

DEGROWTH: WHEN LESS IS MORE

A **shift** to sustainable development is not enough in itself to resolve the challenges facing the future health of the planet. **Growth** must slow down and people have to adopt better lifestyles using less. In other words, reducing consumption and distributing resources more equally is the only way to bring the **depletion** of the planet's resources to a **halt**.

This is the premise behind “degrowth,” a new trend in political, social and economic thinking which questions consumerism as the basis of our society and suggests a new way of looking at wealth, basing it not on material goods and the creation of artificial needs but rather focusing on simplicity. The moral question of whether it is fair that 20% of the world's population should have 80% of its wealth is only part of the degrowth equation. Another fundamental question is that of survival; that an economic model such as ours, based on constant growth, is not compatible with the planet's finite resources. The resources we have at our disposal are limited and, the argument goes, if we do not stop **plundering** them they will inevitably run out.

“We can clearly see that the current system is unsustainable and if we carry on this way it will be disastrous,” says Santiago Vilanova, president of the association *Una Sola Terra*, which organised an international symposium in Barcelona in December 2006—the first intellectual and political debate in Catalonia about degrowth. And he insists: “Put another way, growth and the accumulation of wealth are not equivalent to well-being, quite the opposite, in fact.” Arnau Montserrat, a member of the *Xarxa pel Decreixement*, a group of individuals and organisations already working with these ideas, says that “we have been sold the idea that progress is only linked to growth. Obviously not all growth is bad but the sort we are talking about has nothing to do with personal growth, community links or public and social amenities, its only aim being the accumulation of money.”

It is easy to see degrowth as a utopian ideal and something very difficult to apply in practice. However, for degrowth supporters now is the time for a change of mentality and this change does not necessarily have to be for the worse. “We'll be happier if we work fewer hours and have more free time, we'll socialise more and we can do without piles of consumer goods that we have no need for,” explains Carlos Taibo, a professor of political science at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. “Hyper-consumerism in our societies is an indicator of unhappiness, not happiness. You just need to look at the data showing the growing numbers of Americans saying they are unhappy—three times greater than those who express contentment, which is very surprising considering that **income** per head in the United States has multiplied by three since the end of the Second World War,” he adds.

Text adapted from *Catalonia Today*

shift: canvi / cambio

growth: creixement / crecimiento

depletion: reducció, esgotament / reducción, agotamiento

to halt: aturar / detener

to plunder: abusar / abusar

income: ingressos / ingresos

Part 1: Reading comprehension

Choose the best answer according to the text. Only ONE answer is possible.

[0.5 points each correct answer. Wrong answers will be penalized by deducting 0.16 points. There is no penalty for unanswered questions.]

		Espai per al corrector/a		
		Correcta	Incorrecta	No contestada
1.	According to the text, the health of the planet depends on... <input type="checkbox"/> people eating better quality food. <input type="checkbox"/> people eating more slowly. <input type="checkbox"/> people consuming less than at present. <input type="checkbox"/> people consuming less meat.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	“Degrowth” is a new... <input type="checkbox"/> way to study economics. <input type="checkbox"/> way to create artificial needs. <input type="checkbox"/> attitude concerning population growth. <input type="checkbox"/> attitude concerning consumerism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Our economic model is based on... <input type="checkbox"/> surviving strategies. <input type="checkbox"/> permanent growth. <input type="checkbox"/> a few moral questions. <input type="checkbox"/> the equal distribution of resources.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	According to the text, the resources of the planet... <input type="checkbox"/> might not be enough in the near future. <input type="checkbox"/> are enough for 80% of its population. <input type="checkbox"/> are in the hands of 80% of its population. <input type="checkbox"/> might not be in good condition very soon.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Santiago Vilanova believes that... <input type="checkbox"/> an international symposium should be organised in Barcelona every year. <input type="checkbox"/> well-being cannot be considered a sustainable objective for humanity. <input type="checkbox"/> the accumulation of wealth has to be excluded from political programmes. <input type="checkbox"/> the well-being of people is not necessarily related to having more resources.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	People in “degrowth” organisations think that... <input type="checkbox"/> progress is linked to growth. <input type="checkbox"/> progress is slower than growth. <input type="checkbox"/> progress does not depend only on growth. <input type="checkbox"/> progress is faster than growth.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	“Degrowth” supporters are... <input type="checkbox"/> always in favour of utopian ideals. <input type="checkbox"/> usually good at practical things. <input type="checkbox"/> always in favour of consumer goods. <input type="checkbox"/> usually against working many hours.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	According to Carlos Taibo, more Americans say that they are... <input type="checkbox"/> less happy now despite being richer. <input type="checkbox"/> happier now than in the past decades. <input type="checkbox"/> unhappy since the end of the Second World War. <input type="checkbox"/> happy because of their growing income.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Correctes	Incorrectes	No contestades
Recompte de les respostes		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

