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Post-Growth Society

A Theoretical Perspective on the Implications for Employment

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Introduction

> Allegiance to growth was the single most dominant feature of an economic and political system that led the world to the brink of economic disaster. The growth imperative has shaped the architecture of the modern economy. (Jackson, 2017:137)

1. A (required) paradigm shift?

Considerable research attention has been devoted to the unsustainability of our growth-based economy (see, for example, Jackson, 2017; Gadrey, 2019; Daly, 2005; Røpke, 2005; Méda, 2013; Georgescu-Roegen, 2006; Klitgaard and Krall, 2012). Economic growth has hegemonized our societies (Sinaï, 2015; Latouche, 2016). But when growth becomes an end in itself, it fuels a vicious spiral of industrial production and consumption that gives rise to indebtedness to nature and the generations to come (Sinaï, 2015).

Many scholars advocate for a radical change, away from the infinite and harmful quest for growth, as 'the present trend of global human activities, if unchanged, is heading towards disaster' (Burlando and Tartaglia, 2018:157). As Jackson puts it 'an economy whose stability rests on the relentless stimulation of consumer demand destroys not only the fragile resource base of this finite planet, but also the stability of its financial and political system.' (2017:24) Therefore, there is a vital need for a fundamental change in the economic paradigm currently governing our society.

Among the proponents of Ecological Economics (Schneider et *al*., 2010), but also among scholars from other disciplines, the paradigm of post-growth has been discussed. It is understood as 'an era in which the societal project is redefined beyond the pursuit of economic growth' (Cassiers and Maréchal, 2018:2). It is interesting to note that, according to Méda (in Sinaï, 2015), the direction that the new paradigm will take highly depends on the outcome of the debate about economic indicators, as the shortcomings and flaws of the Gross Domestic Product become more and more acknowledged. The literature suggests that there is no consensus around whether or not post-growth is the right journey to embark upon, or even that such a change of paradigm is needed. Given that 'economic growth has for a long time played a crucial role in stabilizing modern industrialized societies' (Petridis et *al.*, 2015:178), the dedication to economic growth remains very strong, as we will discuss later.

Among all the changes and consequences that a transition towards a post-growth society would imply, we have chosen to focus on the issue of employment. The question of employment in a post-growth society is a very complex one because ‘in everyone’s mind, GDP and economic growth are closely linked to job creation’ (Chiapello, 2012:66). It is also a key question due to the centrality of employment in a society (Méda, 2013; Jackson, 2017; Durkheim, 1967) and given that ‘l’emploi est un des verrous essentiels à lever pour la réorientation des modes de production et de consommation’ (Azam et *al.*, 2007: 61).

In particular, this study is an attempt to shed some light on the impact of a post-growth paradigm on the organization of employment in our current European societies. It is a theoretical research, which offers a critical overview of the existing literature about the implications for employment of a post-growth society. It focuses on European countries in general and covers the period from 1945 onwards. The period following the Second World war was very peculiar on many aspects and had significant impact on societies. ‘Since the end of World War Two, the planet has experienced what some have called “the great acceleration” in the consumption of fossil fuels and in the growth of market economies’ (Costanza et *al*., 2015: 93). This massive increase in economic growth had a major influence on the organization of labour and, in the aftermath of the Second World War, social compromises were sealed between union, workers and managers.

2. *Structure of the dissertation*

The focus of the research is to highlight the implications for employment of a post-growth society, using insights from Ecological Economics as a guiding thread. To the best of our knowledge, there is limited research investigating the way a post-growth society would actually be organized and, in particular, what it would mean in terms of employment (Méda, 2015, in Sinaï). The study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter outlines the theoretical foundations of the study. Firstly, it provides a brief introduction to Ecological Economics, the theoretical frame within which this study is placed. Secondly, it provides an overview of the three main paths for a post-growth society that are discussed in the literature: degrowth, steady state and a-growth. The second chapter is dedicated to economic growth and employment, looking at these two concepts from a macroeconomic and a sociological perspective. Building on what has been highlighted through this overview, the last chapter of the study presents the vision of employment from each of the three perspectives of post-growth presented in the first chapter (degrowth, steady-state and a-growth) and discuss how employment could be sustained in these paradigms. It concludes with a transversal analysis, outlining the common elements to the three visions of employment in a post-growth society discussed in the study.

Chapter 1 – Theoretical Foundations

Insights from Ecological Economics and an Introduction to Post-Growth

1. Introduction

In the 1960s a few pioneers acted as whistle-blowers, claiming that the trend of economic activities, if continued, would be driving societies to the point of collapse (Jackson, 2017). Since then, the situation has not improved, quite the opposite. For example, the last Special Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2018) affirms that human activities are already accountable for an increase of 1°C above pre-industrial levels of temperature. As many scholars highlight, societies are now facing a situation in which some major boundaries of the environment have been exceeded, with climate change being the most familiar consequence, while the social basis of a decent life are not met for everyone on earth (Jackson, 2017; Raworth, 2017). Regarding the specific case of employment, Méda (2017) points out the existence of a double crisis: the employment's crisis demonstrated by a high level of unemployment, and the work's crisis illustrated by poor working conditions, a loss of meaning or even the rising number of workers in burn out. Scholars also call attention to the lack of recognition of any form of unpaid work (Nierling, 2012; Levy, 2007), to the negative impacts of having a part-time job (Schor, 2004; Zwickl et *al*., 2016) and to the harmful consequences of the increased flexibility in the organization of work (Barbier et Nadel, 2000). There is also a growing body of literature calling for more meaningful jobs (Méda, 2017; Ashford et *al*., 2012; Van Parijs, 2004). This social and environmental crisis is happening in the context of 'an economy that is fundamentally broken, in desperate need of renewal' (Jackson, 2017: 22).

The field of Ecological Economics emerged in the 1960s, founded by some of the whistle-blower pioneers, in this period of rising concerns about the pollution, the stock of food and energy, the increased population growth (Røpke, 2004). To a certain extent, echoing with the current situation of rising concerns related to climate change. With thermodynamics as a source of inspiration, proponents of Ecological Economics showed 'the impossibility of infinite growth in a finite world (Latouche, 2010:520) and highlighted the existence of inalterable limits to material growth (Røpke, 2005; Daly and Farley, 2004). A pioneer of Ecological Economics, Georgescu-Roegen (2006), claimed that economic growth has not only to be stopped, but also reversed. 'Les mécanismes de marché ne peuvent protéger à l'avenir l'humanité des crises écologiques, ni répartir les ressources de façon optimales entre les générations' (Georgescu-Roegen, 2006 : 144). This is the emergence of the idea of a society that would be constructed beyond the pursuit of economic growth. As Ecological Economics was developed with the willingness to change the preanalytic vision of economics and undertake a paradigm shift (Daly and Farley, 2004), it seems to be a useful and relevant theoretical framework to analyse the possibility of a transition towards a society 'in which the societal project is redefined beyond the pursuit of economic growth' (Cassiers and Maréchal, 2018:2).

2. Ecological Economics

Common and Stagl (2005) define Ecological Economics as the overlap between ecological and economic systems. It is based on system thinking, a holistic vision of the interactions between systems such as the social system, the ecological system and the economic system (Røpke, 2004). A system thinking focuses 'on similarities between patterns of interactions in nature and social system and on self-regulation inside systems through communication and feedback mechanisms' (Røpke, 2004:299). Røpke (2005) puts forward that 'the economy is embedded in a broader social and cultural system'. Therefore, the vision of individual as a sole *homo oeconomicus* is too narrow and ecological economists advocate 'for including social and institutional perspectives' (Røpke, 2005:267). As a post-growth transition of societies requires systemic changes in many dimensions of societies (Kallis, 2011), Ecological Economics' holistic framework is very useful.

