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Shaping Tomorrow: The Interplay of Individual Behavior and Societal Change in the Context of Degrowth

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Abstract

Through a socio-environmental lens, this master´s thesis explores the perspectives of young adults on the dynamic relationship between individual behavior and societal changes, particularly through the discourse of degrowth. The methodology is a qualitative research design, where the analysis draws on semi-structured interviews with seven masters´s students at NTNU Trondheim. The students come from diverse fields of study to align with the interdisciplinarity of degrowth and sustainable development. Further, the thesis integrates perspectives from sociology, environmental studies, and behavioral science to understand how individual behavior and societal change have an interconnected influence on sustainable development. It provides insights into young adults´ views on hypothetical degrowth initiatives, highlighting their awareness of the critical need for sustainable development and their potential influence on policy and decision-making. It further seeks to understand how to harmonize the tensions that arise with societal change.

The thesis takes a progressive approach, emphasizing the urgency of achieving sustainable ways of living, and underscores the importance of understanding the interplay between societal structures and individual behavior. Understanding degrowth as a critical response to the growth paradigm highlights a forward-thinking perspective aimed at addressing the issue of environmental degradation and global inequalities. This research contributes to the sustainability discourse by underscoring the critical need for radical but inclusive change in current societal structures. Young adults recognize this complex interplay of individual behavior and societal change, making this thesis advocate for a gradual and considerate implementation of changes through concepts like libertarian paternalism to promote positive reinforcement of sustainable behavior. All in all, key findings reveal a need for balancing individual freedom with collective action, and mixed initiatives from top-down and bottom-up approaches. There is also a potential of leveraging on self-interest and herd mentality by creating incentives that align personal needs with sustainable practices. The research ultimately demonstrates how sustainability efforts can gain momentum if the social dimension of change is understood and addressed.

Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven utforsker perspektivene til unge voksne sett ut fra den dynamiske relasjonen mellom individuell atferd og samfunnsendringer, spesielt gjennom diskursen om nedvekst/degrowth. Metodologien er et kvalitativt forskningsdesign, hvor analysen baseres på semistrukturerte intervjuer med syv masterstudenter ved NTNU Trondheim. Studentene kommer fra ulike fagområder for å samsvare med tverrfagligheten i nedvekst og bærekraftig utvikling. Videre inkluderer oppgaven perspektiver fra sosiologi, miljøstudier og atferdsvitenskap for å forstå hvordan individuell atferd og samfunnsendring har en sammenhengende innflytelse på bærekraftig utvikling. Den gir innsikt i unge voksnes synspunkter på hypotetiske nedvekstinitiativer, og fremhever deres bevissthet om det kritiske behovet for bærekraftig utvikling og deres mulige innflytelse i politikk og beslutningstaking. Oppgaven søker videre å forstå hvordan man kan harmonisere spenningene som oppstår med samfunnsendringer.

Oppgaven tar en progressiv tilnærming, med vekt på viktigheten av å oppnå bærekraftige måter å leve på, og understreker betydningen av å forstå samspillet mellom samfunnsstrukturer og individuell atferd i en kontekst preget av endring. Å forstå nedvekst som et kritisk svar på vekstparadigmet fremhever et fremtidsrettet perspektiv rettet mot å adressere miljøproblemer og globale ulikheter. Denne forskningen bidrar til bærekrafts diskursen ved å understreke det kritiske behovet for radikal, men inkluderende endring i dagens samfunnsstrukturer. Unge voksne gjenkjenner dette komplekse samspillet mellom individuell atferd og samfunnsendring, og denne oppgaven taler for en gradvis og gjennomtenkt implementering av endringer gjennom konsepter som libertariansk paternalisme for å fremme positiv forsterkning av bærekraftig atferd. Alt i alt avslører hovedfunnene et behov for å balansere individuell frihet med kollektiv handling, og blandede initiativer fra top-down og bottom-up tilnærminger. Det er også et potensial for å utnytte egeninteresse og flokkatferd ved å skape insentiver som samsvarer personlige behov med bærekraftige praksiser. Forskningen viser til slutt hvordan en innsats for bærekraft kan få bedre innflytelse hvis den sosiale dimensjonen av endring forstås og adresseres.

Preface

I am grateful to be able to write my master´s thesis on degrowth, a relatively new topic of research with an inspiring message of the need for change. Throughout this research process and during conversations with both academics and non-academics, I have learned that degrowth is a concept that is often described as utopic. To me, it became increasingly intriguing to find out why degrowth can be a viable alternative future, and to better understand the social responses to changing our consumption habits. I see it as a privilege to be able to investigate the interconnected dynamics between individuals and societal structures, particularly in the context of changing our ways of living with the goal of well-being, a healthier planet and global equity.

The future is unknown, which is why I feel a responsibility to handle the topic of alternative futures with a progressive approach. The themes that are addressed in this thesis are massive, but the interconnection of them is what I find most appealing. Writing this thesis has been a process of contemplating my own consumption habits and especially the growth-oriented society I am living in. I am motivated by all the existing initiatives and environmental organizations that advocate for a sustainable future. While degrowth is complex, and described as a utopian idea, it is not an unthinkable alternative future considering the current trajectory of exponential growth that drives the Earth beyond planetary limits.

"It is always simpler to criticize the existing state of affairs than to propose a credible alternative." (Wright, 2020, p.65).

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Also, my amazing partner, Sondre, and my classmates created a supporting environment that has made the whole process so much better. I am beyond thankful for the new friendships and memories I have gained during this master´s program. As classmates and friends, we have navigated the past two years together, and seen each other travel to different corners of the world for our internships. I have learned and grown both academically and personally, and I have absolutely had fun along this journey.

Table of contents

List of Figures and Tables

Chapter one: Introduction

In 2002, Paul Crutzen coined the name of a new geological epoch dedicated to human domination of nature and the climate: the Anthropocene (Crutzen, 2002). Transitioning into a new epoch demonstrates how human activity has imprinted the planet (Crutzen, 2002). Although the science of geology itself is neither negative nor positive, the impact humans have had on Earth is manifesting through an ecological crisis, evidenced by consequences like acidification of the ocean, global warming, and biodiversity loss (Crutzen, 2002). The word "crisis" is used because of the experienced threat towards current standards of living. Industrialization, productivism and consumerism are identified as the main drivers for the imprint human activities have had on the planet (Sayre, 2012). Moreover, the fundamental threat leading to environmental degradation is said to be capitalism itself, and the capitalist mindset of people in modern societies (Sayre, 2012). In that way, the Anthropocene is used to mark the need for sustainable, systemic changes, where finding alternative ways of living become necessary.

In 2023, environmental scientists at the Stockholm Resilience Centre stated that six out of nine planetary boundaries have been transgressed, which is a real warning sign to change our current ways of living (Richardson et al., 2023). The Stockholm Resilience Centre´s report from 2023 is far from the first warning sign and eco-facts that has attempted to "wake people up". The growth paradigm has been criticized since the 1970s, and since the 2000s, degrowth have emerged as an alternative to exponential economic growth (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). Degrowth is a multi-layered concept and targets the downscaling of mass production and consumption patterns in developed industries that are significantly resource-inefficient and contributes to environmental degradation (D'Alisa et al., 2014; Schneider et al., 2010; Latouche, 2009). A leading argument within degrowth is that it is possible to have societal development and progress without unlimited economic growth that damages the environment (Hickel, 2020; Schneider et al., 2010).

Joan Martinez-Alier has been one of the main drivers of the development of degrowth and explains that the degrowth movement originates from the French word *décroissance* (Martinez-Alier et al., 2010). During the 2000s in France, climate activists demonstrated by using "*décroissance*" as a slogan to protest high levels of consumerism (Kallis et al., 2018;

Martinez-Alier et al., 2010). In the last decade, research on degrowth has significantly increased (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). The degrowth concept is normative with research in several fields, but mainly it serves as a critique of capitalism, colonialism, mass consumerism, productivism and unjust, patriarchal structures while advocating for the importance of well-being (Kallis et al., 2018; Fitzpatrick et al., 2022; Hickel, 2020).

The growing emphasis on sustainability and structural injustice naturally increases the pressure on developing sustainable initiatives and choices. Humans have a fundamental influence on all ecosystems, and my study suggest that a dualistic and capitalistic mindset makes it challenging for the needed systemic change to be realized. At the core of my research is the investigation of the interplay between individuals and societal (capitalist) structures in the context of change towards sustainability. Humans in modern societies have adapted to mass consumerism, in which the exploration of individuals in relation to ideas that reorient consumerist behavior is intriguing. Specifically, there is a knowledge gap in the social dimensions of degrowth (Alexander, 2013), particularly how individual behavior is impacted by societal change and vice versa. This knowledge gap is important to address as it may hinder the ability to fully understand the possibilities and challenges of implementing degrowth in modern societies. Aligned with the degrowth vision, this study focuses on two examples of mass consumerism that may be downscaled: reducing beef consumption and avoiding fast fashion purchases. The beef and fast fashion industries are both major contributors to deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, water use and chemical pollution, making them viable targets for downscaling (Hickel, 2020; Latouche, 2009; Shen, 2014).

Through qualitative semi-structured interviews with seven master's students aged 25-30 at NTNU Trondheim, my study interprets young adults´ responses to hypothetical degrowth initiatives aimed at reducing consumption of beef and fast fashion. This study seeks to understand the interconnected dynamics between individual behavior and societal change. The master´s students, sampled from diverse disciplines at NTNU Trondheim, offer nuanced perspectives based on their varied educational experiences and positionality that may shape their understanding and engagement within the sustainability discourse. By engaging master´s students from diverse disciplines, this thesis takes a holistic approach to explore young adults´ viewpoints on the interplay between individuals and society during transformative processes.

All in all, the aim of this thesis is to contribute to the growing research on degrowth and the discourse on making educated and sustainable choices, filling the knowledge gap within the

social dimensions of societal change. Central to the discussion is the interplay between individuals and society, how societal changes are perceived by individuals, and what the carrying capacity is for change to be effectively implemented. Based on this reflection, the guiding research question for this thesis is:

How do young adults stand on the relation between individual behavior and societal changes, exemplified by degrowth initiatives?

To answer this question, the thesis includes an empirical study using master's students from NTNU in Trondheim, Norway, to investigate their perspectives on degrowth strategies and the relationship between individual agency and broader societal transformations. The informant sample reflects the interdisciplinary nature of degrowth and sustainable development. To support the empirical data, the thesis employs theories of sustainability, individual behavior and agency, growth and degrowth to ensure academic integrity and coherence when discussing the research question.

The significance of this study is centered on the urgency of reaching sustainable ways of living and acknowledging the important interplay of society and individuals to achieve sustainable transformations. This research holds significance as it can provide insights into master´s students´ stance on degrowth initiatives, shedding light on young adults´ viewpoints on societal change in an era where sustainable action is crucial for environmental health and well-being. Understanding students´ viewpoints can further apply pressure to decision makers and be useful for future research on the knowledge gap in social and cultural dimensions of change. Ultimately aligning with the aim of this study, to contribute to the ongoing discourse on sustainable development.

1.1 Structure of the thesis

This thesis follows a structured approach to address the research question. As this introduction has presented the topic and context of this study, Chapter two includes a review of relevant literature to provide the theories and concepts that best supports the empirical data that has been collected. The theory chapter begins with looking into the concept of individual

behavior, before moving on to growth and capitalism, which is important to the research question as economic growth has shaped individual behavior in different ways (Hickel, 2020). Moving on, the theory chapter goes into sustainability theories that culminates to the concept of degrowth. The theory chapter then explains why the beef and fast fashion industries are viable for downscaling, because they are used as examples of change in the empirical data collection. The theory chapter also presents some critiques of degrowth, before summarizing.

Chapter three details the research methodology employed to collect and analyze data in this thesis project. In addition to explaining the process of sampling informants and preparing for interviews, before presenting methods for coding and analysis. Then, this chapter discusses this study´s credibility and limits of transferability, and lastly explaining the ethical considerations and awareness of positionality throughout the project. Chapter four is a combined chapter of both empirical findings and analysis, where the focus is to present findings simultaneously as analyzing recurring themes like individual freedom, collective responsibility, human nature of self-interest, and the influence of herd mentality. The remaining parts of this chapter analyzes the acceptance of change and culminates into a discussion of degrowth. Finally, Chapter five concludes the thesis project by summarizing key findings, reflecting on their implications and making suggestions for future research.

Chapter two: Theory

This chapter presents the theoretical background of my research project, that will be used as a framework in the analysis. First, "sustainability" will be defined, so it is clear how the term is understood in this study. Then, this chapter delves into individual behavior in societal change, looking into the interconnected relation between individuals and society to clarify the multifaceted nature of this interplay. Further, this chapter explains how the concept of growth is understood in my study, including capitalism in a general mentioning. Some historical and philosophical perspectives are highlighted to understand how the growth paradigm, dualism and capitalism has shaped a collective mindset on production and consumption patterns. Next, sustainability theories are presented as tools to find a balance between growth and sustainability, using the Brundtland Commission, the framework of planetary boundaries and doughnut economies as part of the explanation. Engaging in the criticisms of growth-centered economies, this chapter further explains degrowth as a concept, before justifying why the industries of beef and fast fashion are viable targets for downscaling. All together, these theories and concepts provide a lens to be used in the analysis of how young adults stand on the relation between individual behavior and societal change.

2.1 Defining sustainability

The term "sustainability" is referred to several times throughout this thesis, and since it is an umbrella term, it is a necessary to define how it is understood in this study. The definition that is used here, is from the Brundtland Commission´s report "Our Common Future" from 1987: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). This definition is widely recognized for being fundamental within the sustainability discourse.

The definition of sustainability from the Brundtland Commission is according to Wright (2020, p.14) a form of "intergenerational justice", because it accounts for both present and future generations. Moreover, the principle of sustainability is built on three pillars: environmental integrity, economic viability, and social equity (Morelli, 2011). The three pillars underline the need for balance between individual behavior and the planets carrying

capacity, so that economic growth does not come to the expense of both well-being and planetary health (Morelli, 2011). Altogether, sustainability is a multifaceted term that requires interdisciplinary approaches to address its complexity.

2.2 Individual behavior in societal change

There is growing research on the drivers of societal change, and especially the practical mechanisms and policies to facilitate degrowth (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). However, as mentioned in the introduction there is a knowledge gap in understanding the role of the social and cultural aspects when fostering societal transformations (Alexander, 2013). Alexander (2013) states that this knowledge gap in the social sphere is problematic for various reasons. Firstly, the fixed capitalist mindset is prevalent in modern societies and holds a significant barrier to initiate a degrowth society (Alexander, 2013; Hamilton & Denniss, 2005). As Alexander (2013, p. 288) articulates, "Before growth economies can be overcome, this significant cultural obstacle must be acknowledged, confronted and somehow transcended."

Secondly, even if degrowth is socially accepted, it is unlikely that it will be realized if individuals lack a clear understanding of the behavior that is needed to realize a degrowth society (Alexander, 2013). These are the two main reasons as to why it is inefficient to only change a growth economy structurally. It is just as important to find out how individual behavior plays a role in the realization of degrowth (Alexander, 2013, p. 288). Societal change happens on a macro level and is often characterized by transformations in structures and institutions, naturally influencing individual behavior (Silbereisen & Tomasik, 2010). Yet, there is a knowledge gap concerning the social dimensions of these changes (Alexander, 2013; Silbereisen & Tomasik, 2010).

In modern societies, capitalism and growth plays a large role in individual behavior (Wright, 2020; Alexander, 2013). Although this chapter will elaborate on capitalism in more detail later, this section attempts to define the term. Capitalism can be defined in different ways: some associate it with a free-market economy where the state does not intervene, while others describe it as a class structure of capitalists, owners of productions, and workers, producers of goods and services (Wright, 2020, p.4). Beyond these definitions, capitalism holds a deeper cultural and social dimension, particularly in perceptions of growth (Hickel, 2020). One

relevant argument here is that capitalism is often seen as a collective mindset (Hickel, 2020). Another perspective suggest that capitalism can disrupt community and solidarity values (Wright, 2020).

The way that capitalism disrupts community and solidarity values derives from the values of competitive individualism and economic self-interest, which are fundamental characteristic of capitalist systems. Competitive individualism and self-interest typically drive individual behavior toward achieving success at the expense of others (Wright, 2020). However, culture is complex and consists of contradicting values, as community values are still present in a capitalist society, but more so among families and friends than in broader social contexts (Wright, 2020). While individuals may manage to live an anti-capitalist lifestyle through conscious behavior, changing the capitalist system requires a holistic approach (Wright, 2020).

Power is an essential component of making changes within existing structures. Wright (2020, p.68) describes an "agent-centered" version of power, or "social power", which individuals or groups use to accomplish something within their society. This often involves persuading people into joining collective actions for a common goal (Wright, 2020), for instance, social movements. Although social power is an essential part of a democratic system, its capacity is questionable in systems where capitalist structures are heavily influencing societies (Wright, 2020). Wright (2020) argues that it´s not about an economic system being fully capitalist or socialist, but rather to what degree capitalism or socialism has an influence on the system.

