yet.

To sum up, the green economy focuses on the opportunities and chances that it offers for people, firms, and states. This stands in opposition to the negative and pessimistic messages spread by climate sceptics, growth opponents and the like. It uses the issues we are facing currently to create change and enable a smooth transition to a better world for all. Since it is supported not only by the majority of citizens but also by key players of economics and politics, the green economy is the only feasible solution at this moment in time.

## The Motion

*“The only realistic option for addressing the environmental crisis is a Green economy based upon popular support, any more radical transformation is doomed to failure.”*

## Arguing Against the Motion (Pro-Degrowth)

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- 1) Necessity:** the green economy still relies on rare materials, e.g. for the production of solar panels those rare materials are needed, but they are limited. The limits of resources thus render further economic growth unsustainable and make degrowth inevitable. Furthermore, there is only a limited amount of low entropy energy. The ultimate faith of our universe is chaos as in a finite space there can only be a finite amount of low entropy. However, as long as the amount of low entropy is abundant and easily accessible, we might not care about it but wake up with the devastating consequences in the future.
- 2) Misuse of the strategy:** The green economy only eases the symptoms but does not tackle the roots of the current environmental crisis. It is misusing its strategy and only practicing green washing in order to cover-up the extension of unsustainable growth. For example, in the United Arab Emirates where huge cities like Abu Dhabi try to become more sustainable by building “sustainable skyscrapers”. The performance of a green economy is still measured in terms of money and GDP. Well-being has to be redefined and should no longer stem from material wealth.
- 3) Democracy:** A green economy is not really based on popular support but rather on an overhanging technostructure, undemocratic market forces are used in the decision making process. There needs to be a multi-level approach to transformation: First, there should be a coalition of government and societal actors to foster a collective movement for degrowth down to the local level. In this way the government is democratically legitimized and could foster regulation. On the one hand should short-term regulations on consumption and production relieve the environment quickly of even further pollution and damage. This would mean the implementation of concrete policies such as the reduction of working hours, the taxation of environmental damages and the regulation of harmful activities, including advertisements. On the other hand, there should be a deep transformation with the aid of the right institutions for evoking a societal change.
- 4) Time horizon:** Degrowth is part of an overall change in one direction; not only the means but also the ends change which would lead to a more sustainable society as a whole rather than only to half-hearted and short-term improvements. Sustainable degrowth is a multi-faceted political project that aspires to mobilise support for a change of direction, at the macro-level it addresses economic and political institutions and at the micro level personal values and aspirations are addressed. Degrowth is a radical political project that offers a new story to construct a society that lives better with less.
- 5) Feasibility:** The economic crisis provides a window of opportunity for change; in the times of crisis, we need a new story line and vision rather than single environmental friendly measures. As the current system is not in an equilibrium state, small social mobilizations might have a great effect. Those mobilizations can start with a “new cultural story” which is initially a conversation among few and then gradually challenges the established paradigm. We can be optimistic as examples from the history proof that change is possible: during the Industrial Revolution a 16-hours working was regarded as normal while today we have an established 8-hours working day.