The focus and goal of Ecological Economics is sustainability (Røpke, 2004). In particular, Daly (2005) argues that 'humankind must make the transition to a sustainable economy, one that takes heed of the inherent biophysical limits of the global ecosystem so that it can continue to operate long into the future' (100). Furthermore, Røpke outlines that

> The ecological economic perspective calls for an awareness of the human dependence on well-functioning ecosystems that provide the basic life support for human societies. This awareness implies that economic growth can be endangering human life in much more subtle ways than the traditional discussion of limits to growth had considered. (Røpke, 2005:266)

These characteristics of Ecological Economics have significantly influenced post-growth scholars such as the degrowth movement, in which these requirements for creating social foundations while remaining within ecological boundaries of the finite planet are highly visible. At the core of this school of thought is the argument that the economy is embedded in nature (Daly and Farley, 2004). This vision contrasts sharply with the one neoclassical economics has, from which the environment is abstracted (Daly and Farley, 2004). As Spash puts it, ‘how we understand the world is vastly different if we treat it as a deterministic mechanical system or a chaotic evolving system’ (2011:365). If the economy is perceived as an open system, it means that it can expand itself without limits, which is the premise on which we have built the pursuit of economic growth. But if the economy is considered as being a part of something, then it takes up room within the whole as it grows. Hence, growth is perceived by ecological economists as having a cost (Daly and Farley, 2004).

Ecological economics gathers insights from mainstream economists, socio-economists and ecologists (Røpke, 2005), hence it calls for transdisciplinarity and it legitimizes ‘a plurality of perspectives’ (Thiry, 2018:83). Stemming from that, the field lacks a certain unity. For example, two pioneers of Ecological Economics, Daly and Gerorgescu-Roegen, disagree with respect to which post-growth path should be followed. Daly (Daly and Farley, 2004) argues for a steady state whereas Gerorgescu-Roegen (2006) claims that, in the same way that infinite growth is not sustainable, infinite degrowth cannot be sustained in a finite environment. We will briefly present these two visions in the following section.

Stemming from these considerations, Ecological Economists focus first on the issues of scale and distribution before the one of efficiency, whereas the efficiency of allocation is the main concern of Neoclassical economists. The question of scale relates to ‘the relative size of the economic subsystem with respect to the ecosystem within which it exists’ (Daly and Farley, 2004:12). ‘Ecological economists always ask if the extra growth is worth the extra sacrifice it entails. Neoclassical economists tend to forget this question or to believe that the answer is always affirmative’ (Daly and Farley, 2004:13).

Through its construction and by virtue of its specific characteristics, the field of Ecological Economics has developed relevant tools as well as analytical frameworks to think about a post-growth society (Schneider et *al*., 2010). Even though, as Daly (2005) highlights, there is no consensus around what should be sustained in a sustainable economy and how it should be.

3. *Post-Growth*

There are three scenarii for a post-growth society that are highly discussed in the literature degrowth, steady state and a-growth. We will briefly present them in the following paragraphs.

Degrowth is 'a possible alternative to the paradigm of economic growth' (van den Bergh, 2011:881). The notion of degrowth is polysemous and can be understood differently by different people. As Sinaï puts it, 'il n'y a pas *une* décroissance, mais *des* décroissances' (2017:11, emphasis in the text). It is the signal of a willingness to give up growth as the ultimate goal of society (Latouche, 2016). Per se, degrowth just means a reduction, a decrease in the pace of growth. Georgescu-Roegen, a pioneer of degrowth, used the term in its literal meaning, therefore speaking of an inversion of the curve of growth (Latouche, 2016). According to Latouche (2016), this understanding is shared by every proponent of the degrowth movement. van den Bergh (2011) discusses what he highlights as being the five main interpretations of degrowth in the literature: GDP degrowth, consumption degrowth, work-time degrowth, radical degrowth and physical degrowth. Following van den Bergh (2011), GDP degrowth is not sufficient to reduce environmental pressure as it could result from, for example, producing less efficiently. Consumption degrowth is hoped to lead to a decrease in the resources used and in the generated pollution. Work-time degrowth would result in shorter working weeks and earlier retirement, instead of continuously increase the level of production. Radical degrowth calls for a radical change of paradigm in the economy. Finally, physical degrowth is 'a reduction of the physical size of the economy, notably in terms of resource use and polluting emissions' (van den Bergh, 2011:884). Degrowth is also understood as a degrowth of the carbon footprint, a goal followed by strict environmentalists (Latouche, 2016), which can be seen as an underlying effect of the five kinds of degrowth highlighted by van den Bergh (2011). Latouche gathers under the concept of degrowth 'all the people who aspire to building an actual alternative to the consumption society which is ecologically unsustainable and socially unbearable' (2016:18). He calls for a 'decolonization of the imagination' and an 'exit from the economic imperialism'.

According to van den Bergh (2011), degrowth is not the right alternative to the pursuit of growth. 'GDP growth is not generally necessary or sufficient for progress. Neither is GDP degrowth necessary or sufficient for sustainability' (van den Bergh, 2011:885). He argues that it is a very ambiguous concept and not precise enough, and it leaves a lot of room to the concept of GDP. He is in favour of '**a-growth**', which is an attitude of indifference to GDP growth (van den Bergh, 2011). His argument is based on the acknowledgment of the many weaknesses of the indicator of GDP.

> If one accepts that GDP (growth) is not a robust, reliable indicator of social welfare (progress) than the only solution is to ignore it and as a result be completely indifferent about GDP growth. (van den Bergh, 2011:885)

A steady-state economy is 'an economy which develops, but without increasing its material size' (Thiry, 2018:86, drawing on Daly). The idea of a steady state dates back to Mill, who already argued in 1848 in favour of a 'stationary state of population and capital' (in Jackson, 2017:159). Daly has devoted considerable research attention to the hypothesis of the steady state, for which he is in favour of, and has been very inspired by the history of the concept and by what Georgescu-Roegen had developed (Kerschner, 2010). The constant level of population and what Daly calls 'physical wealth' are chosen and are maintained 'by a low rate of throughput, i.e. by low birth rates equal to low death rates and by low physical production rates equal to low physical depreciation rates' (Daly, 1974:15).

Georgescu-Roegen (2006) argues that, as well as infinite growth cannot be sustained, infinite degrowth or a-growth cannot be sustained either in a finite environment. He also rejects the idea of a steady state as something sustainable within the ecological limits of the finite environment as it is not aligned with the laws of thermodynamics (in Kerschner, 2010). Kerschner (2010) argues that this opposition between degrowth as argued by Georgescu-Roegen and the steady state advocated by Daly should be overcome as the two concepts can be seen as complementary to each other.

Besides these, recent studies have also explored the highly debated possibility of decoupling economic growth (GDP growth) from its environmental impacts (Caminel et *al*, 2014; Jackson, 2014; van den Bergh, 2011; Laurent, 2012; Méda, 2013). Such a decoupling, if possible, would allow the pursuit of economic growth to keep going, hence it would not lead to a post-growth society. Therefore, even though it is very discussed in the literature, it does not seem relevant to consider it in a post-growth study.

Chapter 2 – Entanglement of economic growth with employment

1. Introduction

On the one hand, it appears that our societies have been constructed in such a way that they now appear reliant on economic growth (Jackson, 2017; Méda, 2013) but endless economic growth is an unsustainable goal from a social and an ecological perspective (Jackson, 2017; Raworth, 2017; Gadrey, 2019). On the other hand, several studies have demonstrated that economic growth generates employment, confirming the existence of a strong relationship between economic growth and (un)employement, as (Burggraeve et *al*., 2015; Husson, 2008; Freyssinet, 2004; Oner, 2016; Ball et *al.,* 2013). Therefore, before discussing how a post-growth society could be organized with respect to employment, it seems important to apprehend employment in the current paradigm of economic growth, as well as understand what economic growth is and how the employment and economic growth are related.