"Given the conception of a destination beyond capitalism, the fundamental strategic problem we face is how to create the conditions in which such sustained democratic experimentalism is possible. So long as capitalism remains dominant, such experimentation is deeply constrained." (Wright, 2020, p.92).

Based on the quote above, envisioning an alternative future that values anything else than economic growth is a challenge. While agent-centered power might enforce sustainable initiatives at a local level, breaking free from the capitalist system requires considerable efforts. This includes systemic decoupling from the top-down and resistance to mass consumption from bottom-up (Wright, 2020). It is questionable where these agents with social power originate from, and how collective agency emerges. Identity, values and interests are critical factors in understanding individual behavior (Wright, 2020). Especially when

exploring the social dimension of change and the interplay of society and individuals, it is important to understand how identities, values and interests influence those who advocate for change, those who are satisfied with the status quo, and those who will resist new initiatives.

The challenges of going against a capitalist society lies in the variety of processes that together culminates into the ecological consequences that now needs to be mitigated. For instance, it is more urbanization than explicitly capitalism that weakens the sense of community, and it is more industrialization than explicitly capitalism that leads to environmental degradation (Wright, 2020, p.36). Based on the complex nature of all these ingrained processes, it is indeed a great challenge to find an attainable alternative. This is where it is important to look at how individual behavior can play a role in transforming existing structures that are damaging their own means of existence. Locally, certain individual behaviors can make it possible to escape capitalism, collectively creating an environment and lifestyle that is an alternative to the dominating economic structure that drives mass consumerism. Globally, it is not as feasible to solely rely on individual agency to change current systems (Wright, 2020).

Nonetheless, individuals are not to be underestimated, as their role is important in driving initiatives that benefit the environment and well-being. Focusing on individual agency by promoting sustainable behavior is arguably a crucial component to reach sustainability goals (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005). This argument is based on the importance of change being perceived as a positive and collective project. Degrowth aims to emphasize well-being, which is a crucial part of inspiring individuals to accept change (Hickel, 2020). Engaging in collective efforts can foster a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment, but most importantly, building motivation to sustain the behavior over time (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005).

Erving Goffman in his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, argues that individuals can control how others see them in society, also here based on their self-interest. The book highlights society as dramaturgical, as a stage where individuals put on their masks depending on the situation, they find themselves in (Goffman, 1959). This is shown as a method of shielding one´s private life and natural identity (Goffman, 1959). Classical works like Goffman contributes to the deeper understanding of how individuals' function in society. Classics are used repeatedly for good reasons, as they are the building blocks of contemporary research and ensure more rigorous discussions in academia (Da Col et al., 2017). The work of

Goffman can still be used today in the understanding of individual behavior in societal contexts. The dramaturgical presentation of behavior can be viewed as an argumentation of individual agency, where individuals themselves decide how they are perceived outside their home/backstage where no one can see them (Goffman, 1959). It suggests that individuals hold the power of their own choices, which is an interesting viewpoint in the reinforcing relation between individuals and societal structures.

The interconnected dynamics between individual and society relates to Anthony Giddens structuration theory, that suggest how individuals and society are interdependent and shaping one another reciprocally (Giddens, 1984). According to Giddens, social structures are both influencing and influenced by individual behavior, meaning that societal structures and individual agency are continuously being shaped and recreated through each other (Giddens, 1984). This is an interplay that shows the complexity of society and individuals, as it shows how neither society nor individuals are only passive products of their circumstances, but rather active participants that contribute to a continuous social construction of their existence (Giddens, 1984).

Karen O´Brien (2018) also connects to this perspective by exploring the role of individual agency in transformative processes. Her work is helpful when trying to understand the power of individuals, where change can be seen as a process that accumulates from different behaviors. Her leading argument is that transformations can be seen as a summary of individual behaviors (O´Brien, 2018). Her research identifies three spheres that are connected: practical, political and personal, which in simple terms shows that changes on an individual level can have an effect towards broader structural changes (O´Brien, 2018). The meaning of the three spheres is that individuals have large potential for cultivating societal transformation by changing their worldview, beliefs and values, which further influence society (O´Brien, 2018).

The first part of this section on individual behavior has mainly explored on individual agency, emphasizing how individuals can control their own behavior. The last part of this section before transitioning to the growth paradigm, examines how existing structures can dictate individual behavior, often without individuals realizing the extent of systemic influence they are exposed to.

Individual behavior is complex, often conflicting with rationality and is seemingly rarely calculated (Reeson & Dunstall, 2009). Still, the human mind can also be predictable in some ways. Predictable behavioral patterns are used when shaping consumer marketing strategies or other decision-making processes such as "choice architecture" and "nudging" (Hausman & Welch, 2010; Reeson & Dunstall, 2009; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). The concept of nudging and choice architecture shapes the understanding that individuals´ consumption patterns are heavily influenced by societal structures facilitating some choices over others (Alexander, 2013). Change that encompasses fundamental shifts in existing structures is then yielding different behavioral responses (Alexander, 2013).

There are ethical considerations to be made surrounding decision-making and choice architecture based on behavioral patterns (Hausman & Welch, 2010; Sunstein, 2014). Initiatives of guiding people into a desired behavior need to follow some principles of autonomy and justice. While nudging and choice architecture are effective when promoting healthy and/or sustainable behaviors, they also raise concerns of how ethical it is to guide behavior into a desired direction, and who it is benefitting (Sunstein, 2014). Some nudging techniques are criticized for being manipulative, where individuals are led to make decisions because of tactical unavailability of alternative options (Hausman & Welch, 2010). When using nudging and choice architecture, it is important to do so while prioritizing justice, freedom and well-being. Implementing ethical principles when guiding individual behavior, especially in the context of societal change, can mitigate potential harm, injustice and instability and rather maximize the positive outcome of sustainability initiatives (Hausman & Welch, 2010).

According to Hausman and Welch (2010), and Thaler and Sunstein (2009), libertarian paternalism is one way of nudging that drives individuals into a desired direction at the same time as respecting their freedom to choose. Hausman and Welch (2010) critique Thaler and Sunstein´s work by debating that while they emphasize the concept of libertarian paternalism, they argue that the policies proposed by Thaler and Sunstein lean more towards paternalism than libertarianism. Hausman and Welch (2010) emphasizes that some nudges are paternalistic even if they are meant to be libertarian.

Nudging is paternalistic if it hinders individuals from going in the direction they prefer, such as only placing the fruit in the canteen and hiding the chocolate, creating a forced choice of

fruit (Hausman & Welch, 2010). As Hausman and Welch (2010, p. 124) articulates, "Libertarian paternalism is a relatively weak and nonintrusive type of paternalism, because choices are not blocked or fenced off." Paternalism sets limitations for individual behavior and is generally not welcome because negative emotions come to the surface when people feel a deprivation of the freedom to choose, even if it is a bad choice (Sunstein, 2014). The "choices" in question are self-directed choices that are of no harm to others, making paternalism on such freedom especially unwelcome if it comes from the government (Sunstein, 2014).

The Mill's Harm Principle or also called the Liberty Principle articulated by John Stuart Mill from the 19th century, is an ethical principle that has been a cornerstone in classical liberalism (Sunstein, 2014). The Liberty Principle states that the government should not interfere with individual choices and behavior if it does not inflict harm on others (Sunstein, 2014, p. 4). Even if power is exercised to guide people into a better position, the Liberty Principle argues that individuals know what is best for them, and there should be freedom to make both good and bad decisions. Sunstein (2014) challenges the Liberty Principle and raises the problem of human error which can be translated to how individual behavior has led to the largest ecological disaster ever seen (Baskin, 2015; Crutzen, 2002; Hickel, 2020; Latouche, 2009). With that said, it the behaviors of humanity that has ultimately contributed to an ecological crisis threatening current standards of living is heavily rooted economic growth (Latouche, 2009; Hickel, 2020; Kallis et al., 2018). Therefore, the next section in this theory chapter explores the concept of growth to better understand how modern mindsets function in a society imprinted by the growth paradigm.

2.3 The concept of growth

Economic growth has been central in the development of societies, with technological innovations, cures for diseases and generally increased productivity and standards of living (Wright, 2020). Looking into the concept of growth can offer insights into how modern societies function, providing a framework for understanding individual behavior in a modern society. To mitigate the ecological crisis of the Anthropocene it is necessary to change individual behavior, which makes internalized mindsets on growth a central topic of discussion (Alexander, 2013; D'Alisa et al., 2014; Hickel, 2020). Growth is here seen as a

collective mindset within capitalist societies that influence people's´ stance toward alternatives to the growth paradigm, which can be challenging when the mitigation of climate change requires new reflections (D'Alisa et al., 2014; Hickel, 2020; Kallis et al., 2018). One definition of economic growth is the "(…) expansion in the volume of goods and services produced by a country" (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005, p. 49), making growth an essential part of understanding societal dynamics during change and challenges.

To dive deeper into the concept of growth, it is inevitable to quickly view the historical underpinnings, especially of mainstream economics. The transition from agricultural societies to industrial capitalism during the late 1700s and early 1800s marked a revolutionary period driven by technological development such as the steam engine (Hobsbawm, 2010). This transformative shift heavily influenced production and labor patterns and reshaped societal structures (Hobsbawm, 2010). The historical aspect of growth will not be further explained in detail, but it seems essential to mention it as a key driver of capitalism and the contemporary growth mindset. Most importantly, the emergence of fossil fuel industries since the 1700s have been identified as a primary contributor to the greenhouse gas emissions that has led to the environmental challenges we face today (McMichael & Weber, 2022, p. 239).

The industrialization of economies led to expanding globalization where economic and social processes became increasingly advanced, making the world feel smaller. The term for this is time-space compression, articulated by David Harvey (1990). The process of time-space compression involves making time and distance less of a barrier for human activity (Harvey, 1990). Time-space compression is driven by capitalist forces, that prioritizes speed of trading commodified goods and services across the globe to ensure rapid growth (Harvey, 1990). The concept of shrinking the globe in this way shows to what extent capitalism has shaped the world, and how exponential growth has become such a fixation that even geographical distance is not a barrier (Harvey, 1990).

The commodification of land, labor and anything with potential of being traded expanded the massive exploitation of natural resources (Hobsbawm, 2010; Aulenbacher et al., 2019), which has led to many of the climate issues the world is facing today (Hickel, 2020). The increased exploitation of land and labor is seen as a reflection of a dualistic mindset reminiscent of René Descartes´ philosophy where nature is seen as fundamentally separate from society (Hickel, 2020). Dualism is an umbrella term and is here seen mainly through the philosophy of

Descartes. The exploitation of natural resources has been crucial to expanding capitalist economies (Aulenbacher et al., 2019). Degrading the environment to the current extent is in this thesis argued as partly a product of dualistic worldview. This argument is based on the destructive character of natural resource exploitation, making it unlikely that people see nature as equal to society.

Descartes´ dualistic worldview of fundamentally separate mind and matter has influenced Western thought and shaped attitudes toward the environment (Hickel, 2020). Mind and matter are understood both as the dualism of human beings, having a body and a soul, but also as society and nature being separated. The modern thought of nature not being a part of society, makes it more acceptable to exploit natural resources for industrialization (Hickel, 2020). The "rationalized" idea that nature is separate from society is also supported in Rachel Carson´s publication *Silent Spring* from 1962 (McMichael & Weber, 2022, p.171). Seeing nature as external to society is a mindset that justifies continuous exploitation of natural resources without realizing the consequences (McMichael & Weber, 2022, p.171).

Descartes´ dualistic philosophy set the stage for capitalist ideologies as it led to a perception of nature as a resource to be exploited for economic growth and development of societies (Hickel, 2020). Understanding dualism as a starting point to natural resource exploitation and capitalism is important for the scope of this thesis. It is argued by the role of a dualistic worldview in undermining the interconnectedness between society and nature, contributing to ecological disasters and resource exploitation (Hickel, 2020). It also adds to a holistic perspective on the development of individuals´ perception of nature in relation to society, shaping behavior towards societal changes aimed towards saving the environment. Like the dualistic philosophy, *Silent Spring* also connects to individual behavior towards the environment, as influenced by industries and the growth paradigm, shaping people´s fundamental mindset on how nature and society is seen as independent from the other (McMichael & Weber, 2022). These viewpoints are important to consider as the data collected from interviewing master´s students on the relation between individual behavior and societal change can provide answers that are shaped by this artificial separation of nature and society.

Capitalism meant the rise of growthism, which was essential in making of "the Third world" and is connected to current global inequalities (Kallis et al., 2018). The division of the world

into developed and underdeveloped countries was initiated by President Truman in 1949 during his famous speech about making a "fair deal" for the world (Escobar, 2011; Kallis et al., 2018). In many ways a very ethnocentric representation of the world. In the development enterprise, nature in developing areas in the global South has been and still is targeted for unintelligible resource exploitation for economic growth. Meaning that the natural resource exploitation in the South, drives the development in the North, with consequences like absence of bird song in the spring as the title *Silent Spring* refers to (McMichael & Weber, 2022, p.171).

Capitalism, and all it entails, was presented by Truman as part of the solution to global inequalities, including further industrialization and growth as a way of developed countries assisting underdeveloped countries (Escobar, 2011). Capitalism is a wide and complex concept, and it is more than an economical system (Hickel, 2020). Understanding the development of growth and capitalism is important to contextualize this thesis´ research question, as capitalist ideology and the growth paradigm in many ways infuse modern mindsets. It can further contribute to understanding the relation between individuals and society today, and how individuals stand on concepts such as degrowth when they are raised into a growth-oriented society.

The populations relevant to the topic of degrowth are the ones that are born, raised, and educated in capitalist societies/developed countries that view nature more as a resource for production and consumerism, than a vital part of human´s existence (Hickel, 2020; Kallis et al., 2018). The effects of the Anthropocene, the ecological crisis, are not because all people on Earth have equally lived beyond planetary boundaries (Hickel, 2020). Considering the global rich-poor gap, it is obvious which group is responsible for the ecological crisis; the rich percentage of the world, with extra weight on the 1%. High-income countries are disproportionate when considering the balance between production levels and what humans truly need to have a good life. The excess growth in developed, high-income countries is considered the main contributor to the current ecological crisis that has been culminating in the past decades (Hickel, 2020). It is not only an ecological crisis, but just as much a crisis of inequality.

Naturally, environmentalists and ecological economists are increasingly seeing that the way humans have exploited natural resources are, in fact, damaging (Hickel, 2020). However, the

question is if the capitalist mindset and consumerism is too integrated for people to be able to adapt to the radical changes that are needed to slow down global warming, to save what still has not reached a point of no return. As mentioned previously in this chapter, there are many layers to the concept of growth. So far in this chapter, the development of capitalism seen from a dualistic worldview has been addressed on a surface level. The intention of seeing capitalism from this perspective is to enhance the understanding of how individuals in a capitalist society react to the idea of implementing degrowth initiatives, particularly since degrowth challenges the capitalist mindset. Another layer to the concept of growth is the development theory of economist Walt Rostow showing a linear model with the stages of economic growth (McMichael & Weber, 2022).

Figure 1: Rostow´s stages of economic growth.
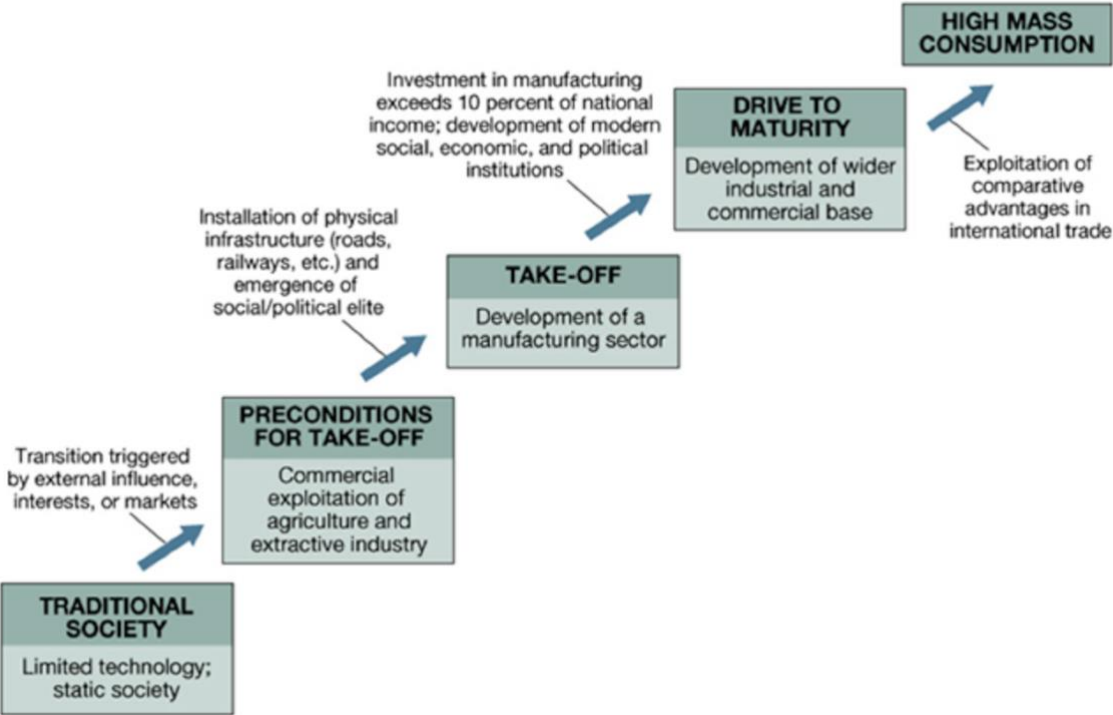
Source: (Pennsylvania State University, n.d.).