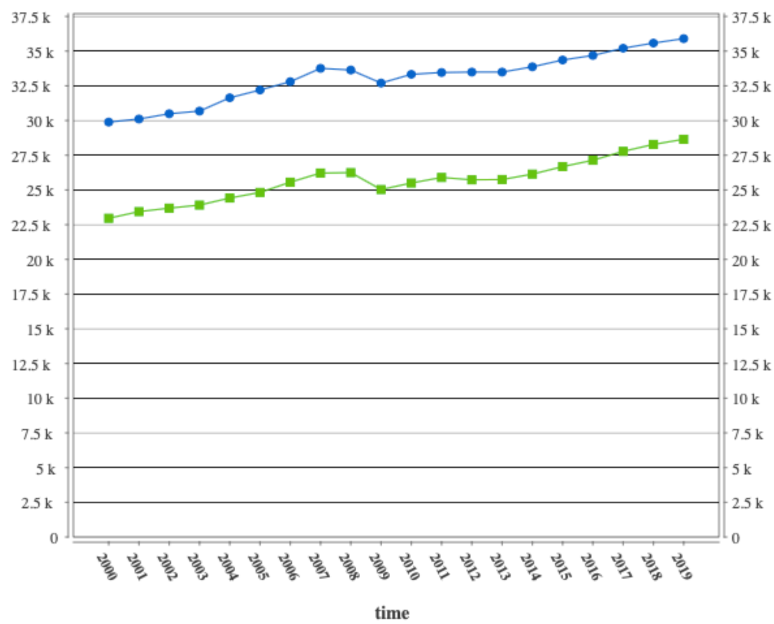
This chapter is divided in three parts and aims at presenting both economic growth and employment, as well as the relationship between the two. The first part of the chapter is devoted to presenting economic growth. It also briefly outlines the hypotheses put forward in the literature to explain the pursuit of economic growth in spite of the growing consensus around the limits to growth and its harmful consequences. The second part focuses on employment. Firstly, it presents how employment is captured by macroeconomics, in order to be able later to draw the relationship with economic growth. Secondly, it reviews the evolution of the meanings and understandings attached to work since the 18th century, adopting a sociological perspective. This brief historical review is conducted to highlight the extent to which work is of paramount importance for individuals' social life (Jackson, 2017; Méda, 2013). Through it, we consider the period following the Second World War (1945-1975) to discuss how that period of economic growth impacted the organization of labour, briefly presenting Keynesian Economics and the development of social security. After which, we outline the key elements of the period after 1975. The combination of a macroeconomic and a sociological perspective allows us to demonstrate the extent to which work is important in a society and economic growth is important to maintain employment in a growth-based society. Finally, the third part further explores the specific relationship between economic growth and (un)employment, before we conclude.

2. Economic Growth

2.1 Definition and figures

Economic growth is the main indicator of how the economy is doing (Blanchard et *al*., 2013). A system of national accounting has been designed after the Second World War, along with strict definitions of economic concepts and their measures (Blanchard et *al*., 2013; Gueret and Thiry, 2013). 'The national accounts provide information to analyse the structure of economies and their development over time' (Eurostat, 2019a). Economists have developed three key indicators to study and analyse the economy: the total output, measured by the Gross Domestic Product, unemployment and inflation rates (Blanchard et *al*., 2013). We will not develop the latter as this is not crucial for the reasoning here, but we will briefly review how the two others are constructed as they are the tools used by economists to assess the economy, each in its respective section.

Economic growth can be defined as 'the long-lasting increase of the aggregated production across time' (Blanchard et *al*., 2013). It is commonly evaluated through an increase in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a GDP corrected from inflation. As the GDP constitutes a good indicator to inform about the development and the dynamic of the economy over time, it is a key element of the system of national accounting (Gueret and Thiry, 2015). The GDP is 'the total monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced (and inventoried) by an entity (generally a State) in a given period (generally a year)' (Cassiers and Thiry, 2014:3). The GDP can be calculated through data about either production, income or expenditure, all of which are equivalent from an accounting's perspective (Blanchard et *al*., 2013). Therefore 'growth, statistically, is represented by the comparison of the GDP level at two different times in a given period of time, after deduction of the increase in prices' (Caminel et *al*., 2014:69). The following graph presents the evolution of the real GDP per capita (GDP expresses in constant prices) over the last 20 years, both for Belgium (in blue) and the 28 countries of Europe (in green). It shows that the GPD of these two regions has been increasing during the last 20 years. (Source: Eurostat, 2019)



A country's GDP is computed based on data. How these data are collected and computed is subject to conventions (Cassiers and Thiry, 2014; Caminel et *al.*, 2014). Therefore, the conventions that underlie the concept of GDP are shaping what GDP actually represents. Cassiers and Thiry (2014) highlight that the GDP has been created in a specific historical context that has influenced its construction. 'National accounting was established in the wake of the Second World War, and the conventions it adopted reflected the beliefs and knowledge of that time, as well as the state of labour relations and political compromises' (Cassiers and Thiry, 2014:3). In the aftermath of the Great Depression and WWII, people were looking for material well-being, which opened the way for economic growth to be at the foundation of the social organization, as we will discuss later.

In spite of its initial goal as a way to quantify the economic activity, the GDP became such a central element in policymaking that GDP growth became the indicator of social progress (Méda, 2013; Gueret and Thiry, 2015). It is important to note that, as Méda highlights, 'la comptabilité nationale n'est pas une description neutre de la réalité, mais bien une description à visée performative, destinée à orienter les actions et produire des effets' (2013:91).

2.2 The Imperative for Growth

The establishment of economic growth as society's goal is the result of a specific historical context (Cassiers and Thiry, 2014) and is at the core of the successive economic theories that have dominated economic policy since the Industrial Revolution. As Jackson puts it 'throughout everything, this has remained the one non-negotiable: that growth must continue at all costs. No politicians seriously questioned that goal.' (Jackson, 2017:38). Moreover, our modern occidental societies are built on growth, both ideologically and functionally, and 'are used since the end of the 17th century, and even more since the second half of the 20th century, to growth rates that have allowed limited questioning about issues of reallocation and ecological efficiency' (Méda, 2013:152). Therefore, it is clear that 'the modern economy is structurally reliant on economic growth for its stability' (Jackson, 2017:21).

There are several non-excludable explanations about where the imperative for growth comes from. As Gueret and Thiry (2015) points out from Fourquet's research, a state's power is usually evaluated through the country's prosperity, which relies on economic growth. The GDP appears as a good proxy for a nation's economic power. 'La poursuite de la croissance est donc d'abord perçue comme un objectif géostratégique par les états' (Gueret and Thiry, 2015:18).

Latouche (2016) argues that the quest for growth started with modernity, as it rejects tradition and questions limits. With modernity came the idea of 'boundlessness', which became sacred. 'The core of the capitalistic production method born from modernity is the logic of growth for growth itself' (Latouche, 2016:11). Latouche (2016) also highlights an important feature of the market society, which is that the individual is perceived as having neither roots nor ties, which allows the consumerist wave to overflow him.

This argument related to consumption is present in many reflections with respect to economic growth. For example, drawing on Weber's concept, Jackson (2017) argues that society is trapped in 'the iron cage of consumerism'. The intertwined dynamic of profits, leading to endless innovations, and of markets, relying on 'an expanding consumer demand' fuels the 'engine of growth on which modern economies depend and lock us into an 'iron cage' of consumerism' (Jackson, 2017:104). This dynamic is furthermore stimulated by the symbolic dimension attached to material goods by consumers (as a way of expressing oneself, carrying a sense of identity, as social class distinguisher) as well as the role plaid by novelty, given that 'it offers variety and excitement' (Jackson, 2017:115).

This dynamic of novelty through innovations and the reliance on increasing demand for material goods is related to the commodity-driven culture we are living in (see, for example, Shove and Warde, 2002 and Maniates, 2001). 'Highly industrialized economies have operated under the assumption that the sense of well-being depends crucially both on the quantity of goods and services available to the population and the rate at which that quantity is growing' (Watchel, 1998:259). This can be related to the neoclassical understanding of welfare as being dependent on market goods consumption, which should necessarily be increased. As people are considered insatiable, 'welfare is increased through the ever-greater provision of goods and services and measured by their market-value' (Daly and Farley, 2004:4). Hence, unending growth is pursued.

Méda (2013), relating to Lynn White's arguments, highlights the victory of Christianism over paganism as the source of mankind's obsession with growth. Paganism's belief was that every natural element, from a stone to the hill, had a protective spirit, whereas Christianism desacralized nature and, through that, allowed nature's exploitation. In other words, the pursuit of growth required a major revolution of human's perspective over nature and of their relationship with nature, revolution that was accomplished by the switch from paganism to Christianism (Méda, 2013). This highlights the fact that the relationship between human and nature is closely related to beliefs.

Chiapello (2012) points out another explanation for the tie between society and economic growth, which puts the emphasis on another dimension of economic growth: going beyond GDP growth requires a change of paradigm, 'une transformation du regard tel que nombre de réflexes professionnels […] deviendraient caducs' (Chiapello, 2012:65). Not only is a change of paradigm a difficult thing to undertake, but it would question the assumptions under which many economists and politicians are working and that constitute their source of power.

Last but not least, the strong relationship that exists between GDP growth and employment might explain society's dedication to growth. As Chiapello puts it, 'in everyone's mind, GDP and economic growth are closely linked to job creation' (2012:66). It seems that economic growth is required to observe an increase of income or purchasing power, or even to be likely to find and keep a job (Gueret and Thiry, 2015). Furthermore, 'dans le discours des responsables politiques, l'emploi apparaît comme le motif principal de la supplique pour le retour de la croissance' (Méda, 2013: 183). This is a key relationship to understand the organization of labour in our current growth-based societies, as well as its flaws, will be further explored in the last part of this chapter.

3. *Employment*

Work is a key component of social life (Jackson, 2017). According to Durkheim (1967), social cohesion primarily stems from the division of labour as it creates a solidarity between individuals that depend on each other:

> Mais si la division du travail produit la solidarité, ce n'est pas seulement parce qu'elle fait de chaque individu un échangiste comme disent les économistes; c'est qu'elle crée entre les hommes tout un système de droits et de devoirs qui les lient les uns aux autres d'une manière durable. (Durkheim, 1967: 143).

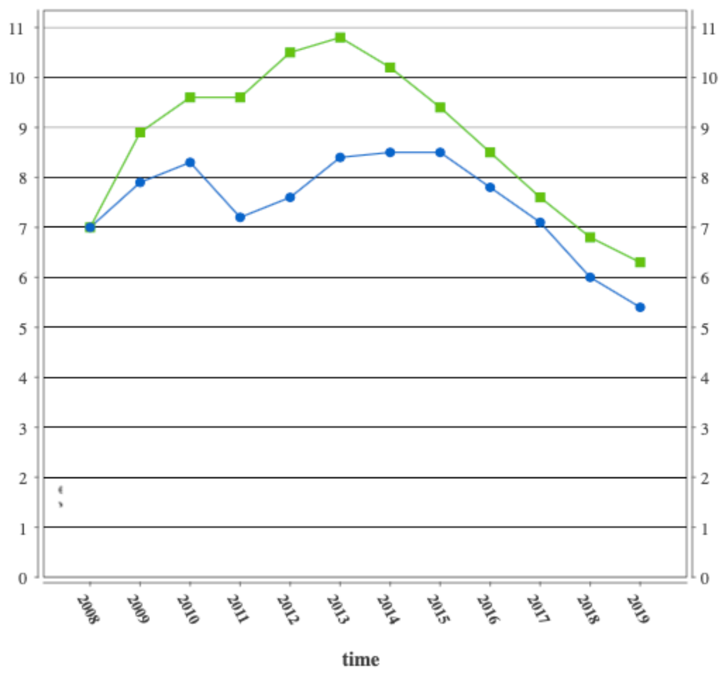
Work is both a component of the economy and of the society, it is therefore crucial to consider it through both of these perspectives. As ecological economists argue, the economy is part of the society, so it makes senses that work belongs to both these spheres. Therefore, we combine the economic perspective on employment with a sociological perspective that aims at understanding the perception of work in society. This allows us to question the place and organization of work in a growth-based economy and to put it in perspective. Furthermore, these economics and sociological insights offer two complementary perspective on employment that will constitute the foundation to discuss and rethink the place of work in a post-growth society. We consider that it is important to first understand how employment is captured by the current growth-based paradigm, which is why we first present the macroeconomics of employment, before discussing it in a post-growth perspective. This also allows us to draw a general picture of the current situation of (un)employment in Europe.

3.1 The macroeconomics of employment

A key variable used by macroeconomists to analyse the economy, besides GDP, is the unemployment rate (Blanchard et *al*., 2013). The unemployment rate (u) is measured by the ratio of unemployed (U) with respect to the labour force (L), which is constituted by workers and unemployed.

$$u = \frac{U}{L}$$

Even though this seems pretty straightforward, what is understood by 'unemployed' can vary a lot (Blanchard et *al*., 2013). In order to make things comparable between countries, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has developed a definition of workers and unemployment that is used in most countries. An unemployed is any person who meets the three following conditions during a period of reference: has no job, is available to work and is looking for a job (Service Public Fédéral Belge, 2017). The status of unemployed is here independent from having filled in for unemployment benefits or not. Workers, on the other hand, are defined as individuals who have done at least one hour of paid work or had a job but were temporarily out of work, during the period of reference.



The following graph presents the trend of the total unemployment rate as a percentage of the economically active population (15-75 years old) for the last decade. In green, the average of the 28 European countries and in blue, the trend for Belgium. This shed light on the current situation of employment in Europe and indicates that unemployment has increased after the 2008 economic crisis and has been decreasing since 2013 in the European Union. (Source: Eurostat, 2019b.)

3.2 Sociological perspective on employment

Employment is a concept constituted by 'several layers of meaning that have been added to each other through times, each being related to a specific epoch, and they constitute a foundation for individuals' interpretations and expectations' (Méda and Vendramin, 2013:17). For example, Gorz (1988) highlights that what we call 'work' has been created by modernity and generalized through the Industrial Revolution. According to Durkheim (in Ferreras, 2007), the division of labour that happened with the Industrial Revolution created a social link that bonded the individuals. In other words, work appears as 'a powerful tool of integration in society' (Méda and Vendramin, 2013:6). Gorz to specify that 'it is through a paid job (un travail salarié) that one belongs to the public sphere, that one is granted an existence and a social identity' (Gorz, 1988:30). Drawing primarily on Méda and Vendramin's work (2013), we will briefly recall the main understandings of work since the 18th century, looking at these multiple layers of meanings that have overlapped. Their evolution highlights the importance carried out by work within a society.

In the 18th century, labour appears as a production factor. Smith describes it as 'what creates value' (in Méda and Vendramin, 2013:18). It is both an activity of production and the source of social stability. The 19th century sees labour as the 'modèle de l'activité créatrice' (Méda and Vendramin, 2013:19) as work exits the domestic sphere (Ferreras, 2007). Through work, humankind overcomes nature and fashions it to serve its own goals. By the end of the 19th century, labour is perceived as the channel through which one can access a decent income and, therefore, a purchasing power. The goal is to make work 'as bearable as possible by improving working conditions and promising access to larger and larger compensations for the workers' (Méda and Vendramin, 2013: 23). This requires state intervention into the markets.

In the 20th century, Taylor advocates that society should aim at the highest level of prosperity possible, which means the highest level of productivity possible. The individual is considered as a consumer rather than a worker and it is the consumer's satisfaction that society and firms are concerned with (Méda and Vendramin, 2013).

> L'Etat social a réussi à substituer à l'utopie socialiste d'un travail libéré une visée plus simple qui consiste à fournir au travailleur, en échange de son effort, une somme croissante de bien-être et de lui garantir le plein-emploi. Le 20ème siècle est celui de la société salariale et de l'emploi. (Méda and Vendramin, 2013:23.)

The second half of the 20th century sees a massive increase in economic growth and the development of new expectations with regard to work as something that could be fulfilling. For a long time, work was seen as a duty but through the 20th century it became 'une activité visant à l'obtention d'un gain, permettant une certaine réalisation de l'individu et conditionnant une plein intégration à la société' (Méda and Vendramin, 2013: 74). Work is framed with rights and perceived as the vector of 'la citoyenneté sociale' (Ferreras, 2007; see Castel, 2008). Individuals work in order to have access to everything that consumption has to offer (Méda and Vendramin, 2013) and what was previously offered as compensations became the purpose of working (Gorz, 1988). 'La régulation incitative par le consommationisme a ainsi une efficacité qui dépasse sa fonction initiale et provoque une mutation culturelle' (Gorz, 1988:83).