In Figure 1, at the bottom of the model is the traditional, primitive societies, and at the top is the "age of high mass-consumption" (McMichael & Weber, 2022, p. 12). Rostow's influential theory of stages of economic growth contributes to the understanding that the capitalist economy and neoliberal markets have not naturally occurred but are instituted and driven by interests of economic growth and ideas of maturity and development (McMichael & Weber, 2022, p. 23). As referenced in McMichael and Weber (2022, p. 23), the World Bank has stated that markets driven by economic growth are not sufficiently evaluating environmental degradation from growth activities. This statement underscores the dualistic philosophy of nature and society being separated in the mindsets of people living in societies driven by economic growth.

One of the most problematic issues with mass consumption is that it is not clear amongst most consumers that the consumption of goods is the same as consuming nature (McMichael & Weber, 2022). Whereas paying for the goods does not give anything back to nature, it only takes. The result of this ignorance is seen in drought, wildfires, extreme weather conditions, flooding, biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, global warming and contamination (Hickel, 2020; McMichael & Weber, 2022). Recognizing the growth paradigms driving the crumbling of the environment is crucial if the goal is to shift towards sustainability. Some post-development scholars call the ideology of growth a Western myth, that is gradually and irreversibly justifying the unsustainable and unlimited economic growth that has led to global warming (Kallis et al., 2018). Within the sustainability discourse there are several theories that pose as critiques of growthism and capitalistic societies. The following section presents some of the theories and concepts that create a better framework for understanding the efforts needed towards balancing economic growth with environmental health.

2.4 Sustainability theories

This section will begin by drawing attention to sustainability theories as a crucial response to the ecological crisis threatening standards of living, including the Brundtland Commission, Rockström and his colleagues´ concept of planetary boundaries, and how human activity should stay within a doughnut economy (Raworth, 2012; Rockström 2009; McMichael & Weber, 2022; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). These ideas contribute to the visualization of what balance between human activity and environmental

preservation could look like, where well-being and the environment is sustained and supported. By understanding and applying sustainability theories, the aim of this section is to present ways for contemporary societies to navigate the relations between economic development, well-being and ecological conservation.

Sustainability theories offer frameworks to navigate the complex challenges of reaching sustainability and equity in the world. Many of these theories are relevant to the problem statement at hand because they provide organized approaches to better understand these issues. The existing paradox of economic growth and ecological damage results in diversity within the sustainability discourse, as finding a balance is challenging. The paradox was first described by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 along with a call for sustainable development: "We all depend on one biosphere for sustaining our lives" (McMichael & Weber, 2022, p. 171). The Brundtland Commission´s report "Our Common Future" generally formed the foundation of sustainable development as we know it, focusing on a combination of global and local strategies and actions (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

As mentioned, when defining sustainability at the beginning of this chapter, there are three pillars involved: environmental integrity, economic viability, and social equity (Morelli, 2011). In 1997, John Elkington used the interconnectedness of these pillars, and coined the people, planet, profit approach in 1994 (Elkington, 1997). Another name for this approach is the three-legged stool or triple-bottom line theory, which indicate that environmental degradation is entrenched in social and economic issues. This makes the goal of sustainable development mostly targeted towards finding balance between meeting the needs of all three pillars.

One of the most important concepts when talking about sustainability is planetary boundaries, which illustrates the Earth´s limits of human activity (Rockström et al., 2009). Overshooting planetary boundaries result in irreversible changes like biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions, and melted polar ice caps that are linked to a chain of reactions that affect standards of living for all species. Planetary boundaries are used to highlight the urgent need for sustainable living, to prevent crossing irreversible thresholds in the global climate (Rockström et al., 2009). Rockström and colleagues (2009) identified nine interconnected

planetary systems in 2009, whereas three systems had already been transgressed (see Figure 2)

Figure 2: Analysis of planetary systems in 2009.
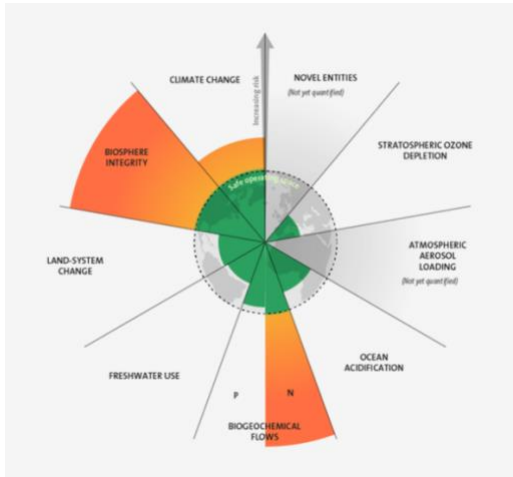
Source: Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, based on analysis in Richardson et al. (2023).

In 2023, a team of scientists revisited and quantified the nine systems and found that six boundaries have been transgressed since Rockström and his colleagues´ assessment in 2009 (see Figure 3)
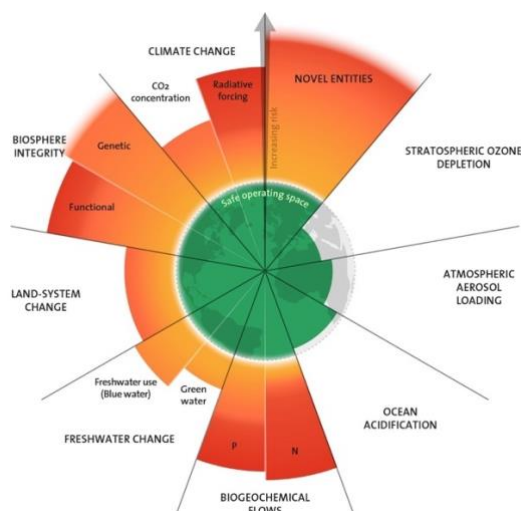
Figure 3: Analysis of planetary systems in 2023.

Source: Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, based on analysis in Richardson et al. (2023).

Figure 3 shows the latest assessment of the interlinked planetary systems (Richardson et al., 2023). The six systems that have been transgressed clearly emphasizes how quickly the environment is degrading and underscores the urgent need to protect what is left and reduce further disturbance. To effectively address this challenge, it is important to implement transformative measures within individual behavior, local and global structures and fundamental changes in socioeconomic systems (Hickel 2020; Latouche, 2009; Kallis et.al., 2018; Richardson et al., 2023). Through such measures, there may be chances of securing the well-being of both present and future generations, as well as the health of the environment.

Within the sustainability discourse, and exemplified by the Brundtland Commission, sustainability theories can offer alternative routes to a more equitable and ecologically sensible development, without compromising economic growth (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). For example, the sustainable development project, initiated in the late 1900s, seeks to reconcile economic growth with both social equity and environmental preservation (McMichael & Weber, 2022). The sustainable development project encompasses a few theories that seek to find ways of living within planetary boundaries. One of the theories is doughnut economics, developed by Kate Raworth (2012). The concept of a doughnut economy offers a comprehensive framework to navigate human activity and resource-use within planetary boundaries (see Figure 4)

Figure 4: The doughnut economy model.
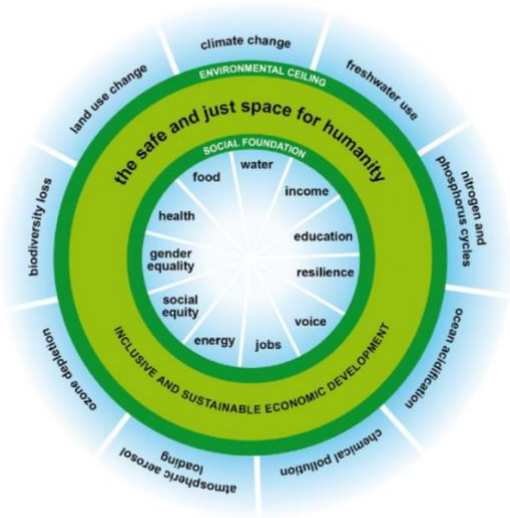
Source: (Raworth, 2012)

The doughnut model is a visualization of human activities represented in the outer and inner rings of a doughnut. It shows the boundaries where humanity can live and thrive, without further damaging the planet (Raworth, 2012). Doughnut economy is mainly about balancing human needs and planetary boundaries where it all stays within ecological limits. The model shows basic human needs such as food, water, health, income etc., in the inner circle of the doughnut, while also incorporating ecological considerations based on the nine planetary boundaries. The doughnut model functions as a perspective from both societal and environmental spheres and highlights the systemic changes that are needed for human activity to stay within the thresholds (Raworth, 2012). As cited in McMichael and Weber (2021, p.312), Raworth states that "economic activity should be meeting the needs of all within the means of the planet". Since she created the doughnut model in 2012, it has been revisited and applied in several areas as a tool when working on sustainable development (Raworth, 2017).

Proposals for a more sustainable and cleaner future often receive criticism based on the effect it will have on economic growth (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005). Mainly, this criticism comes from those who benefit from industrial production and high consumption (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005). The need for change is underscored by scientists stating clear concerns about the insufficient efforts to address the increasing temperature on Earth (Hickel, 2020). Even reaching the point of 2 degrees is expected to trigger the planet into permanent heat that would be impossible to reverse, making the only rational measure to prevent the planet from heating to more than 1.5 degrees (Hickel, 2020). Such efforts would require a drastic reduction of global emissions to zero at a pace much faster than currently seen as feasible (Hickel, 2020).

Realistically, even 1.5 degrees is setting many parts of the earth into crisis, while 2 degrees is fatal for many places in the global South (Hickel, 2020). Having 2 degrees as the accepted limit is a result of climate negotiators from the US along with other western countries that pushed this decision on the global South, Africa in particular. At the Copenhagen summit in 2009, the Sudanese chief negotiator for the G77 said; "We have been asked to sign a suicide pact. It is unfortunate that after 500 years-plus of interaction with the West we are still considered disposables" (Hickel, 2020, p. 110). One way of seeing this is as a continuous form of colonization. The global North has not only been taking resources from the South to develop themselves for a long time, but the exploiting dynamic is still very visible today.

To attempt resolving the serious challenges of transgressed planetary boundaries, as well as the exploiting dynamic and inequality across the globe, many sustainability theories can be inefficient in the current circumstances. It is evident that there is need for transformative measures across all sectors of mass production and consumption, to balance human needs within the capacity of the planet (Hickel, 2020). On that note, the next section will present the concept of degrowth as a radical but compelling approach that is allegedly an alternative solution to most issues of overshooting planetary boundaries and deeply rooted global inequalities (Hickel, 2020).

2.5 Degrowth

Transitioning to sustainable living calls for an interference with existing structures (Meadows et al., 1972). Degrowth serves as a framework that challenges the collective addiction to economic growth, with an aim to shift away from overconsumption and address issues of inequality among other things (Hickel, 2020). Mainly, degrowth focuses on a systemic shift for long-term sustainability and well-being, and is a political concept (Pichler, 2023). As an inspiration, The *Limits to Growth* report from 1972, played a significant part in shaping both degrowth and the modern discourse of sustainability and environmental issues (Meadows et al., 1972). The main findings from this report showed what would happen if the speed of resource-use and growth kept going, revealing an inevitable ecological collapse as resources would be depleted and other consequences would arise from crossing environmental limits (Meadows et al., 1972). The previous section on sustainability theories and the Brundtland Commission shows approaches of sustainable development that in many ways maintains the trajectory of economic growth. *Limits to Growth* marked the beginning of degrowth, as the degrowth movement came forward as a response to the current speed of growth and the predicted crisis from the report (Latouche, 2009). The concept of degrowth rises within the sustainability discourse as a critique to existing sustainability theories and the green growth approach, viewing it as inefficient (Hickel, 2020).

Degrowth can be experienced as a chaotic concept with broad definitions in existing research. Additionally, it is relatively new in research, interdisciplinary and connected to the sustainability discourse, as an approach to alternative ways of reaching sustainable ways of living. A degrowth framework view exponential economic growth as conflicting with the need of staying within planetary boundaries and ensuring global equity (D'Alisa et al., 2014;

Hickel, 2020). As an alternative to the growth paradigm, degrowth advocates for a systemic transformation towards small-scale, decentralized economies that utilize resources within the planets carrying capacity with a significant focus on well-being (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Degrowth can be described as reactive to other processes, meaning that there are several layers to the concept (Kallis et al., 2018). From one perspective, the first layer of degrowth came in the 1970s, when environmentalists began to voice their concerns about the consequences from unlimited economic growth. These concerns eventually formed into a critique against growth (Kallis et al., 2018).

Following the 1970s, industrial activity was recognized for having large, negative impacts on the environment and the environmentalists' concerns was increasingly acknowledged (Crutzen, 2002; Hickel, 2020; Kallis et al., 2018; Latouche, 2009). As a response, sustainability became an intensified focus after the 70s, with several perspectives, but the view of degrowth emerged as a critique of existing sustainable development strategies, that through a degrowth-lens is deemed insufficient (Kallis et al., 2018; Latouche, 2009).

Moreover, degrowth focuses on equitable distribution of resources globally, and the global North is the part that needs to liberate resources to ensure global equity (Hickel, 2020). This means that degrowth is not a global project, but it targets productivism and mass consumption patterns in the industrialized, developed countries (McMichael & Weber, 2021; Hickel, 2020). In this context, it is relevant to emphasize some critiques on the Anthropocene epoch. In social sciences, Anthropocene as a geological epoch is problematic because it is overly generalizing humanity as it implies that all of humanity is dominant to nature (Baskin, 2015). Still today, there are many groups whose lifestyles are far different that those in the West, emphasizing the point that degrowth is not a global project, but aimed towards those lifestyles and industrial systems that exceeds accepted emission levels (Baskin, 2015; Latouche, 2009).

There are nomads in several countries with lifestyles that generate extremely low emissions (Hickel, 2020; Baskin, 2015). The Nuer, an indigenous group in South Sudan, is an example of such a group (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). The Nuer will be mentioned once more as an example of alternative worldviews in the upcoming section on the beef industry. Considering the existence of "non-modern" societies, it seems unethical to blame low-emission lifestyles for the ecological damage that has culminated in the past decades. There are wide differences in the responsibilities for the ecological footprint of humans, which degrowth accounts for

(Hickel, 2020). The richer someone is, the more carbon emissions they produce. Baskin (2015) supports this statement, as he labels the Anthropocene as universalizing humanity without distinguishing between population groups, cultures and societies either existing in the present or past.

Degrowth economies in the global North would presumably force the sustainable development of the global South (Hickel, 2020). Furthermore, this would likely slow down the cycle of developed countries being dependent on underdeveloped countries to stay underdeveloped and exploited (Hickel, 2020). This statement is rooted in the dependency theory, which is a critical look on global inequalities, and the definitions of underdeveloped and developed countries as stated by President Truman in 1949 (Escobar, 2011; Kallis et al., 2018). The dependency theory underscores the hierarchical characteristics of the global economy (McMichael & Weber, 2022).

The dependency theory involves a core-periphery model that shows the dominance and exploitation enforced by developed and capitalistic core countries over peripheral countries, often characterized as "underdeveloped", with lack of a better word (McMichael & Weber, 2022). A degrowth framework would contribute to liberating resources and downscale consumption in the core countries to bring forward a more sustainable development in the peripheral nations (D'Alisa et al., 2014; Hickel, 2020). In 2015, Pope Francis referred to the ecological debt that the global North has to the global South, after unaccountable exploitation of the South´s natural resources (McMichael & Weber, 2022, p. 170). Looking at this from a global and broader perspective is important for the research question because it contributes to an understanding of the global system that individuals live in, influencing their viewpoints depending on where in the world they are from. The master's students at NTNU Trondheim are mainly Norwegians, who benefit from living in a country with a high rank globally in the Human Development Index, which reflects considerable progress in education, income and health (United Nations Development Programme, 2024). Based on this rank at UNDP, it is needed to be aware of the informant's positionality when analyzing the empirical data.