Recent sociological research points out that, alongside the instrumental dimension of work, an expressive dimension also exists (Ferreras, 2007). The instrumental dimension relates to the idea that individuals' motivation to work lies only in their wages. The expressive dimension implies that workers attach meanings to their work. Ferreras (2007) highlights that the expressive dimension is constituted by four components: feel useful, be autonomous, be included and do an interesting job. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that work is not only something pursued by people for the wages, as conceptualized by orthodox economists, but is also 'un support de sens majeur dans la vie de l'individu qui travaille' (Ferreras, 2007:244). In other words, 'work has a crucial bearing upon the material as well as affective well-being of those who perform it' (Spencer, 2009:1).

There is a multiplicity of understandings of employment and the evolution of society through the Industrial Revolution and into the industrial capitalism has strongly impacted the organization of work and the understandings attached to it (Castel et *al*., 2012). The next two sections focus on the specific period of the *Trentes Glorieuses* that followed the Second World War, and the period after 1975. These are peculiar periods in terms of economic growth, and it is interesting to understand how that influenced the organization of labour.

3.3 Employment during the period from 1945 to 1975

According to the study that Méda and Vendramin (2013) did based on European census, attitudes towards work are clearly shaped by the institutional and economic context. In particular, it seems that the 20th century had a major influence on the current organization of labour. Society knew a massive economic growth after the Second World War and the organization of labour was shaped by the trust economists and politicians put in it.

3.3.1 Elements of the context

In the aftermath of the Second World War, European countries such as France, Belgium and the UK aimed at developing mass production in order to rebuild and modernize the economy (Méda and Vendramin, 2013) and, simultaneously, aimed at creating a new social order (Palier, 2005). The massive economic growth that the period between 1945 and the early 1970s knew was the result of a combination of the standardisation of goods and of production methods (Méda and Vendramin, 2013: Gazier et *al*., 2014), as well as mass consumption and the generalization of social security. Following the difficult time of the war, the acceleration in economic activities is welcomed by individuals, who are now looking for material well-being and see in it a source of social progress (Gueret and Thiry, 2015).

During this period, the benefits offices were created. Insurance for workers and unemployment benefits were made mandatory and generalized (Faniel, 2006). As Freyssinet (2006) discusses, there is nothing brand new at that time, as it is the result of a construction based on previous dynamics. 'L'élément nouveau réside dans la croissance progressive des moyens et dans l'effort de mise en cohérence des dispositifs au service d'une politique macroéconomique et de plein emploi' (Freyssinet, 2006: 8). The protection granted by this security system is determined by one's professional activity (Gazier et *al*., 2014). In other words, it is through work that someone has access to the rights that give one the assurance of protection. Castel (2008) argues that, through these social protections, the citizens gain a 'citoyenneté sociale'. This relates to 'having access to a minimum level of resources and have vital rights that guarantee a certain social autonomy' (Castel, 2008:135). It goes hand in hand with a political citizenship, as the social citizenship enables the individual to fulfil and enjoy his or her political duties and rights. This newly generalized social security 'plaid a role of stabilization as it both supported and revitalized economic growth' (Gazier et *al*., 2014:41). Furthermore, the social compromises sealed in the aftermath of WWII were based on the agreement that 'workers would play an integral part in the pursuit of increased productivity, and that employers would share the benefit of that increased productivity between salaries and profit.' (Cassiers et Thiry, 2014: 4). Hence, economic growth underlies the social compromises related to labour that were agreed upon after 1945.

3.3.2 Keynesian Economics & Full Employment

During the period following the war, Keynesian economics was at the core of economic theory and policies (Jahan et *al.*, 2017). It had a significant influence on the organization of labour, with long-lasting effects. This branch of economics was created in the 1930s, in a period of economic depression with a massive level of unemployment. Classical economic theory, that was prevailing at the time, could not provide a satisfactory explanation. The belief had been that the invisible hand would bring the market back to its equilibrium (Jahan et *al*, 2017).

Contrasting with this idea, Keynes made the revolutionary argument that state intervention could solve the capitalist economy's issues (Jahan et *al.*, 2017). 'The government, as the developer and enforcer of the money contracting system, can cure, with the cooperation of private industry and households, some major economic flaws' (Davidson, 2017:15).

According to Keynes, the most important driver of the market is the aggregate demand (Jahan et *al.*, 2017; Davidson, 2017). Government's expenses can contribute to boosting the aggregate demand or can decrease it, by shrinking public expenditure. Keynesian economists advocate in favour of deficit spending to stimulate demand. This can generate optimistic perspectives for private firms, encouraging them to hire more workers, which in turn decrease unemployment (Jahan et *al.*, 2017; Davidson, 2017). In other words, Keynes' understanding of unemployment is an insufficient level of profitable market demand, reinforced by pessimistic perspectives for private firms (Davidson, 2017). Accordingly, policymakers should encourage additional spending by households and increase public spending to stimulate the aggregate demand. 'The basic Keynes message is our capitalist market system works best when spending causes a healthy growth in market demand and thereby generates profits and jobs and income for all the members of the community' (Davidson, 2017:62). By stimulating and creating the required level of aggregate demand, the economy would reach full employment. 'Keynesian economists justify government intervention through public policies that aim to achieve full employment and price stability' (Jahan et *al*., 2017:4). 'In France, as elsewhere in Europe, from 1945 onwards, the social security plan is framed by an economic policy that aims at and relies on full employment' (Palier, 2005:97). Full employment became a norm (Fouquet, 2011) and 'society's goal' (Conter, 2007), which implies that the state guaranteed that everyone wishing to work would find a job.

Full employment does not imply the absence of unemployment but means that 'unemployment is limited to a frictional level, usually evaluated at 3%, that matches the transition period between two jobs' (Conter, 2007:23). In other words, frictional unemployment 'arises because both workers and firms need time to locate each other and to digest the information about the value of the job match' (Borjas, 2013:506). Politicians and economists do not worry about this kind of unemployment as this is not the result of structural problems in the economy (Borjas, 2013).

Castel et *al.* (2012) highlight how France became a modernized and dynamic country during that period, 'the constant development of sciences, techniques and social wealth seemed to guarantee an increasing domination of humankind on nature and on humanity's destiny. It seemed pretty logical to think that tomorrow would be better than today' (Castel et *al*, 2012:27).

However, the first clues about the unsustainability of that model appeared in the 1970s, with the oil crisis in 1973 and 1978 that hit economic growth, among other things. Keynes' ideas lost popularity, as advanced economies suffered from stagflation in the 1970s, to which Keynesian economics had no answer (Jahan et *al.*, 2017). Moreover, while economic growth declined, the social and economic difficulties of the population increased, putting even more pressure on the last resources of that system (Palier, 2005). Palier (2005) argues that as long as France knew economic growth, the development of the social security hid the many discrepancies stemming from the social compromises sealed in 1945. Nonetheless, the agreement on economic growth that prevailed during the two decades following the Second World War started to crumble during the 1970s (Gueret and Thiry, 2015).

3.4 Employment in the period from 1975 onwards

Until the 1970s, 'la croissance économique permet simultanément celle des revenus, de la consommation, de la population active et de l'emploi, mais aussi la faiblesse du taux de chômage, ainsi que la constitution d'une protection sociale' (Barbier, 1997: 25). The two consecutive oil crises created a situation of economic recession, generating inflation, slow growth and unemployment. Neoliberal politics seemed to offer better answers to the situation than Keynesianism and dominated the new economic policies in Europe, aiming at restoring economic growth and limiting inflation (Crespy, 2018). The core of these policies is twofold: increasing competition, which is achieved by opening up to foreign markets and encouraging the mobility of capital, and decreasing state intervention (Ostry et *al*., 2016). 'There has been a strong and widespread global trend towards neoliberalism since the 1980s' (Ostry et al., 2016:38) and neoliberal thoughts dominated economic theory and policies, until the 2008 economic crisis, when there was a renewed interest for Keynesianism (Davidson, 2017).