To better understand the function of degrowth, Figure 5 shows how degrowth is meant to serve as a step towards a more sustainable society. When altering the growth paradigm and moving on from the growth phase, there is a need for a degrowth phase before the next stage is to reach a steady state economy (Duprez, 2022). The point is not to be in a continuous

degrowth stage, but to reach stability on a lower production and consumption level after the degrowth phase that will be more environmentally friendly (Duprez, 2022).

Figure 5: Growth phase – Degrowth phase – Steady-state economy.
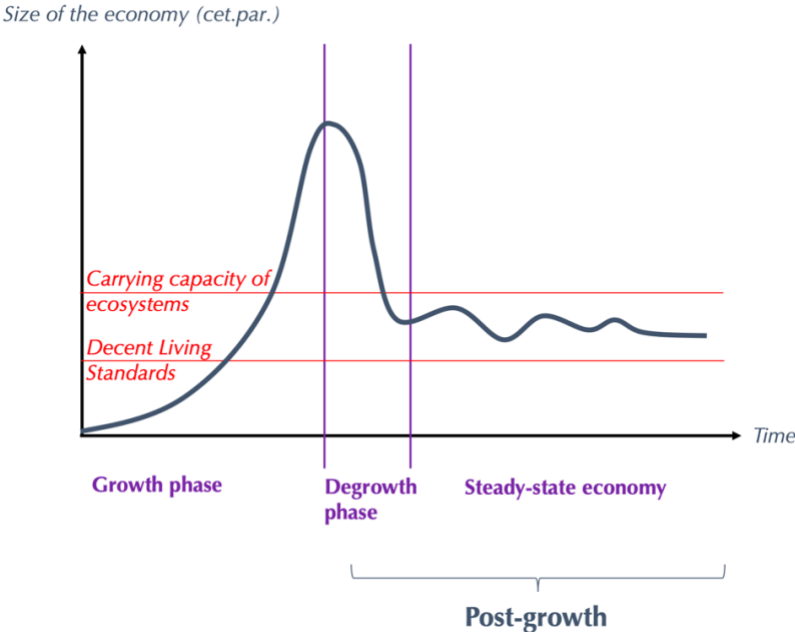
Source: (Duprez, 2022)

As Figure 5 shows, a degrowth phase leads to post-growth and a steady-state economy (Duprez, 2022). What a post-growth society or steady-state economy looks like has a variety of visions, but the most important point to make is that degrowth is not meant as negative growth, as in recession (Schneider et al., 2010; Cosme et al., 2017). Taking the degrowth route would lead to a phase of negative growth, before transitioning to a steady state economy, characterized by slower growth and a focus on quality over quantity (Cosme et al., 2017). Degrowth targets industrialized societies and prioritizes well-being and environmental health over continuous growth driven by capitalist and dualistic mindsets (Cosme et al., 2017; Hickel, 2020).

It becomes evident that the conventional economic model that is growth-oriented are no longer viable when considering planetary health (Crutzen, 2002; Baskin, 2015, Kallis et al., 2018). Shifting towards degrowth seeks to establish a new equilibrium, where mass production and consumption levels are significantly downscaled. The next section focuses on

two specific industries that have been targeted as resource-inefficient and damaging for the environment by several scholars: the beef and fast fashion industries (Hickel, 2020; Shen, 2014; Fletcher, 2013, Latouche, 2009). In this study, these two industries are used in the empirical data collection as examples of industries that should be downscaled. The master´s students have been asked about two localized initiatives inspired by the need to shrink the production and consumption of beef and fast fashion. The following section explains why the beef and fast fashion industries are viable targets for a downscaling before the specific initiatives used for empirical data collection will be presented.

2.6 Degrowth strategies

This following section will shortly explain the interconnected functionality of degrowth strategies to create a holistic understanding. Then, the idea of downscaling industries is further elaborated, as the empirical data collection in this study is focused on how individuals relate to initiatives that change the access to products from industries that largely contribute to environmental degradation.

There is a variety of strategies and ideas within the degrowth discourse. It is important to understand that degrowth strategies in general is connected, where if one strategy were to be implemented, it can´t function without the implementation of other strategies (Hickel, 2020; Chertkovskaya, 2022). To provide a broader picture, a degrowth society includes strategies such as implementing fewer working hours to improve well-being, which naturally leads to reduced salary. Reduced salary does not improve well-being without the strategy of cheaper housing and transport (Hickel, 2020). Cheaper housing and transport are not possible without the strategy of implementing an upper wage limit where income above a certain number is taxed and used to finance the cheaper housing and transport (Hickel, 2020). Also, Universal Basic Income is another strategy that would be necessary if all these societal changes were to be successful (McMichael & Weber, 2021).

This explanation of how degrowth strategies is connected is supported by Chertkovskaya (2022), who argues that degrowth strategies must be combined to ensure a social-ecological transformation. The need for several supporting initiatives is rooted in the interdisciplinary nature of degrowth, as a versatile concept and a movement (Chertkovskaya, 2022). Most

importantly, no degrowth strategies or initiatives will be successful without considering the social and cultural aspects (Alexander, 2013; Schneider et al., 2010; Silbereisen & Tomasik, 2010), which is where this thesis aims to contribute to the discourse.

Downscaling industries is one of the main strategies of degrowth, based upon the need to change habits of mass consumption beyond user-value (Chertkovskaya, 2022). As previously stated, the industries used as targets for downscaling in this study are the beef and fast fashion industries. These two industries have significant environmental impact and takes part in the mass consumerism that contributes to a serious volume of emissions, land-use and waste (Hickel, 2020; Shen, 2014; Fletcher, 2013). Using beef and fast fashion as examples of targets for degrowth is based on the influence its products hold over individual behavior and habits. Drawing attention to the fast fashion industry signifies the need for more sustainable clothing practices, especially as clothing is a universal necessity. The fast fashion industry represents an industry where its production and consumption are driven by short-lived trends, consumer habits, collector mentality and it takes part in the everyday decision-making among individuals (Shen, 2014; Fletcher, 2013).

The beef industry is categorized as severely environmentally destructive based on its extensive land and water use that is disproportionate to nutrition value, making it one of the most obvious targets for degrowth (Hickel, 2020). Both the beef and fast fashion industries provide as intriguing examples when examining the relation between individual behavior and societal changes, given the universal familiarity of their products. Presenting hypothetical initiatives that limit the consumption of their products is central to the problem statement of this study.

2.7 The beef industry

The beef industry necessitates land, water and energy resources to the extent that it is considered the most resource-inefficient food globally (Hickel, 2020, p.197). In fact, 60% of global agricultural land is used, directly or indirectly, for beef production (Hickel, 2020). Notably, this percentage pertains specifically to beef, and not meat production in general. The consumption levels in the global North are so resource-inefficient and beyond user-value that

it results in lack of resources for two-thirds of the world´s population in the global South (Latouche, 2009).

The use of agricultural land for beef production includes mainly pasture areas for cattle (directly) and growing feed (indirectly). The resource-inefficiency is scaled according to the usage of land, water and energy resources compared to the advantages of calories and nutrition of beef (Hickel, 2020). The main issue with the large amount of land used for beef production is that it counts as the largest driver for deforestation, which is one of the most destructive processes for the climate (Steinfeld et al., 2006; Hickel, 2020). The Amazon rainforest is being destroyed, burned, to produce beef that is not even considered as essential for humans to live healthy lives. In fact, beef is counted as 2% of the calories that the world's population eats (Hickel, 2020). Scaling down the beef industry would be beneficial for the climate and is considered as one of the industries that would barely make any losses to human welfare if it was decreased (Hickel, 2020).

Shifting to plant-based proteins, such as beans, will potentially save up to 11 million square miles of land, and reduce the ecological footprint from food sources (Poore & Nemecek, 2018; Weis, 2013). According to Hickel (2020, p. 198), this amount of land is equivalent to the size of the United States, China and Canada. It would also cut emissions by 8 gigatons of carbon dioxide annually, this being around 20% of the current emissions globally each year. (Hickel, 2020; Weis, 2013). By degrowing the beef industry, the transformations would, according to scientists, be the most important degrowth process to avoid further environmental crises. Naturally, degrowing this industry would likely result in loss of income for many farmers and investors, mainly in high-income countries. However, researchers have found that less red meat in people's diets is expected to drive medical costs down significantly (Hickel, 2020). Reconsidering practices and production volume within the beef industry can be essential to mitigate environmental challenges as well as liberate resources to other sectors that need them (Foley et al., 2011).

Beyond this, while beef is largely a commodity, some indigenous groups and communities rely on cattle for their livelihood. These populations exemplify how it is possible to have different values related to cattle. A classic example from Social Anthropology is the Nuer indigenous people located in South Sudan and some parts of Ethiopia. The book *"The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People" by*

Edward Evans-Pritchard from 1940 describes the Nuer´s close relation with their cattle. For the Nuer, cattle play a crucial role in their economic system, societal structure and culture (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). The Nuer do not see cattle only as a food source or as something with economic value, but as something deeply cultural and symbolic in terms of prestige and social status and important for rituals such as marriage (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). This perspective is a reminder that alternative futures must consider a variety of value systems, especially opening for those that view animals and nature as more than just economic resources.

2.8 The fast fashion industry

Another industry that plays a significant role in environmental degradation is the textile industry, specifically fast fashion. In the span of one year, the global consumption of textile (not only fast fashion) estimates to around 30 million tons, which has a considerable impact on the environment (Shen, 2014). The sustainability challenges within the fast fashion industry are serious, encompassing human rights violations, labor exploitation, and massive use of chemicals, pesticides, water and shipping (Fletcher, 2013; Shen, 2014). This industry presents a two-parted issue, requiring sustainable efforts from both producers and consumers. On the producer end, sweatshops in developing countries with weak labor laws are a reality in many supply chains, which includes low wages, long working hours and exploitation of people in vulnerable positions (Fletcher, 2013). These conditions display a range of ethical dilemmas that require more sustainable practices and regulations throughout the textile/fast fashion supply chain (Fletcher, 2013; Shen, 2014).

Greenwashing is another serious issue within the fast fashion industry. Brands like H&M and Uniqlo capitalizes on the growing environmental awareness among consumers by advertising sustainable clothing and eco-friendly campaigns (Shen, 2014). However, there is a clear lack of transparency in their supply chains, which raises concerns about the authenticity of their "green" claims (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020; Fletcher, 2013). Greenwashing undermines the genuine efforts of sustainable practices and makes it challenging at the consumer´s end to make informed decisions when buying clothes. Shen (2014) refers to previous studies showing that consumers are more drawn to buying sustainable clothing and pay more if it means that the piece is ecologically friendly.

Given the large spectrum of challenges in the fast fashion industry, there are persuasive arguments to downscale it with the goal of achieving sustainability and ethical production of clothes. A downscaling process would include less production and less consumption, with the implementation of more sustainable clothing practices at a local level. Examples of sustainable clothing practices can be sawing, re-design, second-hand shopping, buying quality over quantity etc. (Fletcher, 2013). Such changes would decrease the ecological footprint, improve labor conditions at factories in developing countries which would further improve social justice and human rights along the value chain (Shen, 2014; Fletcher, 2013). To give an example of an existing initiative, the Norwegian organization Future in Our Hands launched a challenge to limit clothing purchases to five items per year, seeking to limit over consumption and inspire more sustainable clothing practices (Framtiden i våre hender, n.d.). The initiative is based on research that five new garments is sufficient to meet personal needs and simultaneously contributes to sustainable clothing practices (Framtiden i våre hender, n.d.).

2.9 Critiques of degrowth

In this thesis, the literature on degrowth that have been presented primarily holds a positive perspective on the idea of a degrowth society. Therefore, it is important to address some of the critiques as well. The scholars that have been referenced in this study regarding the degrowth concept come from various fields but share a common interest in finding alternatives to unlimited growth. To date, there has no legitimate implementation of the degrowth concept in a societal context, and it faces critiques of being utopian (Naudé, 2023, p. 23).

The critique mainly revolves around the realism of a degrowth society: its feasibility, potential issues with economic stability and practical challenges of implementing degrowth strategies. The concerns are also centered on potential negative impacts on innovation and entrepreneurship in a degrowth society (Naudé, 2023). Other scholars highlight the concerns of degrowth´s impact on employment and social welfare systems, as well as skepticism towards its ability to address global inequalities (D'Alisa et al., 2014; Schneider et al., 2010).

Martinez-Alier et al. (2010) particularly address the problem of implementing degrowth in regions with lower socio-economic status, where it could hinder needed development. Conversely, Hickel (2020) argues that degrowth is not a global project, but should primarily target the global North, which is heavily responsible for excessive greenhouse gas emissions. Hickel´s argument is supported by the critique of Anthropocene that fails to differentiate adequately among the difference in ecological footprints across various groups (Baskin, 2015). The wealthier someone is, generally, the more carbon emissions they produce (Baskin, 2015, p. 15).

A significant barrier to the implementation of degrowth, and the most relevant critique for this study, is the mental resistance to embrace the changes that comes with degrowth at the individual level. Alexander (2013) discusses the challenge of shifting societal norms that are established within growth-oriented values and lifestyles of high-consumption. Moreover, there are also powerful economic and political entities that are heavily invested in maintaining the status quo and would resist changes that would undermine it (Alexander, 2013).

2.10 Summary

As previously stated, there is a critical knowledge gap on the social and cultural aspects of societal change (Alexander, 2013). There is an even larger gap on these aspects regarding a transition towards a degrowth society. The capitalist and dualist mindset creates a barrier to alter the growth paradigm, which highlights the need to recalibrate the collective understanding of growth. As Hickel (2020) states: people are "lulled" into a waiting mode when they hear disastrous eco-facts, because they feel like society is excluded from nature. Furthermore, even though reactions to eco-facts through structural changes are necessary, it is inevitable to understand individual behavior and predict social responses of change that might lead to feelings of deprived freedom if done in a manner of injustice. As evidenced in this section, individual behavior is influenced by societal structures and cues, such as choice architecture and nudging (Hausman & Welch, 2010; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009; Sunstein, 2014).

To summarize this theory chapter, the theoretical framework of this thesis is quite broad, but still connected. The broadness of theory underscores the multifaceted nature of societal change towards a more sustainable future. Understanding the dynamic relation between

individuals and society is an essential part of this thesis, as it is used as a tool to interprets master´s students´ viewpoints on hypothetical initiatives for downscaling the beef and fast fashion industries. By synthesizing diverse theoretical perspectives – from dualism, growthism, individual behavior and ecological economics – this thesis highlights the complexities of social acceptance when it comes to system changes for sustainable development. The interdisciplinarity might help to cultivate a deeper understanding of the interconnection between history, society, and nature, that plays a part in the challenges of finding alternative pathways for a sustainable future. Following this, the next chapter will present the methodology used for data collection and analysis, laying the fundament for an extensive investigation of these dynamics.

Chapter three: Methodology

The goal of this chapter is to present the methodological framework of this research project. First, the qualitative research design and the degrowth initiatives that were used in the data collection is presented. Then, the process of sampling informants and preparing for interviews and methods for coding and analysis is explained. Lastly, limits of transferability, ethical considerations and positionality is reflected upon. This chapter seeks to show transparency of the data collection process, from beginning to end.

3.1 Research design

To address the research question effectively, this thesis project employed an explorative qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven masters' students from various disciplines at NTNU in Trondheim. This method was chosen to ensure a comprehensive representation of perspectives, acknowledging that students from various academic fields may offer unique insights (Hay & Cope, 2021). Semi-structured interviews are especially beneficial when the goal is to maintain focus on the research topic, but also allowing flexibility for follow-up questions and a more organic communication (Hay & Cope, 2021).

Initially, when preparing for interviews, an interview guide was made with key themes and questions. The themes were: Introductory questions, degrowth initiatives, differences in social acceptance of change and perspectives on the future. See Appendix A for a full English version of the interview guide. The interview guide was composed of 27 structured questions under these themes, made to cover the essentials of the research topic. The interview guide was strategically used to steer the interview back on track if the conversation went too far off the main topic. Yet, it was flexible enough to open for a deeper understanding of the informants´ responses. Each interview lasted on average 60 minutes, which offered enough time for a thorough discussion and a considerable amount of raw data.

Using a qualitative research design and semi-structured interviews made it feasible to go in-depth on the research question by providing insights into the viewpoints of master´s students regarding the complex dynamics of societal change. This approach allowed for a nuanced

exploration of individuals as actors within these dynamics. The presented topic of this thesis is broad and potentially ambitious, encompassing individuals, society, change and degrowth. Still the interconnection of these themes, supported by relevant literature and theories, opens for a contribution to new understandings of the social and cultural dimensions of societal change and degrowth.