The increased competition encouraged by neoliberal politics went hand in hand with globalization. This neoliberal globalization lead to 'la mise en concurrence des pays de la planète, de leurs systèmes sociaux et de leurs travailleurs' (Plihon, 2006 :123), which was further exacerbated by the financilisation of the economy. The 1980s mark the development of the financial capitalism, which significantly changed the power balance between labour and capital (Plihon, 2006). After the Second World War, capital was not very mobile and the relationship with labour was quite stable, which allowed the creation of social compromises. But the neoliberal agreements made capital highly mobile and destabilized that balance in favour of capital holders (Plihon, 2006).

In the financial capitalism, the market value of the firm becomes the most important thing, overtaking the development of the firms' activity and employment (Plihon, 2006). The dynamic of shareholders and their return to capital is the focus of private firms and 'la masse salariale constitue la principale variable d'ajustement dont dispose les *managers* pour assurer la stabilté des résultats de l'entreprise' (Plihon, 2006:132). Moreover, the evolution of workers' purchasing power is now smaller than the evolution of productivity gains. The wage share in percentage of GDP has decreased in many industrialized countries, while the return of capital for investors has increased significantly (Plihon, 2006). International competition is now the key element in determining wages (Barbier and Nadel, 2000). In the trio formed by shareholders, executives and employees, the latter are the weakest (Plihon, 2006).

All these elements converge towards a situation of precarity for employment. Since 1985, there is an increase in low-wage jobs, as well as a higher probability of staying in these low-wage jobs or remaining unemployed (Concialdi, 2006). This is related to the development of flexibility of employment and work, which reached its height in the 1990s (Barbier and Nadel, 2000), and is a by-product of the globalization and financialisation of the economy. This high level of flexibility is visible in the increased share of temporary jobs and part-time work in the economy (Concialdi, 2006). In 2019, nearly one worker out of 5 is working in a part-time job in Europe and 10.8% out of the total number of employees are working temporary jobs in Europe (Eurostat, 2019c;d). According to Concialdi (2006), the neoliberal politics that have encouraged these new forms of work, with the underlying agenda of decreasing unemployment, have further weakened the labour market and did not bring a solution to unemployment at all. The establishment of flexibility in the labour market also weakened the union powers, 'preventing them from crystallising collective resistance' (Plihon, 2006:132).

Through this period of neoliberal politics, the financialisation of the economy has changed the place of work changed in society, which became, to a certain extent, subordinated to the financial capital. The post-growth paradigm is also a mean to question that superiority of financial capital over human capital and, possibly, to correct that imbalance.

4. *Economic Growth and Employment*

Let's recall that GDP represents 'the total monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced (and inventoried) by an entity (generally a State) in a given period (generally a year)' (Cassiers and Thiry, 2014:3). The GDP can be computed using data on production, income or expenditure, all of which are equivalent in an accounting perspective. If we consider the production side, we can compute the GDP to put forward the role played by workers. The GDP (*Y*) can be broken down using the average hours worked by a worker (*H*):

$$Y = \frac{Y}{TH} . \frac{TH}{E} . E$$

With $TH = E.H=$ the total hours worked in an economy

The first term $\frac{Y}{TH}$ represents the (apparent) hourly labour productivity, as it is the GDP divided by the total number of hours worked in an economy. The second term indicates the total hours worked by an employee, as it is the ratio of the total hours worked in an economy to the number of workers.

Simplifying for the level of employment in person (E), this identity tells us that ‘all other things being equal, and leaving aside capital and technical progress, if productivity outpaces economic growth, the volume of labour diminishes’ (Burggraeve et *al*., 2015:32). This is related to what Husson (2008) calls the ‘dilemma of productivity’: productivity fosters economic growth and reduces the total number of jobs. As technological research evolves, productivity increases and it reduces the unit of labour required to produce (Bihouix, 2015, in Sinaï). Husson (2008) pointed out that, if economic growth matters for employment, it is not sufficient to draw a representative picture of a country’s situation with respect to employment, rather it has to be considered relatively to the hourly labour productivity. Hence, productivity plays a major role in the ‘general dynamic of economic growth and employment’ (Husson, 2008:34)

With respect to the demand of labour in an economy, from a macroeconomic perspective, the gains in productivity play the main role. If they are growing at a slower pace than economic growth, there will be a net creation of jobs (Gazier and Petit, 2019). For the supply side of labour, the standard model considers the trade-off between money (earned from a job) and free time (that allows one to spend money, therefore, to consume). A utility function depending on consumption and free time represents an individual’s preferences, considered with respect to a wage given by the market and which constitutes the budget constraint. Gazier and Petit (2019), after explaining it, highlights that such a representation dismisses the sociological and psychological determinants that also play an important role in an individual’s decision to offer his or her labour force, as we have discussed in a previous section.

If productivity gains are significantly influencing employment, economic growth still plays a primary role. In particular, at the national level, the strong correlation that seems to exist between the evolution of the GDP and of the level of employment has inspired Okun’s law. This macroeconomic principle was developed in 1962 and predicts a negative correlation between a change in the evolution of a country's GDP and the level of employment in that country (Ball et *al.,* 2013). In other words, Okun's law predicts the minimum level of economic growth required for the unemployment rate to start decreasing (Bodart et *al*., 2013). What the law depicts is the fact that a change in the aggregate demand leads the output to vary around its potential, which then creates a shift in the labour requirements of firms, hence the level of employment is impacted (Ball et *al*., 2013). The relationship can be written as followed:

$$U_t - U_t^* = \alpha\ (Y_t - Y_t^*) + \varepsilon^{U,Y}\ , \alpha < 0$$

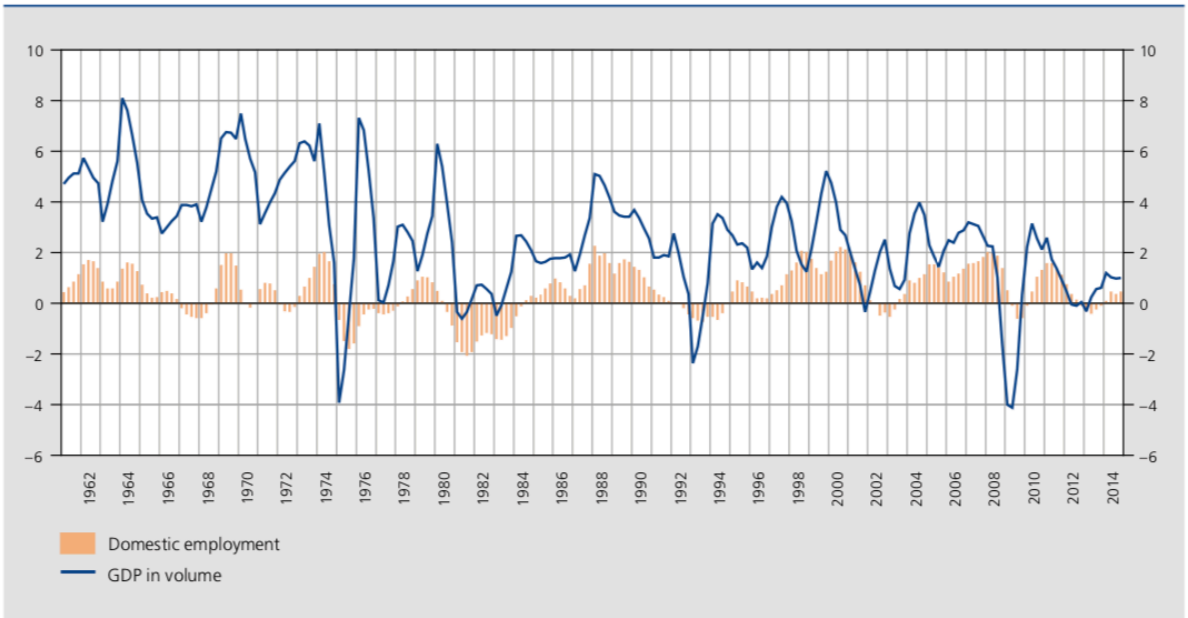
With α being Okun coefficient, U_t the unemployment rate at time *t*, Y_t the neperian logarithm of real GDP and U_t^*, Y_t^* the trend value of those variables (Burggraeve et *al*., 2015).

The relationship is found to be verified for many countries but the coefficient α of the relationship, the sensitivity of unemployment to changes in GDP growth, varies between countries (Ball et *al*., 2013). For Belgium, Ball et *al.* (2013) found an Okun coefficient of -0.511 for the period going from 1980 to 2011. This means that a change of 1% in GDP leads to a decrease of 0.511 percentage point in the unemployment rate. A change in GDP can be due to changes in employment, in the average working time or in the productivity per hour (Burggraeve et *al*., 2015). It is worth noting that recent studies appear to support the fact that Okun's law is strong and stable across time and countries and is found to be valid even in periods of economic crisis (Ball et *al*., 2013; Ball et *al*., 2014).

The following graph shows the evolution of economic growth and employment growth in Belgium in a large time frame. From that graph, it is clear that the correlation between employment and economic growth is positive (Burggraeve et *al*., 2015), implying that an increase in GDP is positively correlated with an increase in employment. A period of expansion implies an increase in the labour requirement of firms, which translates in an increase in the employment rate and a decrease in the unemployment rate. Burggraeve et *al*. (2015) put forward that the reduction in unemployment will not be proportionate to the augmentation in employment, primarily because of the specific dynamics of the labour force that relates to the composition of the population in its entirety, as well as the labour market participation rate.

CHART 2 HISTORICAL PATTERN OF EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

(data adjusted for seasonal and calendar effects, percentage changes compared to the corresponding quarter of the previous year)



Sources: NAI, OECD.

Source: Burggraeve et *al*., 2015: 33

In an explanatory document about unemployment, the International Monetary Fund puts forward the very important relationship that exists between economic growth and unemployment (Oner, 2016).

> Growth and unemployment can be thought of as two sides of the same coin: when economic activity is high, more production happens overall, and more people are needed to produce the higher amount of goods and services. And when economic activity is low, firms cut jobs and unemployment rises' (Oner, 2016:32).

5. *Conclusion*

The relationship between economic growth and (un)employment is at the core of Okun's law, 'which postulates that a decline in unemployment by one percentage point corresponds to a three percent rise in output' (Oner, 2016:32). Macroeconomists consider that a high level of employment goes with a high level of economic growth. Economic growth has been the focus of policies since the Industrial Revolution, and both Keynesian and neoliberal policies aimed at reaching higher level of GDP growth. The relationship between employment and economic growth is also present in the social compromises sealed after 1945 about the organization of labour, creating or reinforcing workers' rights and protection.

During the *Trentes Glorieuses*, Keynesian policies have significantly influenced the labour market's organisation, as well as the meanings attached to work. During that period, policies aimed at fostering demand. In other words, it aimed at encouraging consumption in order to generate economic growth. In the 1970s, neoliberal policies dominated in a period of economic crisis and aimed at getting as close as possible to the situation of massive economic growth and full employment that the previous period knew. The financial capitalism and the phenomenon of globalization that emerged during this period weakened the labour market. As a result, employment has become flexible and precarious.

Given all this, how would employment evolve if 'the societal project [was] redefined beyond economic growth' (Cassiers and Maréchal, 2018:2) as a post-growth transition would require? Drawing on what has been highlighted so far, the next chapter of the study discusses the theoretical implications for employment with respect to the three main scenarii highlighted in the first section, namely degrowth, steady-state and a-growth.

Chapter 3 – Scenarii for a post-growth society

1. *Introduction*

Post-growth is understood here as 'an era in which the societal project is redefined beyond the pursuit of economic growth' (Cassiers et Maréchal, 2018:2). We have previously highlighted three perspectives for a post-growth society that are highly discussed in the literature, the degrowth movement, the steady-state and the a-growth. The boundary between these concepts of post-/de-/a-growth appears blurry and subject to debate (van Griethuysen, 2012; Kallis, 2011). Moreover, the policy recommendations of each of these perspectives are not exclusively related to one of them and are even sometimes shared by all three (van den Bergh et Kallis, 2012). Besides, as a transition towards a post-growth society requires 'a systemic, political, institutional and cultural change' (Kallis, 2011:875), scholars usually suggest an ensemble of proposals, in a holistic perspective, and not a unique policy.

The aim of this literature review is to highlight what could change in the labour market if we were to switch to a post-growth economy, in particular from the point of view of the worker. We will discuss the arguments present in the literature, highlighting the specificities of each perspective and the policy proposals related to employment that are suggested. We do not aim at providing guidelines about how to achieve a transition to post-growth, but to present an overview of what is discussed in the literature.

This chapter is organized into three distinct sections. Section one discusses the degrowth movement, which has received a lot of attention in the literature. Firstly, it briefly presents the concept of degrowth. Secondly, we discuss two key policy proposals of the movement: a working-time reduction and a basic income. Thirdly, we outline the arguments in favour of switching towards low-productivity and labour-intensive sectors of the economy, mainly constructed around Jackson's (2017) and Bihouix's (2015) arguments. Section two is devoted to the steady-state, originally developed by ecological economist Herman Daly. We will first review what is understood by steady-state, then discuss two ways of achieving a distributional equity while staying within the ecological constraint of the environment. Section three deals with the a-growth debate. It outlines the arguments of van den Bergh, who first coin the term as an alternative to the duality of the position of green growth and anti-growth (van den Bergh, 2015), and of the Doughnut Economy, developed by Raworth (2017), before concluding the chapter.

2. <u>*Degrowth*</u>

Degrowth implies a contraction of the economy (Büchs and Koch, 2019), a process of downscaling (Kallis, 2011; Levy, 2017). In the Degrowth Declaration of the Paris Conference in 2008, degrowth was defined as 'a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society' (Research & Degrowth, 2010: 524). It implies decreasing the flows of production and consumption in order to remain within the ecological boundaries of the planet while being socially equitable (Buch-Hansen et Koch, 2019), which will eventually lead to a decrease in GDP (Kallis, 2011; Büchs and Koch, 2019). As Kallis (2011) emphasizes, the GDP degrowth is not the primary goal of degrowth as defined in this broad sense, rather 'from a degrowth perspective, the core problem is the systemic dependency of stable economies on an ever-expanding output' (Kallis et van den Bergh, 2012:916). Economic growth poses a dilemma as capitalistic growth is doubtlessly not sustainable but degrowth appears socially unstable (Jackson, 2017; Kallis et *al*., 2013), given that a 'lack of growth […] leads to a spiral of debt, unemployment and deteriorisation of welfare' (Kallis et *al*., 2013). Therefore, the post-growth society, if following a degrowth strategy, requires a new set of institutions and policies (Kallis et *al*., 2013). The literature suggests that 'l'emploi est un des verrous essentiels à lever pour la réorientation des modes de production et de consommation' (Azam et *al*., 2007: 61). Consequently, and because of employment's key importance in society, the development and implementation of new work policies that would fit the post-growth paradigm appears as a good entry point into a post-growth society.

The degrowth movement aims at enhancing individuals' well-being while decreasing the pressure on the environment (Kallis, 2011) and to do so involves 'implementing social policies that will contribute to a smooth and stable economic downscaling' (Kallis et van den Bergh, 2012: 912). As Kallis (2011) highlights, the degrowth of the economy is not to be endless, but to downscale until it reaches a steady state. According to Druckman et *al*., Ecological Economics has highlighted two ways of reaching a degrowth economy: 'reducing the number of hours worked and reducing the amount of goods and services produced for each hour worked' (2020: 1). In other words, they put the focus on work-sharing and on the question of labour productivity growth.

2.1. Policy proposals

In this section, we present what appears as the most discussed policy proposals with respect to the organization of employment in a degrowth society. We consider three proposals.

The working-time reduction - that involve questions of redistribution, reallocation and organization of leisure time - the introduction of a basic income and the shift towards a service-based economy.

2.1.1. Work-Time Degrowth

‘Negative growth is socially unstable in capitalist economy’ (Kallis et *al.*, 2013: 1546). Therefore, when it comes to degrowth, one of the fears mentioned in the literature is a rising level of unemployment. This worry is related to the concept of labour productivity gains that we have briefly discussed in the second chapter. Let’s recall that ‘if productivity outpaces growth, the volume of labour diminishes’ (Burggraeve et *al.*, 2015:32). Therefore, to maintain employment, if the duration of work is to remain constant, economic growth is required (Gadrey, 2019). To put it another way, ‘with labour productivity continually rising, aggregate demand must rise at the same rate if the total number of employed hours is to stay the same’ (Jackson, 2017: 145). So far, labour productivity gains have been used to produce more with less and despite major gains since the Industrial Revolution, the hours worked a week by workers have not changed since the Great Depression, when the 40-hours week was set (Kallis et *al.*, 2013). Numerous scholars in the degrowth movement have turned their attention to a decrease in working time per worker, which is a possibility that Keynes already mentioned in his 1930s essay, *Economic Possibilities of our Grandchildren* (Keynes, 1963).