3.2 Degrowth initiatives

Prior to the data collection, it became clear that the concept of degrowth can be challenging to grasp. Therefore, expecting informants to be familiar with degrowth was unreasonable. Following this reflection, the empirical data collection did not go forward with a conceptual understanding of degrowth, but rather used the concept of changing consumption habits to develop examples of change that were presented to the informants. This resulted in two degrowth-inspired hypothetical initiatives to downscale two mass industries: beef and fast fashion, which were presented to the master´s students during interviews:

1. To downscale the beef industry, how do master´s students stand on the removal of beef at NTNU campuses, where the alternative would be vegetarian food.
2. To downscale the fast fashion industry, how do master´s students stand on two different ways of limiting fast fashion. One way is more directly affecting consumers, while the other directly affects the companies.

To elaborate shortly on the second initiative, where the informants were presented two ways of limiting fast fashion. The alternative that directly affect consumers were exemplified by implementing a quota of how many fast fashion garments a consumer could buy during a month or a year. The alternative that affects companies were exemplified by a higher tax, likely resulting in increased prices on fast fashion, presumably making consumers want to buy less. The idea of presenting these two ways were to see how the informants responded to two alternatives that had different pathways to the same goal: limiting consumption.

The two initiatives are based on the need to downscale mass production and consumption of beef and fast fashion. Moving on with this thesis, the initiatives will be named: the beef initiative and the fast fashion initiative.

These initiatives were developed on the hypothesis that changing consumption habits of such products should be possible for individuals to envision as a reality. Moreover, the informants are likely to have some relation to the consumption of products from these two industries, like hamburgers or a new sweater from H&M. Envisioning a completely transformed society might seem less realistic than reflecting on more specific changes, such as removing beef in the campus cafeteria or restricting fast fashion purchases. The scope of this thesis is limited to 30 ECTS, which is why the degrowth initiatives presented here is very simplified. With a larger scope, the thesis could dive deeper into how such initiatives would have a chain reaction through supply chains, but the focus in my study is on the social dynamics of society and individuals in the context of change and not the practical implementation of degrowth in societies or through supply chains.

3.3 Sampling informants and preparing for interviews

The process of sampling informants entailed an assessment of feasibility, accessibility and likeliness of this thesis being a contributor to filling knowledge gaps in the social and cultural aspect within degrowth as a concept. The decision of having master´s students as informants was influenced by several factors. Firstly, as a student myself, there is larger accessibility to students across diverse fields of study. This made the process of sampling informants for empirical data collection highly feasible. Second, master´s students from various fields of study as informants, represent a perspective that is both youthful and highly educated, as well as the potential they have of becoming future decision-makers. This can be useful for future sustainability planning. Students being the future workforce makes the perception of increased educational focus on sustainability interesting as they are likely to take part in an evolving society influenced by environmental degradation and technological development.

There are a few factors that makes the present generation of students intriguing, as they are poised to play a role in addressing issues that are increasingly coming to the forefront, such as climate change. Also, the decision to focus on master´s students was based on an expectation

that students at this level has a developed reflexivity typically associated with higher education. While this is a conscious assumption from my side, it is arguably more applicable to master´s students than for example bachelor´s students.

Master´s students today are currently being educated in a time where sustainability has growing importance, which are likely influencing their perceptions of a sustainable future. Also, they are the future members of the workforce. Master´s students from various disciplines represent a cohort that are likely to enter various professional domains, making their stance on the relation between individual behavior and societal changes particularly interesting. It is especially interesting to see how master´s students view degrowth strategies, as degrowth is interdisciplinary. Master´s students are encouraged to critically analyze complex issues, which make them interesting to use as informants in this research project. This decision allows for an exploration of the multifaceted dynamics of individual behavior, societal transformation, and sustainable development.

Table 1 provides an overview of the seven informants with information about the fields of study and the gender attached to each study. Figure 6 shows the distribution of the informants´ gender in percentage. Table 1 and Figure 6 is included to give a better picture of who the informants are while keeping them anonymous, to ensure a better understanding and overview of the sample.

Table 1: Count and distribution of gender across fields of study.

Count and Distribution of gender across fields of study
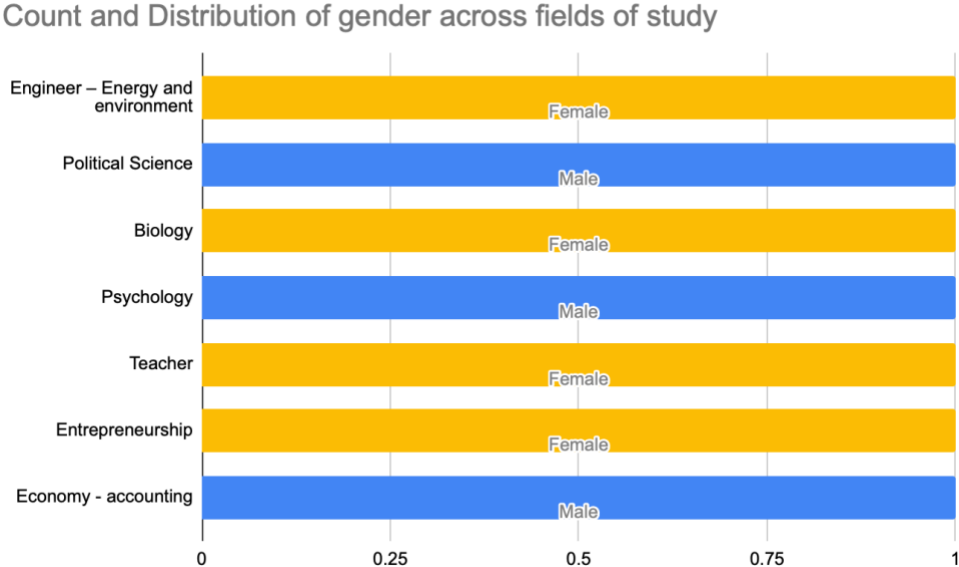
Prepared by Stuenes, I. (2024).

As seen in Table 1, none of the master´s students come from the same discipline. They were strategically chosen to gather empirical data from various fields of knowledge. The rationale behind this choice is the potential to uncover a broader range of viewpoints on degrowth initiatives by sampling informants within diverse areas of expertise. Based on the information in Table 1, the informants will be referred to as "engineering student", "political science student", "biology student" etc. in the upcoming analysis.

Figure 6: Distribution of the informants´ gender.

Distribution of gender

Male
42.9%

Female
57.1%
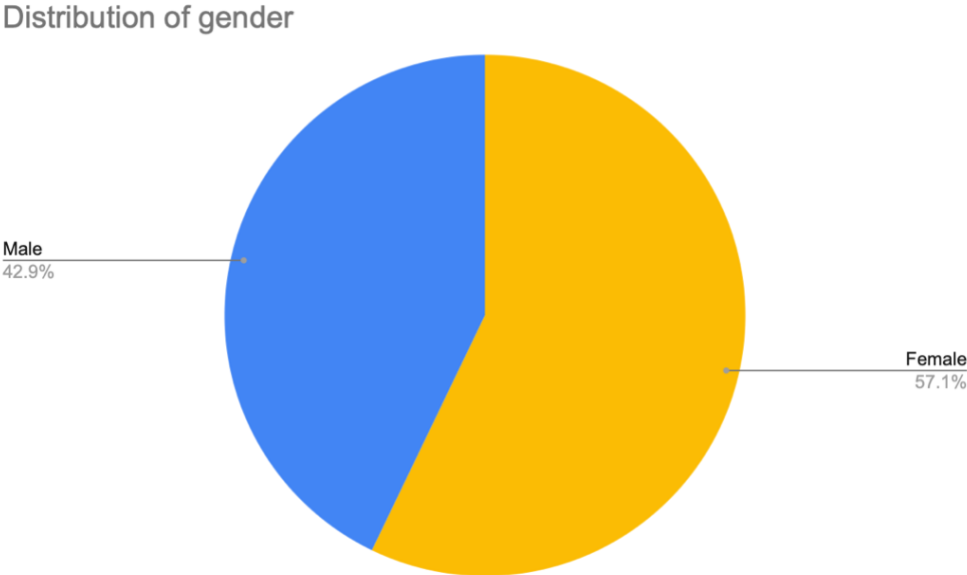
Prepared by Stuenes, I. (2024).

Table 1 shows that the sampling consists of four women and three men from different fields of study. Figure 6 provides another overview by presenting the gender distribution as percentages. The variety of gender within the sample was not purposive, as I did not predetermine the specific number of men and women in the study. It is important to note that the variables of gender and field of study are not significant for the analysis. However, it is necessary to provide a clear picture of who the informants are and to demonstrate the diversity within the sample.

The strategy for sampling informants was a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The choice of purposive sampling was based on the intention of using master's students at NTNU in Trondheim between the age of 25 and 30 years old. This specific age group, university and geographical location was targeted to ensure constant variables between several fluctuating factors. There was no criterion that the students should be familiar with or have clear viewpoints on degrowth, and I had no insight in their viewpoints on the topic prior to interviews. The sampling process had characteristics of snowball sampling (Hay & Cope, 2021), as my network was used to identify potential participants. Through leveraging on my connections in academia, six out of seven informants were recruited. The method of snowball sampling involved asking peers to recommend candidates from various fields who might be interested in participating, thereby ensuring variety in the informant group.

The final participant that was not reached through network connections, was sourced through an outreach to NTNU Handelshøyskolen via their official e-mail address. After several referrals, I received interest from an informant within the field of economy. Initially, this study aimed to sample 6-8 participants, and seven interviews provided sufficient data for analysis. I made a strategic consideration to avoid using my closest relations as interpersonal dynamics might lead to biased data and compromise the neutrality and integrity of the study.

Each interview begun in an informal context through casual conversation to cultivate a relaxed environment that better facilitate for open dialogue (Hay & Cope, 2021). Prior to recording, the students were asked about their own studies and other light-hearted topics to ease any potential discomfort associated with an interview set-up that involves recording. Around 5-10 minutes were consciously used to ensure that the informant was settled before transitioning into the interview starting with the introductory questions.

3.4 Methods for coding and analysis

This section explains the methods used to systemize and analyze the empirical data that was collected for this thesis project. The process involved a rigorous approach using inductive coding and thematic analysis (Hay & Cope, 2021). The aim of an inductive thematic analysis was to systematically examine the data to identify recurring patterns, themes, and underlying concepts that were of relevance to the research question (Hay & Cope, 2021).

Using audio recording during interviews provided an opportunity to go through the interviews in detail during the transcription phase. After transcribing all seven interviews, the transcripts went through a translation process. The translation was ensured to be done as directly as possible to avoid the mistake of including data that were not present in the Norwegian version. This was done manually by reading the Norwegian version side by side to the English version. The inductive coding process started after transcription and translation of the raw data. Before beginning the coding process, research on coding and analysis techniques were done to find the most effective way to systemize the data in a rigorous manner. It was clear that thematic analysis and inductive coding would be the best approach based on the nature of the qualitative empirical data from semi-structured interviews (Hay & Cope, 2021).

The next step was to do an inductive open coding technique where the transcripts were read and re-read to ensure familiarity with the content and to avoid missing relevant data. Following the repetitive reading of transcripts, some recurring themes and patterns were identified, but not yet systemized. The themes were:

- The value of individual freedom.
- Collective responsibility and awareness.
- Human nature of self-interest.
- The influence of herd mentality.

Moving on with these topics, further coding was done by manually color coding the data, highlighting recurring topics, direct quotes and differences and similarities in viewpoints among the informants. The colors were green for similar viewpoints, yellow for different viewpoints, pink for direct, relevant quotes, and blue for themes and viewpoints that are connected to the theoretical framework. Highlighting the empirical data that goes with theory was a strategic choice to ensure a smoother process when writing the discussion chapter. This approach facilitated organizing and categorizing the data, to enable a better thematic analysis.

Notably, the influence of various factors on the students´ viewpoints was considered, such as media consumption and political orientation. The students were briefly asked about these factors during the interviews. While these factors do not constitute a significant part of the analysis, they were included during the data collection to demonstrate the consideration of the

variety of influencing factors that shape an individual's perspective on various subjects. Media consumption and political orientation is presumed to be some of the more influential factors among young adults, explaining why these were chosen over other influences.

To manage the large amount of data collected, reducing the data became necessary. The reduction process happened simultaneously as the coding process, as the categorization of themes and viewpoints naturally condensed and synthesized the data. During the coding process, irrelevant information was set aside to ensure a more focused analysis. To find the irrelevant information, it was measured against its usefulness when discussing the research question. The coding and analysis processes were not done with any software or analytical tools, because of a lack of time to get familiar with a new data program. However, the process was ensured to be rigorous by doing it manually. The only data tool that was used during the data collection process was Nettskjema.no and UiO´s Dictaphone app to record, store and listen to the interview audio. When using pen and paper to systemize the data, a mind map of each theme was made. Further, direct quotes were drawn from the interviews and connected to the chosen themes, before incorporated in the thesis.

The chosen approach to systemize and analyze the data was guided by the nature of the research question and the data. Given the exploratory character of this thesis, and the focus on understanding master´s students´ perspectives, an inductive, open coding approach was considered appropriate. It allowed for detailed insights and the color coding complemented the process of thematic analysis and saw connections between theory and empirical data. Seeing this, the methods used for a critical analysis in this thesis were selected to facilitate rigorous research.

3.5 Limits of transferability and the study´s credibility

As mentioned, this thesis project aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on sustainable development, by recognizing and studying the interconnection between individuals and society. This interconnection gains increased significance during a time that calls for structural changes to mitigate the ongoing ecological crisis. So far in this thesis, it has been made clear that to achieve sustainable transformation, knowledge within the social dimension of change is a critical factor. This research project contributes by providing insights into how

master´s students as young adults view the hypothetical implementation of initiatives inspired by degrowth to interpret social responses to change.

Throughout the process of carrying out this study, ensuring rigor has been a high priority to build trustworthiness and academic integrity (Hay & Cope, 2021). Interpreting empirical data is a responsibility. To maintain neutrality, the strategy has been to acknowledge my own biases and positionality as both the writer and interpreter. Throughout this study, it has been important to ensure academic integrity, and especially important to maintain professionalism in sampling participants through my student network. This consideration led to the choice of avoiding any close relations as informants. Because of this decision, no students from my own program were chosen.

This thesis project does not claim any definitive statements of the feasibility of initiating degrowth or degrowth-inspired initiatives, as that would require perspectives from several knowledge fields. In exploring the perspectives of master´s students aged 25 to 30 at NTNU in Trondheim, the study maintains some constant variables, but acknowledges the positionality of the informants, and influential factors like educational background, political orientation, social media consumption and other variables that shape viewpoints. The methodology was designed to map these inconsistent variables through the interviews, to explore the participants´ media habits and political orientation. This mapping was done to get a broader image of the informants´ positionality when analyzing their answers. Another consideration of this thesis´ findings is that people´s viewpoints naturally change over time. When the informants' step into other phases of life, such as work or becoming a parent, value systems and beliefs are more likely to change. Even so, the findings of these young adults´ viewpoints at this phase is still valuable as it gives an insight into some of the thought processes that all together shape our understanding of individual behavior.

Choosing young adults' viewpoints on initiatives that downscale the beef and fast fashion industries gives a more concentrated inquiry, but the limit of transferability is debatable. There are a significant number of industries that are deeply integrated into the culture of mass consumerism. As this study has explored the social dimension related to changes in consumption of products within the beef and fast fashion industries, there might be a level of transferability towards changes in other high emission industries. For instance, industries that support private jets, single-use plastic and long-distance supply (Hickel, 2020). The complex

dynamics of the social dimension of change, with individual behavior and all the factors that influence individual perspectives are acknowledged.

Educational background becomes a natural referral point as the informants are master´s students, however it is not a factor that alone explain viewpoints towards a future. The qualitative approach of this study attempts to capture an impression of current perceptions among the seven young adults. To some extent, the findings from this study can be applied to a broader group of young adults, but it is debatable how far it can be extended. On the one hand, the supporting literature and theories employed in this study signifies an increased openness and interest in alternative future, that can justify the transferability of the findings. On the other hand, current political instabilities around the world may engage young adults in diverse interest groups with varying political orientation and levels of engagement in social movements, which in turn can shape large differences in worldviews. This argument reinforces the complexity of individual behavior, challenging the predictability of social responses.

For more rigorous research, this inquiry can be expanded through quantitative methods to cover several demographics to enhance the transferability and rigor of findings. Quantitative studies could complement and validate the initial insights gained in this study, creating a more comprehensive understanding of how young adults view the relation between individual behavior and societal change when transitioning towards sustainability. Still, this study´s credibility is rooted in the qualitative approach that ensured in-depth exploration of the master´s students' viewpoints that are valuable to better understand the reasoning behind responses towards initiatives for change.

3.6 Ethical considerations and positionality

The issue of ethical consideration is a necessity when the research project involves personal data (Hay & Cope, 2021). Moreover, several ethical considerations were made throughout the research project to ensure the well-being and confidentiality of the participants. Before sampling any informants or conducting interviews, information about the research project was sent to Sikt containing a simplified interview guide and letter of consent to be reviewed. The Sikt application held information about what sorts of personal data that would be collected.

Sikt was informed that the data collection would require general categories of personal data such as name, contact information and the informant´s voice on a recorder.

The project includes one special category of personal data, which is political orientation. Participants have been informed of both categories of personal data, as well as them giving consent to obtain this data. See Appendix B for the letter that were given to the informants. In this letter, the participants were also made aware of their rights to withdraw from the project, receive insights into their data, and that the data is deleted as soon as the research project is finalized. Anonymity was also assured (Hay & Cope, 2021), noting that only their field of study would be disclosed, and the only identifier would be their voice on the recorder, only meant for transcription purposes. Before the interviews began, all informants were asked to sign the letter of consent. The letter of consent granted permission for their participation, audio recording, translating data from Norwegian to English, and analysis.

Regarding the audio recording, data storage was considered. The interviews were recorded on the Dictaphone app made by UiO, which is directly connected to Nettskjema.no, where the recordings are stored. The recordings were not shared outside of Nettskjema.no. The transcription documents were locally stored on my computer where only I have access. Sikt replied that the research project was following privacy legislation, which started the process of recruiting informants. During the recruitment process, I maintained confidentiality by avoiding disclosing the name of my participants during conversations with peers about the data collection process. Prior to the interviews, the participants were sent a letter about the research project. The letter included general information about the purpose of the project, who is responsible, what it means for them to participate, and measures for privacy and confidentiality as well as their rights as participants.

I have been aware of my own positionality throughout the research project. This master´s degree is heavily focused on sustainable development, which naturally means that I am interested in sustainability and more open towards alternatives like degrowth. My academic interests are also leaning towards culture and social aspects which has led to the interest of filling a knowledge gap within this area. On a personal level, I follow a vegetarian diet, which has likely influenced my choice of a degrowth strategy that focuses on downscaling the beef industry. As I have previously participated in activism against the meat industry, this is a case that I am attached to. However, I am aware of my own biases and have actively maintained objectivity throughout this thesis. I made sure to be neutral during interviews, and reacted neither positively nor negatively on the informants´ responses surrounding the topics I am

personally invested in. Being aware of my positionality has been important as the goal is to finalize a research project that is contributive, objective and holds academic integrity. I wish for the reader as well to be aware of this, as all people are biased in some ways, where ignoring one's positionality only puts the academic work at risk.

Chapter four: Understanding viewpoints on degrowth initiatives

This chapter combines empirical findings from the data collection with an analysis of young adults´ viewpoints on degrowth initiatives, seeking to explore the relationship between individual behavior and societal changes. As a reminder, the guiding research question for this thesis project is: "How do young adults stand on the relation between individual behavior and societal changes, exemplified by degrowth initiatives?". The empirical data revealed recurring themes that demonstrate the informants' reflections, providing insights into contemporary social viewpoints on hypothetical degrowth initiatives that were made for the purpose of this study: the beef initiative and the fast fashion initiative. The purpose of this study is as previously stated to contribute to the sustainability discourse by investigating the social dimension of change. The next section shortly discusses modern mindsets through the lenses of dualism and capitalism, incorporating empirical data. This is followed by an analysis of four recurring themes: individual freedom to choose, collective responsibility and awareness, human nature of self-interest and the influence of herd mentality. Then, a broader analysis on the acceptance of change is presented, and lastly the concept of degrowth is discussed without any empirical data.

4.1 Modern mindsets

The theories and concepts presented in Chapter two was selected to better understand how modern mindsets have developed in the growth paradigm and capitalist economies, facilitating an analysis of social responses to societal changes that influence consumerist behavior. Degrowth has been presented as the example of a systemic shift and a socio-ecological transformation, which is a highly political concept (Pichler, 2023), but this thesis project prioritizes its social dimensions. Through this lens, the following analysis provides a nuanced understanding of societal changes and individual behavior as an interconnected relation that can reinforce each other in the pursuit of sustainability.

The philosophy of dualism and industrial capitalism with the expansion of market economies are factors that can reflect modern mindsets (Hickel, 2020). These phenomena provide a lens to understand how the growth paradigm has taken root and why modern society struggles to acknowledge the severity of environmental issues. Historically, capitalism has perceived

nature as a resource to exploit, and this mindset is evident in the lack of sufficient action against environmental degradation. Descartes' dualism, as discussed by Hickel (2020), suggests that environmental degradation is difficult to view as mutually detrimental to society.

Dualism, capitalism, and Rachel Carson's publication "Silent Spring" illustrate how the relationship between society and nature has been reconceptualized in modern mindsets, viewing nature as separate from society (Hickel, 2020; McMichael & Weber, 2022, p.171). Capitalist ideologies foster perceptions of nature as an exploitable resource external to societal values, making it relevant to explore how lifestyles within the growth paradigm influence consumption habits. During the empirical data collection, it became clear that the master's students' viewpoints are shaped by this artificial separation of nature and society. When asked about degrowth initiatives, many informants expressed concerns about the loss of revenue in targeted companies as consumption levels decrease. For instance, regarding the beef initiative, one political science student remarked, "I would go elsewhere to eat, and the canteen would lose revenue" (political science student). This response highlights the challenge of shifting mindsets ingrained in the growth paradigm, emphasizing the need to address these perceptions to foster more sustainable behaviors.

About half of the informant group raised questions about how the loss of revenue would be mitigated, highlighting the relevance of discussing the concept of growth and the dualist mindset in the theory chapter. The informants´ questions and concerns about revenue loss can connect to the dependence on growth that seems rooted in modern mindsets shaped by the growth paradigm. It is debatable whether the capitalist mindset fosters more resistance to initiatives aimed at downscaling high-emission products, which naturally will lead to revenue loss. The key issue is whether eco-facts and the growing urgency of sustainability can infiltrate modern mindsets and shift the focus towards other aspects than economic growth.

To make things grow is inherently something people strive for, but in many cases, it is rooted in capitalism, and this type of growth is different from that of living organisms. As one of the master students stated: "The way we think of growth can´t be said to only come from a capitalist mindset, as the idea of plants growing and humans growing up is also growth, but not related to money at all" (psychology student). The psychology student highlighted the importance of not using economic systems to explain everything that we are and how we think as human beings. This idea is also supported by Hickel (2020, p. 23), where he

emphasized how nature is self-limiting where "organisms grow to a point of maturity, and then maintain a state of healthy equilibrium". The so-called "problem" with capitalism is its core principle of ensuring unlimited growth and continuous profit, which from one viewpoint is more radical, utopic, and extreme than any other economic system (Hickel, 2020). Economic growth does not seem to have a matured self-limitation. This viewpoint is based on the reality that the continuous growth mindset is driving our ecological system to the ground (Crutzen, 2002; Schneider et al., 2010; Latouche, 2009).

4.2 The value of individual freedom

When discussing the two degrowth initiatives of downscaling beef and fast fashion during the interviews, the importance of preserving individual freedom of choice was a recurring theme. The informants emphasized the significance of personal freedom in dietary and fashion decisions. Notably, there were disparities among the students, particularly regarding the acceptance or resistance of removing beef from the university canteen. One informant, who expressed strong resistance to the initiative, stated: "I am very negative about that. It´s a personal matter of my conviction about choice. If people want to eat meat; they should have the option to do so" (political science student). Conversely, the biology student responded positively to the beef initiative, considering it a good strategy to downscale the beef industry.

Regarding the fast fashion initiative, the psychology student viewed it as a significant deprivation of freedom: "Clothes are something many people care about, and it is largely tied to identity, which makes restrictions on it feel like a major deprivation of freedom" (psychology student). The engineering student highlighted that fast fashion allows people with limited financial freedom to own a variety of clothes and express their identity. However, she also acknowledged that fast fashion´s short-lived trends foster a collector mentality and contribute to mass consumerism. On this point, all seven informants agreed that limiting fast fashion through higher taxes on fast fashion companies, which would likely result in higher clothing prices for consumers, can be a suitable approach. They all viewed this initiative as less intrusive to individual freedom compared to imposing a quota on consumers, as it does not directly restrict personal liberty.

Prior to conducting the interviews, it was to some degree expected that all seven informants would agree on the solution of limiting fast fashion through higher taxes on fast fashion companies. The fast fashion initiative was designed in two parts to determine whether informants preferred the quota solution or were willing to pay more for clothes to avoid direct limitations on their consumer habits. It is a clear finding that implementing a quota is not favorable, as it received only negative feedback. The fast fashion initiative presented to the informants can be compared to the Future in Our Hands campaign, as referenced in the theory chapter, which encourages people to only buy five new garments in a year (Framtiden i våre hender, n.d.). This comparison reveals an interesting contrast, where the campaign represents a self-imposed quota as an approach towards sustainable consumption of textile.

It would be insightful to see how informants had responded to the Future in Our Hands challenge, as this approach might foster inner motivation that is more lasting than a governmental-imposed quota. A challenge that includes collective efforts can trigger competitive instincts and promote feelings of mastery, which again, fosters inner motivation (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005). The psychology student emphasized the importance of inner motivation to ensure a behavior that lasts: "Nobody likes to be told what to do" (psychology student). This finding shows how individuals need to feel like they are the ones making the decisions. Unfortunately, I discovered the Future in Our Hands campaign too late in the research process, which may have given a different outcome of empirical findings if the informants were asked about it.

As the Future in Our Hands campaign can be seen as one way of nudging individual behavior into more sustainable consumption habits, further research could explore whether self-imposed limitations are more socially accepted than structural limitations. The following quote from the psychology student can be argued to support this sentiment of self-imposed limitations being more accepted:

"Removing beef from NTNU campus is a deprivation of freedom. All deprivation of freedom is about existentialism, and it can lead to lower well-being and less motivation. Self-determination is important, if you haven't chosen it yourself, it´s harder to maintain long-term motivation" (psychology student).

Moving on, some informants discussed the potential for riots in response to the degrowth initiatives, as they come forward as too forced upon consumers. Regarding the beef initiative, the biology student predicted that many could potentially become anti-vegetarian and eat even more meat as a form of protest. Additionally, the entrepreneurship student stated: "The initiative of removing beef from NTNU campuses can potentially create a polarization between vegetarians and meat-eaters" (entrepreneurship student). The engineering student was initially positive about the beef-initiative, but still acknowledged some potential challenges:

"I think it will be easier for people to make healthier choices when it´s available. A challenge would be that those who do not like vegetarian food might opt for unhealthier foods, like ultra-processed option that also feeds into another unsustainable industry" (engineering student).

This last quote from the engineering student relates to how choice architecture can guide people into specific behaviors, like making healthier food choices when they are available (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). However, the empirical findings show most negative responses that arise from removing beef as an alternative, including anti-vegetarianism, riots and a consumer shift towards other unsustainable industries. These comments, along with concerns about imposing quotas on fast fashion or fully removing beef, demonstrates how forced behavior are likely to meet resistance as they can be perceived as overly paternalistic. If the initiatives were inspired by libertarian paternalism, alternatives would be available, preserving the individual´s freedom to choose (Hausman & Welch, 2010). Nevertheless, there is still a need to shift behaviors towards more sustainable practices, underscoring the relevance of ethical nudging and choice architecture that leads consumers to make better choices without infringing on their sense of liberty.

Based on the informants´ responses under this theme, a main finding from the interviews is that individual liberty needs to be carefully balanced with initiatives for change. This suggests that implementing changes thoughtfully and gradually is essential to ensuring a lasting and broader shift in the end. Ultimately, the recurring theme of individual freedom reveals a tension between the desire for personal autonomy as consumers, and environmental imperatives that require more collective action. Seen through the lens of libertarian paternalism and the Liberty Principle (Sunstein, 2014), these perspectives reflect the natural

human need for autonomy. At the same time, there is need for a balance, where people can have the freedom to choose but might be nudged into making choices for sustainable, collective action.

There is arguably a tension between guiding individual behavior towards the desired outcome of sustainability and simultaneously respecting freedom. This underscores the need for ethical decision-making in the context of increased focus on sustainability. Further, both the critique and opportunities of libertarian paternalism offered by Hausman and Welch (2010) emphasize the necessity of having a balance between nudging behavior and preserving feelings of freedom. Here, the Liberty Principle serves as an ethical framework that advocates for democratic decision-making. The challenge lies in coordinating behavioral freedom to avoid riots, and the need to address the pressing ecological crisis as a result of human activities. Navigating these issues highlights the complexities of societal change and the need for a nuanced understanding of both individual behavior and structural changes.

4.3 Collective action and awareness

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that the informants were aware of their roles in society. When asked about the roles of master´s students as the future workforce in the task of achieving sustainability (see Appendix A, question 24), most reflected that their awareness had increased with the growing focus on the global climate crisis (Baskin, 2015; Crutzen, 2002). The students appeared well-informed about the climate and inequality challenges the world is facing, indicating that their respective fields of study have increasingly incorporated these critical issues. Additionally, the informants were relatively aware of their own consumption patterns, often mentioning their personal sustainable habits such as not eating meat, thrift shopping or reducing plastic use.

The role and impact of individual choices within consumption are difficult to pinpoint, raising questions about the reciprocal relationship between individual and society. Whether personal choices drive societal changes or societal changes influence personal choices is a challenging consideration. It relates to Giddens´ (1984) structuration theory which, in a simplified explanation, suggests that both society and individuals are active agents, not passive products of their circumstances. This perspective makes the role and power of collective action

particularly interesting to explore. In all the seven interviews, the importance of collective action and spreading awareness was a recurring theme. As one informant made a point of, individual behavior can have a ripple effect: "When individuals change their habits, it will have an effect upwards" (engineering student), creating a form of collective action. Determining whether changes in habits arise from structural initiatives to downscale industries or from inner motivation is challenging. However, this distinction is important to view when trying to understand the influences and origins of change, shedding light on the intricate relation between individual behavior and societal changes.

The value of spreading awareness became a central topic of discussion during the interviews. The teacher student highlighted the benefits of downscaling the beef industry and stated:

"If we move towards vegetarian food, it´s good for the climate and health in general. Raising awareness of the benefits of change will be more helpful than continuing with crisis exaggeration and focusing on the negatives that push the need of change. Many people struggle to grasp how bad the situation is, and since this information is uncomfortable, they distance themselves from it. Therefore, it is better to promote the benefits of these changes" (teacher student).

This last quote from the teacher student shows that there is need for spreading awareness to both make people understand the severity of the ecological crisis and the benefits of sustainable living. An example of spreading awareness came from the entrepreneurship student who said that the school she went to before starting the university, had a meat free day each week, as she noted: "(…) the meat free week were complimented with information about the meat industry and how much emissions and water use that were saved by eating a vegetarian meal over meat" (entrepreneurship student).

Moving on, many of the interviews brought attention to the influence of social norms, culture and generational behaviors regarding the awareness of the need for change. The entrepreneurship student pointed out: "Young people are perhaps more aware of how our choices influence others, while older generations look more towards what affects themselves and their own immediate surroundings" (entrepreneurship student). This quote suggests that there is a generational shift in values towards sustainability, and a shift in social norms. Saying that young people are more aware of how choices have an impact beyond immediate

surroundings, can be explained by the technological development and the increased connections across the globe, also called time space compression as explained in the theory chapter (Harvey, 1990). The generational divide highlights how complex the acceptance to change can be as different age groups perceive their behavior and change processes differently.

The economy student viewed age and generations as important factors that influence individuals in accepting or not accepting change:

"(…) younger generations today are more receptive to information than the older generation. Probably because we have grown up with the internet and advanced technologies. Younger generations are perhaps more likely to find themselves in an echo chamber due to social media algorithms that adapt to their interests. (…) social media algorithms and echo chambers might lead to critical thinking becoming rarer" (economy student).

This observation points to the dual influence of technology on younger generations. While advanced technologies and the internet enhance information accessibility, they also create echo chambers through social media algorithms, potentially limiting critical thinking. This dual influence suggests that younger generations may be more informed and receptive to new information, yet simultaneously more susceptible to confirmation bias and reduced critical thinking.

Collectively, these quotes reveal the complex interplay between generational differences, cultural conditioning, and individual experiences in shaping viewpoints on change. They emphasize the need to consider these factors when designing and implementing sustainable initiatives. Understanding that younger generations may be more open to change due to their greater exposure to global issues and technological influences, while also recognizing the potential limitations imposed by echo chambers, can help tailor more effective strategies for fostering sustainable behaviors across different age groups.

Under this theme of collective responsibility and awareness, it is evident that the informants have a sense of their societal roles, especially as an actor in the sustainability shift. The discussions during interviews mainly revolved around the need to increase awareness to foster collective action. The informants emphasized that individuals have a power to influence broader societal shifts, and the spreading of eco-facts can create better visibility and

acceptance of sustainable initiatives, which in turn foster a collective shift in behavior. Most importantly, the informants recognized the necessity of having an integrated approach that combines individual behavior and a systemic shift for lasting transformation. This realization among the students aligns with theories and concepts that advocate for the interplay of individuals and society as shown by O´Brien (2018) and Giddens (1984), in the theory chapter.

The empirical data so far in this chapter suggest that young adults are conscious of their role and connection with society and the capitalist system they grew up in. It also suggests that the student´s recognize that sustainability is only achieved if the effort goes beyond individual behavior and includes a coordinated collective effort. When weaving together the viewpoints of master´s students on this discourse, there is a nuanced understanding of potential pathways toward a societal transformation.

4.4 The human nature of self-interest

As discussed in the theory chapter, the critiques aimed at initiatives for a cleaner future often come from those who benefit from mass-producing industries (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005). Such attitudes reflect Descartes´ dualistic philosophy, underscoring a prevalent notion among many that economic growth/society is more valuable than environmental health/nature (Hickel, 2020). This perspective suggest that nature and society are not interconnected or equally valuable. The human nature of self-interest can be helpful when trying to explain these attitudes.

Self-interest was a recurring theme in all seven interviews, particularly regarding the need of making sustainable decisions in daily life and changing habits that are unsustainable. The students openly discussed the difficulties of aligning personal self-interest with societal and environmental (collective) needs. A tension between self-interest and the greater good became evident. Also, all the students acknowledged a skepticism among people about changing habits. One student shared a thought on this matter:

"People are selfish by nature and would not want to take that chance and shoot in the dark for a brighter future when they are already in a good position, and must think about their own

wallet, children, house etc. (…) "It´s difficult for people in general to change. This may be the biggest challenge in changing people´s consumption habits and lifestyles even though awareness has increased" (political science student).

This quote underscores the human tendency to prioritize immediate personal benefits over uncertain long-term gains, particularly when individuals are in a comfortable position. The perceived risks and sacrifices associated with change often outweigh potential future benefits, making sustainable initiatives requiring significant lifestyle changes more likely to be met with resistance. The viewpoints from the political science student emphasizes a gap between awareness and action. Despite being aware of environmental issues, it is difficult to alter established consumption habits as the behavior is ingrained, and the comfort and convenience of current lifestyles creates a resistance to change. For the achievement of sustainability to be realistic, it is essential to address these barriers among individuals by aligning self-interest with environmental health. For instance, having an incentive for making the change, new policies and behavioral nudges can make sustainable options more attractive for people.

The informants of this study indicated that they would need compelling reasons to embrace changes in their behavior. One informant mentioned an existing example of an effective incentive for making a sustainable choice: the incentives for consumers to purchase electrical vehicles (EVs), such as Tesla. EV owners benefit from perks like free parking and access to bus and taxi lane. Although the mining of minerals required for EV batteries raises significant environmental and ethical concerns, the main take away is the effectiveness of creating incentives that encourage desired behaviors while simultaneously serving self-interest.

While self-interest drives economic activity, it often conflicts with the goals of staying within planetary boundaries. The discussion should not focus on how humans should redefine their self-interest and change their unsustainable behaviors accordingly, as this may not be feasible. Instead, the focus should be on the capitalist system that nudges individual behavior toward activities that drives economic growth. As the Brundtland Commission stated, economic activity and sustainable development should coexist (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Although economic activity is not solely responsible for environmental degradation, the chain reaction within economic activity – demand, production, mass consumption, global production chains, shipping, mining and deforestation – are significant

contributors. Therefore, the focus should be on changing the structures surrounding production and consumption patterns. This is where degrowth can be a viable alternative.

Degrowth becomes relevant when debating the difficulties and seemingly impossibilities of changing production and consumption systems. Degrowth aims to align well-being with planetary health by downscaling mass industries that contribute to environmental issues (Hickel, 2020; Schneider et. al., 2010; Kallis et al., 2018; Latouche, 2009). As the political science student previously highlighted, it is difficult for people to change, a sentiment that were echoed by the rest of the informants in different formulations. In the interplay of individuals and society, it seems like the necessary change must happen within societal structures. Two informants noted that people are adaptable beings and have recently become accustomed to a mass consumption society. On the opposite, the economy student disagreed on people´s ability to adapt, highlighting the difficulty of altering established lifestyles due to the comfort and luxury associated with current habits:

"Once people have become accustomed to a specific way of life or a luxury, it takes great effort to do something different. For example, beef can be such a luxury for some. In that way, removing something entirely seem like a bad idea, but downscaling seems more likely to be accepted as people can have the freedom to maintain their standard" (economy student).

The viewpoint from the economy student indicates that the beef initiative presented to informants in this thesis is a bad idea, but downscaling seems more likely to be accepted as people can have the freedom to maintain their standard. Consciously using the values of libertarian paternalism and choice architecture in the NTNU canteen by placing appealing vegetarian meals closer to consumers than the beef (Hausman & Welch, 2010; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). These insights underscore the challenge of implementing drastic changes that might be perceived as a threat to personal standards of living. Instead, gradual approaches, such as downscaling rather than completely removing options, may be more acceptable as they allow individuals to retain their self-interest, sense of freedom and control over their choices. This perspective aligns with the broader theme of self-interest driving resistance to change, which is a key finding from the empirical data. The suggestion based on this finding is that a top-down approach with policies aimed at sustainability should consider implementing gradual changes to be more effective and lasting in the long run.

4.5 The influence of herd mentality

As stated in both the theory chapter and this chapter, choice architecture and nudging have proven as techniques that can be used to nudge consumers into making sustainable decisions (Hausman & Welch, 2010; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). Even though individual behavior can be complex, the human mind is still predictable (Reeson & Dunstall, 2009). Predictable behavior patterns are commonly used to navigate marketing strategies, making consumers buy more and further shaping individual behavior in a mass consumerism society (Reeson & Dunstall, 2009).

When a society's infrastructure and availability of options shape individual behavior, it suggests that changing the structures would consequently shape individual behavior. This aligns with the structuration theory that reflects on whether society shapes individuals or individuals shape society (Giddens, 1984). The concept of choice architecture and nudging are interesting dimensions within this debate of reinforcement, demonstrating that individual behavior is predictable and often influenced by the surrounding social environment. It connects to the influence of herd mentality in a social environment, which emerged as a recurring theme in the interviews. The psychology student and the biology student had two interesting viewpoints on herd mentality:

"What people perceive as socially acceptable and normal to do plays a significant role. Now, it is normative for young people in Norway to not eat meat. It has become a movement that has changed the norm among young people. If someone around you, do it, it is much more likely that you do it, to avoid being socially judged for being different. A kind of herd mentality" (psychology student).

"I think acceptance to change is dependent on a herd mentality, but also the feeling of shame. Introducing new sustainability initiatives can make some feel ashamed if they sit in a vegetarian canteen eating meat, or if they shop fast fashion when their friends started thrifting instead. I think people want to try to fit into societal norms. With a systematic change where everyone started doing something else, it might be easier to change oneself as well" (biology student).

These two quotes highlight how social norms and herd mentality significantly influence individual behavior. These quotes highlight how social norms and herd mentality significantly influence individual behavior. The psychology student notes that the norm among young people in Norway to avoid eating meat exemplifies how herd mentality can drive widespread behavioral change. This again emphasizes the ripple effect of individual behavior.

When a behavior becomes socially acceptable and normative, individuals are more likely to adopt it to avoid social judgment. The biology student expands on this by discussing the role of shame in reinforcing herd mentality. She suggests that new sustainability initiatives can leverage feelings of shame to promote behavioral change. If sustainable practices become the norm, individuals might feel social pressure to conform, thus facilitating broader acceptance of these practices. This highlights the interplay between social norms and individual behavior, where people can be motivated to act after societal expectations to avoid judgement and moral pointing fingers.

Erving Goffman´s (1959) dramaturgical approach, which suggest that individuals perform a role, as if they were actors on a stage, based on societal expectations and norms, can further explain this phenomenon. According to Goffman (1959), people want to act according to social norms to be accepted in their different roles in society. When exploring the interplay of individuals and society in the context of change, Goffman´s idea of comparing social life to a stage, where people put on a mask, can contribute to reflect on why people perhaps might make sustainable choices in public to be seen positively by other, while not maintaining those behaviors in private.

In the context of sustainability, one finding from this discussion is that leveraging herd mentality can be highly effective. Public campaigns, community role models, and educational programs that normalize sustainable practices can promote environmentally positive behaviors more effectively. By making sustainable choices socially desirable and aligning them with herd mentality, such measures can reduce the perception of personal sacrifice and increase collective acceptance.

Ultimately, the influence of herd mentality can play an important role in shaping individual behavior in response to societal changes. Understanding this dynamic can help design more effective sustainability initiatives that align individual self-interest with broader environmental goals. By leveraging herd mentality, policymakers can make sustainable

practices more socially acceptable and desirable, fostering the collective action that is required for a more sustainable future.

4.6 Acceptance or resistance of change

Achieving sustainability requires an understanding of the intricate relationship between societal structures and individual behavior (Alexander, 2013). This is important because societal changes are partly driven by collective actions, and individual behavior need to align with these societal changes for them to be successful and sustainable. This reflection is rooted in Giddens´ (1984) structuration theory, which suggests an interdependence and reciprocity between societal structures and individual agency. Additionally, Hamilton and Denniss (2005), emphasize the importance of fostering sustainable behavior over time through collective efforts that provide a sense of accomplishment, further motivating individuals to maintain these behaviors. This reciprocal relationship between individuals and society can gradually evolve, shaping more sustainable ways of living. While proposing a solution to address the interconnected development of individual behavior and societal structures might seem ambitious, efforts to address the knowledge gap in the social dimension of societal changes, such as degrowth, can be step in the right direction.

In the theory chapter, identity, interests, and values were highlighted as critical factors in understanding how collective agency emerges (Wright, 2020). Evaluating and emphasizing these factors can help identify which groups are likely to advocate for and accept societal change, which groups are content with the status quo, and which groups are likely to resist new initiatives. Although challenging to identify and map within civil society, these factors can serve as tools for better understanding and predicting how individuals and groups might respond to the implementation of new initiatives, such as degrowth. As the biology student emphasized the transformative impact of life experiences and education:

"You are influenced by your upbringing and what your parents believe, but when you move out, there is a process of self-creation. For example, education and new relations has changed many of the opinions I had before I moved away" (biology student).

This statement highlights the dynamic nature of identity formation, suggesting that although initial values and beliefs are shaped by upbringing, they can evolve significantly through education and new social interactions. This process of self-creation indicates that exposure to

diverse perspectives can lead to either acceptance or resistance of change. However, the teacher student pointed out the challenge of implementing societal changes due to the discomfort associated with changing personal habits:

"Many people are used to a comfortable lifestyle with access to everything (…) Even though the changes do not lower standards of living, I think that many people find it uncomfortable and inconvenient to undergo changes that require new habits. By nature, people tend to avoid discomfort" (teacher student).

The teacher student´s viewpoint underscores the psychological resistance to change, even when the changes are beneficial for the collective. A quote from Wright (2020, p. 65), already placed in the Preface of this thesis, emphasizes the challenge of changing the status quo: "It is always simpler to criticize the existing state of affairs than to propose a credible alternative". Resistance or acceptance to change, can be understood through the lens of identity, values and interests, which can be deeply rooted in individual lifestyles (Wright, 2020). A lifestyle characterized by convenience and abundance, often found in mass consumption societies, fosters an identity that values ease and comfort, with an interest in maintaining the status quo. Implementing societal changes, such as degrowth strategies, requires new habits for sustainable living, which can feel imposed and threaten the stability of one's identity, values, and interests.

Despite the long-term benefits, a natural human reaction is to avoid discomfort. This reflection can be aligned with Giddens´ (1984) structuration theory, which posits that individual actions and societal structures are mutually reinforcing. Established societal structures and norms that support a comfortable lifestyle in modern societies can also reinforce individual resistance to change. The political science student noted: "It´s difficult for people in general to change. This may be the biggest challenge in changing people´s consumption habits and lifestyles even though awareness has increased" (political science student). This sentiment was echoed by several informants, alongside contrasting views on human adaptability. Modern societies have quickly adapted to high mass consumption, suggesting that over time, they can also adapt to different standards of living. The economy student offered a different perspective:

"Once people have become accustomed to a specific way of life or a luxury, it takes great effort to do something different. For example, beef can be such a luxury for some. In that

way, removing something entirely seem like a bad idea, but downscaling seems more likely to be accepted as people can have the freedom to maintain their standard" (economy student).

The consensus across all seven interviews is that changes need to happen gradually. A viable solution to overcoming discomfort and resistance to change involves framing sustainable habits as additions to a lifestyle rather than sacrifices. For instance, promoting awareness of the health and environmental benefits of a plant-based diet or highlighting the creativity and uniqueness of sustainable clothing practices like sewing, thrift shopping, and redesigning can be effective. Moreover, positive reinforcement and nudging can play a crucial role (Hausman & Welch, 2010; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). By integrating degrowth initiatives into established structures, individuals can be guided towards new habits by making sustainable choices more appealing and easier to adopt. The findings emphasize the need for positive reinforcement that focuses on the advantages of adopting new behaviors rather than solely on the drawbacks of current practices.

4.7 Degrowth?

The discourse of degrowth naturally leads to fundamental questions of what post-growth societies will look like, where the capitalist system is replaced. These are questions regarding the economic structure, the existence of businesses, the global trade market, and work dynamics (Kallis et al., 2018). Further, what relation people should have to nature and the environment, not only individually but as a society. While degrowth is often seen as a utopian concept when attempting to answer these questions, it presents a critical counterpoint to the unsustainable trajectory of unlimited economic growth, which also becomes utopic at some point. Growth needs to be seen as a phase, something that is stabilizing and self-limiting (Duprez, 2022. The capitalist system of growth today is not designed to listen to signals of the environment to stop growing before the point of self-destruction is met (Hickel, 2020; Latouche, 2009).

When discussing the layers of degrowth, one is most relevant to the aim of this thesis. The layer of escaping the social imaginary that economic growth is the same thing as progress. If the goal is to increase social acceptance of radical, systemic change amongst civil society, a reconceptualization of growth might be necessary. Today´s general understanding and

motivation for growth is a dominant discourse that can make it harder for civil society to accept degrowth measures such as downscaling the beef industry and limiting fast fashion.

By highlighting the seriousness of overshooting planetary boundaries, the concept of degrowth is increasingly intriguing to explore. Although degrowth is not necessarily the only solution to this crisis, it advocates for the reduction of production and consumption and to prevent further damage. While degrowth can take part as a broader strategy to avoid reaching the irreversible point, there is a need for a versatile approach to address the interconnected issues of sustainability. The latest report by Richardson et al. (2023) showing that six out of nine planetary boundaries have been transgressed can function as an eco-fact that is meant to "wake people up". This need for balance between economic survival and environmental health can be seen as a critical juncture at this point. While modern societies are anchored in capitalist structures, shaping individual behavior in the societal system, they are at the same time bombarded with evidence that urges the need for change. However, Hickel (2020) emphasizes that the ultimate eco-fact may never come, and changing unsustainable ways of living needs to happen yesterday.

Adopting degrowth strategies, or implementing transformational changes in general, has its possibilities and challenges shaped by the complex interplay between individual behavior and societal structures. Within this interplay, the themes that are discussed here are modern mindsets, the value of individual freedom, collective responsibility and awareness, self-interest, herd mentality and the acceptance of societal change. The tension between individual freedom, societal structures and collective responsibility underscores one of the main challenges in changing unsustainable behavior patterns. There is a need to respect personal freedom at the same time as encouraging behavior that support collective benefits, which is a balance that requires well thought through incentives and ethical nudging.

In the discourse of sustainability and the need for change, topics like nudging, libertarian paternalism and choice architecture seem essential to familiarize with. As addressed in the theory chapter, these are concepts that safeguards the feeling of freedom among individuals, while getting desired behaviors. Decision-makers of structural changes in the name of sustainability will have to be aware of how individual behavior is affected by change. As understood from the literature on this topic, there are ways of nudging individual behavior into a desired direction to benefit the environment, without depriving the sense of freedom.

Libertarian paternalism can be a way of doing so. It is a sensitive topic, as it stirs in the feeling of freedom that historically has been a fight to achieve on most ends of the world.

This chapter has combined empirical findings with an analysis and explored the nuanced viewpoints of master´s students at NTNU Trondheim on the interconnections between individual behavior and societal change, using degrowth measures as the example. The analysis reveals that there are significant challenges when incorporating change in existing structures. It also reveals a challenge in determining the roles of society and individuals in its reinforcing, interconnected relation. However, it identifies viable possibilities of encouraging sustainable practices through strategic measures, such as community engagement, spreading awareness and align actions with self-interest and herd mentality. Most importantly, this analysis underscores the necessity understanding individual behavior and the social dynamics within systemic change processes. Civil society is naturally influenced by processes of societal change, since people are the ones experiencing the challenges and opportunities within societal structures. Attempts to impose change that excludes the well-being of the people and deprives freedom can lead to unwanted changes. Therefore, gaining social acceptance and supporting behavior from civil society is crucial for successful transformations.

Chapter five: Conclusion

The interconnectedness between individual behavior and societal change is important to investigate when looking into alternative futures, for various reasons. First, "society" is a collection of intricate social, economic, and political systems. Exploring the dynamics of whether individual behavior and societal structures are reinforcing one another, is an important part of understanding both challenges and opportunities of development within societies. This dynamic of reinforcement can be key to identify effective strategies for sustainable progress. Second, researching the relationship between individual behavior and societal change might help to identify strategies for fostering adaptability and resilience amongst civil society. Third, while parts of this thesis may come forward as hypothetical, delving into the areas that have not yet materialized on a societal level can be influential in the process of finding ways to be sustainable. This is argued by the necessity of evaluating alternative standards of living that function within planetary boundaries (Baskin, 2015; Crutzen, 2002; Hickel, 2020).

Before attempting to answer the research question, "How do young adults stand on the relation between individual behavior and societal changes, exemplified by degrowth initiatives?" the following paragraphs summarize the findings under the four recurring themes: the value of individual freedom, collective responsibility and awareness, human nature of self-interest and the influence of herd mentality. This summary synthesizes the data and content in this thesis to concretize the topic and provide a comprehensive answer.

Regarding the theme of individual freedom, the responses from the interviews highlight the most crucial finding of this study, namely the need to balance individual liberty with initiatives for societal change. Informants indicated that while personal freedom is important, it must be carefully managed when implementing sustainability measures. This balance suggests that changes should be introduced thoughtfully and gradually to ensure a lasting and broader societal shift. The gradual approach can help mitigate resistance and foster acceptance over time, ultimately leading to more effective and enduring sustainability practices.

Under the theme of collective responsibility and awareness, the interviews revealed a strong sense of societal roles among the informants, particularly in the context of sustainability. The reason why the master´s students emphasized their societal roles in the context of sustainability, is that sustainability has become a heightened focus in most fields of studies and generally throughout existing structures. The discussions centered on the importance of increasing awareness to foster collective action. Informants emphasized that individuals have the power to influence broader societal shifts, and that spreading awareness, for instance through eco-facts and positive reinforcement of sustainable behaviors, which may enhance visibility and acceptance of sustainable initiatives. This, in turn, can foster a collective shift in behavior. The necessity of an integrated approach that combines individual actions with systemic changes was also recognized as crucial for lasting transformation. The theme of collective responsibility and awareness can be said to be a bottom-up approach to normalize sustainable behaviors. By understanding their roles and responsibilities, individuals can contribute significantly to the sustainability shift.

The topic of self-interest shows a potential effectiveness of creating incentives that encourage desired behaviors while simultaneously serving individual needs. This finding suggests a top-down approach using libertarian paternalism to nudge behaviors towards sustainability while respecting self-interest and self-determination, thus more likely avoiding consumer resistance. Informants highlighted that aligning personal benefits with sustainable practices can motivate individuals to adopt environmentally friendly behaviors. Incentives can be financially or socially convenient and can play a significant role in promoting sustainable actions. By tapping into the human nature of self-interest, sustainability initiatives can achieve more success and wider acceptance.

In the context of sustainability, leveraging herd mentality emerged as an effective strategy. The interviews revealed that public campaigns, community role models, and educational programs that normalize sustainable practices can promote environmentally positive behaviors more effectively. By making sustainable choices socially desirable and aligning them with herd mentality, these measures can reduce the perception of personal sacrifice and increase collective acceptance. Understanding this dynamic can be helpful when designing effective sustainability initiatives. By aligning individual self-interest with broader environmental goals and utilizing the power of herd mentality, sustainability efforts can gain momentum and have greater impact.

Overall, to answer the research question, it is evident that young adults recognize a complex interplay between individual behavior and societal changes. While young adults see the value of the beef initiative and the fast fashion initiative, there is a clear consensus that initiatives must balance individual liberty with collective action, suggesting that sustainability measures should be introduced gradually to ensure broader acceptance and lasting impact. Even though the decrease in current consumption levels need to happen quickly, changing individual behavioral patterns does not align with the speed that is necessary at this point, considering the seriousness that six out of nine planetary boundaries is already overshot.

It is also clear that young adults understand their societal roles and the power of individual actions to influence wider shifts, advocating for increased awareness and the dissemination of eco-facts to foster a feeling of collective responsibility, and then action. Additionally, they highlight the importance of incentives that align personal benefits with sustainable practices, leveraging the natural human tendency for self-interest. Young adults also see the potential of using herd mentality as a tool to normalize sustainable behaviors through public campaigns and community role models. Ultimately, their nuanced perspective underscores the need for integrated approaches that respect individual freedom while promoting systemic changes, ultimately facilitating a broader societal transformation towards sustainability.

The purpose of exploring alternative economic models like the doughnut economy and degrowth, with sustainability theories and initiatives like those of the Brundtland Commission and planetary boundaries, is to establish a framework for a thriving humanity and environment, both now and for future generations. As humanity has entered the epoch of the Anthropocene as an era marked by human activity having an impact on planetary thresholds, sustainability initiatives seemingly strive for the same goal of preserving the environment. All the themes, theories and concepts that have been discussed in this thesis emphasizes the critical need for radical and sustainable change in current structures. Addressing the social dimensions of change is crucial, as individual behavior is here shown as a fundamental factor in environmental issues.

This thesis has taken an abstract dive into the social dimension of change within the sustainability discourse. Through the viewpoints of master´s students at NTNU Trondheim, the study has developed a better understanding of the intricate and interconnected relationship between individual behavior and society in the context of change. This has been done through

the lens of Anthropocene to emphasize the need for change, and through degrowth as a concept that mainly targets the capitalist system. The lessons drawn from this thesis project seem to indicate the need for a balance of strategic measures for change and focus on well-being. Building understanding and acceptance of change among civil society comes forward as one of the main takeaways. Also, attempting to weave individual and collective interests together into a shared integrated strategy for an alternative, but sustainable future.

Looking into changing the path of modern societies using hypothetical implementation of measures inspired by the degrowth concept requires the ability to envision how it would be in practice. It calls for not only understanding the surrounding theoretical concepts, but also to encourage creative and critical thinking that grasps the nuances of individual behavior, culture and social structures. With an alternative focus, comes alternative solutions to build future societies where degrowth, as an example, is more than just a concept toward sustainability and equity.

For future research, it seems beneficial to develop policies that effectively integrate individual behavior with collective efforts, bridging the gap between self-interest and societal or environmental needs. Future studies should further delve into the social and cultural dimension of change across different demographic groups to tailor change strategies more effectively. A deeper understanding of human functionality within modern societies with the history of growth and capitalism in mind is imperative to anticipate responses to societal change. Especially when it surrounds radical changes that targets the system, exemplified by degrowth. Moreover, enhancing educational programs to deepen the knowledge about ecological impacts of individual behavior, as well as the benefits of sustainable practices, could aid in making radical changes more socially acceptable to civil society.

Looking into the views of master´s students as young adults has contributed to disclose the complexities in the social dimension of initiating change processes that are transformative. All in all, this thesis has contributed to fill the knowledge gap in the social dimension of societal change. The study may be closed by emphasizing how the road to a sustainable future is paved with the power of individual behavior and community engagement, and the influence of policy and decision makers within existing structures. Understanding the synergy between these factors can accelerate the process of making changes to avoid further challenges of transgressing planetary boundaries. Gaining foothold in the complex landscape of individual

behavior and societal change becomes the essence of understanding the potential futures that lie before us.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guide

Introduction:

1. Can you tell me about your educational background and academic interests?
2. Why did you choose the master´s program you are currently in?
3. Do you think your education are influencing your views on various proposals for an alternative future?
4. Can you share your thoughts on the current state of sustainability initiatives in Norway? What is good and what is bad?
5. Which side of politics are you on? Rate yourself from 1 to 7, where 1 is far left and 7 is far right.
6. How many hours a day do you spend on social media?
7. Which media do you use the most?
8. How would you describe the algorithm on different platforms?
9. Is there much focus on sustainability in the media you consume?

Degrowth initiatives:

Initiative 1: Removing beef and serve vegetarian food in cafes and canteens at NTNU.

10. What is your view on the idea of removing beef, and as an alternative offer a vegetarian food choice in public eateries such as cafés and canteens? For example, all NTNU canteens.
11. What do you see as the possible effects of such a transition? Any challenges, benefits or concerns?

Initiative 2: Limiting fast fashion purchases – sustainable clothing practices.

12. What do you think about two different ways to limit fast fashion. Both options are done in a fair and democratic manner:
   a. One way is for the government to impose a quota on each consumer of how many fast fashion garments they can purchase each month or year.

b. The other way is for the government to impose new regulations where fast fashion companies face higher taxes, forcing them to raise prices to compensate for the extra tax expense.

13. What do you think about your municipality having a greater focus on sustainable clothing practices? For example, repairing clothes, redesigning old clothes, and buying used items? Do you see any obstacles or opportunities?

14. Do you believe that an increase in focus on sustainable clothing practices would lead people to buy less fast fashion?

Social Acceptance Disparities:

15. As you reflect on the initiatives that we´ve discussed, do you perceive varying degrees of acceptance for them?

16. Which strategy triggers more resistance or acceptance and why?

17. What factors do you think influence individuals' acceptance of these strategies?

18. In what ways do you think culture, norms and habits can play a role in the openness to accepting or not accepting change such as the strategies mentioned here?

19. Do you think people are willing to go against their practices and lifestyles because of the pressing conversation about sustainability today?

20. How do you think individuals can be encouraged to embrace alternative strategies for sustainable development?

21. What role do you think education and awareness play in promoting social acceptance of such strategies?

22. Do you think you would have different views if you were a student in a completely different discipline?

Perspectives on the future:

23. Looking ahead, and based on perspectives from your education, what do you see as necessary steps to achieve a more sustainable society?

24. What role do you think today´s master´s students play in the process of changing our practices to achieve the goal of living within the planetary boundaries considering we are the future workforce?

25. What gives you hope or concerns you regarding the idea of implementing degrowth strategies in the future?

26. Do you have any other comments or questions regarding this interview?

27. Do you have any feedback for me on what I could do better based on your experience with this interview?

Appendix B: Letter of consent

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

"Shaping Tomorrow: The Interplay of Individual Behavior and Societal Change in the Context of Degrowth"

Formålet med prosjektet

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om du vil delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å

- Undersøke hvilke standpunkt studenter som unge voksne har til lokaliserte degrowth/nedvekst initiativer. Studentene behøver ingen forhåndskunnskap til konseptet «degrowth».

- Undersøke hvordan studenter reflekterer seg frem til argumenter om degrowth/nedvekst initiativer.

- Bruke disse funnene til å diskutere den sammenkoblede relasjonen mellom individ og samfunn, samt si noe om sosial aksept for en alternativ fremtid, sett i lys av en verden som i økende grad må håndtere klimarelaterte problemer.

- Dette forskningsprosjekter er en masteroppgave i MSc Globalization and Sustainable Development på NTNU.

- Dine personopplysninger blir anonymisert, hvor eneste identifiserbare opplysning er stemmen din på en opptaker. Opptakene vil bli slettet etter transkribering og ikke brukt til andre formål.

- Du kan snakke norsk eller engelsk. Masteroppgaven skrives på engelsk, og intervjuer på norsk vil i ettertid oversettes til engelsk.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Du får denne forespørselen fordi

- Jeg tar kontakt fordi jeg søker studenter fra diverse utdanninger ved NTNU Trondheim til å delta i mitt forskningsprosjekt om studenters standpunkt til degrowth/nedvekst initiativer. Du behøver ikke å ha hverken forhåndskunnskaper eller forståelse for konseptet «degrowth».

- Det er 5-10 studenter som får henvendelsen.
- Jeg har brukt mitt sosiale/faglige nettverk for å komme i kontakt med deg, og/eller tatt kontakt med forelesere i de ulike studieområdene for å komme i kontakt med aktuelle studenter.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Fakultetet for samfunns- og utdanningsvitenskap (SU) / Institutt for Geografi er ansvarlig for personopplysningene som behandles i prosjektet.

- Institutt for Geografi ved NTNU er behandlingsansvarlig.
- Veileder, og prosjektansvarlig er Ståle Angen Rye – professor ved Institutt for Geografi, NTNU.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

- Metoden som brukes for å samle inn data er et personlig intervju som vil vare i ca. 60 minutter. Ingen andre informanter kommer til å delta på ditt intervju, eller få informasjon om at du har deltatt.
- Intervjuet vil bestå av en rekke spørsmål som søker svar på hva dine standpunkt til degrowth/nedvekst initiativer samt tanker om fremtiden og hvilke faktorer som er viktige når det kommer til å akseptere endring. Det vil være noen ledende spørsmål som fører videre til oppfølgingsspørsmål.
- Omfanget er å undersøke dine refleksjoner i sammenheng med relevant teori for å diskutere de sosiale dimensjonene av endring i et vekstorientert samfunn sett i lys av relasjonen mellom individ og samfunn.
- Det vil ikke bli samlet inn navn, konkret alder utover aldersgruppen 25-30 eller andre opplysninger som kan føre til identifisering av deg. Det som blir oppgitt i oppgaven er en oversikt over utdanning og kjønn i en tabell.
- Relevante personopplysning er din stemme på en opptaker og dine standpunkt på strategiene som i noen tilfeller kan oppfattes politisk. Det er ikke et fokus på politikk i

prosjektet, men du vil bli spurt om din politiske orientering for en overordnet kartlegging.

- Intervjuet vil bli tatt opp på en opptaker lånt av NTNU. Det er kun jeg (Ida Celine Stuenes) som vil ha tilgang til opplysningene.
- Det vil ikke bli samlet data om deg fra andre kilder enn deg selv (ingen journaler, elevmapper eller andre personer).

Kort om personvern

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler personopplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket. Du kan lese mer om personvern på neste side.

Med vennlig hilsen,

Masterstudent, Ida Celine Stuenes.

Veileder, Ståle Angen Rye.

Utdypende om personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

- Tilgang til personopplysningene er gitt til masterstudent som gjennomfører prosjektet og veileder av masteroppgaven.
- Dine kontaktopplysninger og lydopptaket av intervjuet vil bli slettet etter forskningsprosjektet er over. Dine kontaktopplysninger vil bli erstattet med koder som «Informant 1», «Informant 2», etc., og ikke ditt navn. Datamaterialet vil bli lagret på server med totrinnsautentisering hvor kun ansvarlig masterstudent for forskningsprosjektet har tilgang.
- Deltakere vil ikke kunne bli gjenkjent i publikasjonen, lydopptak vil ikke bli publisert.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Institutt for Geografi har personverntjenestene ved Sikt – Kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandør, vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- å be om innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene,
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende,
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

Vi vil gi deg en begrunnelse hvis vi mener at du ikke kan identifiseres, eller at rettighetene ikke kan utøves.

Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes 15.mai 2024.

Opplysningene vil da anonymiseres for publisering. Lydopptak og kontaktinformasjon vil slettes.

Spørsmål

Hvis du har spørsmål eller vil utøve dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- NTNU ved Ida Celine Stuenes (masterstudent), tlf.: 95094320, e-post: idacelinestuenes@gmail.com
- Ståle Angen Rye (veileder), tlf.: 73591818, e-post: stale.angen.rye@ntnu.no
- Vårt personvernombud: Thomas Helgesen

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til Sikts vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt på e-post: personverntjenester@sikt.no, eller på telefon: 73 98 40 40.
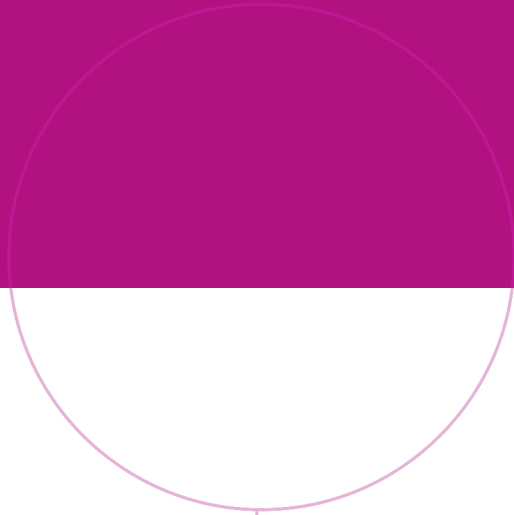
Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet Shaping Tomorrow: "The Interplay of Individual Behavior and Societal Change in the Context of Degrowth", og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

☐ Å delta i personlig intervju med lydopptak.

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet 30.mai 2014.

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)