Hence, policies of working time reduction (WTR) are not a new idea. Furthermore, they have already been implemented in times of low growth such as recession and stagnation (Zwickl et *al.*, 2016; Kallis et *al.*, 2013). Such a policy tool is believed by many to be an effective way to limit the rising level of unemployment that would follow a lack or a decrease in labour productivity gains (Zwickl et *al.*, 2016; Kallis et *al.*, 2013; Schor, 2004; Bihouix, 2015; Levy, 2017; Pullinger, 2014; Antal, 2018; Nørgård, 2013; Victor, 2017) but has never yet been used with respect to environmental considerations (Zwickl et *al.*, 2016). As Zwickl et *al.* (2016) acknowledge, the effect of such a policy on employment is highly determined by the set of institutions. A transition to a post-growth society requires systemic changes (Kallis et *al.*, 2013), which implies the development of a new set of institutions, and there is no guarantee that the work-time reduction policies will have similar implications as it had had in time of involuntary low growth.

The proposal of working-time reduction involves many questions. We will discuss the dimension of redistribution of work, of reallocation of work and time, the question of leisure with respect to the environment and, before concluding, the peculiar perception of time in a work-time reduction perspective.

Redistribution

The labour market participation could be increased by allocating hours and job more equally within the working population (Ashford et *al*., 2012; Victor, 2017; Zwickl et *al*., 2016). Kallis et *al*. (2013) mention four possibilities for work-time reduction: implement a four-day week, keep five days of work but with fewer hours each day, increase the share of part-time jobs or allow for longer paid leave (vacation, parental leaves, sabbatical, etc.). By redistributing work over the labour force, it would redistribute part-time jobs over the population, not making them only the burden of women anymore (Schor, 2004; Zwickl et *al*., 2016). Indeed, scholars from the field of feminist economics have voiced concern about the fact that the jobs allowing for short hours of work a week, that are often women's jobs, comes with a price (Sirianni and Negrey: 2000), as they are generally associated with less social benefits like smaller retirement benefits, no increase in wages and no possibilities of climbing the professional ladder (Schor, 2004; Zwickl et *al*., 2016). Kallis et *al*. (2013) emphasis that the dividing line between the opportunity of working part-time and the obligation of working part-time is very thin. Therefore, WTR, by redistributing work over the working population and decreasing the hours worked by every worker, could have additional positive effect than just limiting unemployment. Furthermore, 'the negative effects of long and unequal working hours on the environment, health, happiness, well-being, earnings, and gender equality, make a strong case for redistributing hours more equally through work-sharing policies' (Zwickl et *al*., 2016: 249). As Levy (2017) puts forward 'there is nothing natural or inevitable in this increasingly imbalanced way work is now shared' (313).

Reallocation

A policy of work-time degrowth could lead a reallocation of time between the different forms that work can actually take. As Levy (2017) rightfully highlights, a redistribution of work through a work-time reduction policy focuses on a very particular form of work, 'the work that we perform for someone else in exchange for a wage, for purposes that are not our own and according to a timetable dictated by someone else' (2017: 308). A number of studies have argued that another understanding of employment that includes voluntary and non-paid work, such as domestic and voluntary work, should be promoted in a degrowth society (Martinez-Alier et *al*., 2010; Nierling, 2012). 'In contrast to paid work, which is strongly related to institutionalised and economically based work activity, very often directly contributing to economic growth, unpaid work is basically not profit oriented and is organized on an individual basis.' (Nierling, 2012: 240).

Nonetheless, Nierling (2012) stresses the importance of economic security to be able to enjoy this surplus of time that becomes available through policies. She argues in favour of complementary policies that would allow anyone who wishes to, to be able to do volunteer work, such as a basic income. More generally, there is a need to protect the workers with a below-average wage, and such a protection could be granted through 'the uncoupling of social protections and benefits from labour-market participation' (Levy, 2017: 316). As we have discussed in the second chapter of the study, the access to social benefits has been constructed through workers' rights, therefore making them conditional to working at least a certain amount of time (Gazier et *al.*, 2014).

Numerous scholars have also discussed whether or not the reduction of working time should be accompanied by a change in wages. According to Pullinger (2014), the implications of WTR policies strongly depend on whether or not there is a variation in the wages. Those advocating against a change of wage argue that a WRT should not lead to a situation where precarious workers and less wealthy people suffer (Levy, 2017, Kallis et *al*., 2013). The idea behind this argument is that, as a WTR policy would decrease the number of hours worked by an individual, if it is associated with a decrease in wages and that the worker has a precarious job that does not pay well, the worker will receive an even smaller wage and that may not be sufficient to cover his basic needs. Compared to that, someone who has a good job and a good pay will be more likely to manage with a smaller income without having to cut the spending in his basic need. On the opposite, Ashford et *al*. (2012) argue for a decline in wages in order to be able to redistribute the 'wage income from existing workers to a larger pool of potential workers' (19). Bihouix (2015) shares that vision and considers that a reduction of wage is feasible as part of a consumption degrowth, and as long as the parameters and the relationship between the different dimensions of work, such as between paid and unpaid work, domestic and economic, change as well.

Leisure

A decrease in the hours worked would create more time for leisure (Kallis et *al*., 2013). With respect to the ecological boundaries, Kallis et *al.* (2013) point out that a reduction of working hours does not automatically benefit the environment. Furthermore, if there is no change in the current preferences of individuals with regard to leisure activities, resource consumption is likely to expand. The Ford Effect is a good example of how working less can lead to increased consumption and economic growth (Kallis et *al.,* 2013). Jackson points out that 'the way we spend our leisure time can be responsible for as much as 25 per cent of our carbon footprint' (2017: 143). Hence, the environmental impact of such a policy would be significantly influenced by the extent to which the increased free time is dedicated to resource-intensive activities and consumption (Levy, 2017). Pullinger (2014) claims that WTR should be implemented in combination with policies that encourage leisure activities with a very small ecological impact. 'The question here is how working less may also lead to producing and consuming less (in a degrowth spirit), rather than working less but producing and consuming the same' (Kallis et *al.*, 2013: 1562). Yet, Nørgård (2013) found empirical evidence that a WTR would have a significant positive impact on the environment. Moreover, 'less work time does offer unique opportunities to combine significantly reduced environmental impact with improved quality of life if the extra leisure is spent appropriately' (Nørgård, 2013: 67).

What is considered as 'appropriate' ways of spending the leisure time is not explicitly presented in the literature. Nonetheless, there seems to be a general agreement that this time should be spent on activities that 'nurture human relationships' (Kallis et *al*., 2013: 1546) and for personal development (Levy, 2017). For example, taking care of a vegetable garden or create your own toothpaste (Bihouix, 2015). In particular, Levy (2017) argues that a transition to degrowth 'implies a way of life which will require more time than the hours left over from demanding wage work' (308). It is interesting to note that the discussion about this new leisure time was already conducted by Keynes in his 1930s essay. According to him, it is individuals 'who can keep alive, and cultivate into a fuller perfection, the art of life itself and do not sell themselves for the means of life, who will be able to enjoy the abundance when it comes' (Keynes, 1963: 5). He emphasizes that it can be something dreadful for some individuals, especially as 'we have been trained too long to strive and not to enjoy' (Keynes, 1963: 5). This did not prevent him from seeing in fewer working hours a way to be free from all the economic practices aiming only at fostering the accumulation of capital and that he acknowledges as 'distasteful and unjust' (Keynes, 1963).

About Time

By definition, the working-time reduction policies aim at redistributing time between individuals, so that everyone who wishes to can have some time to work, some time to engage in other forms of work, such as unpaid or volunteer work and some personal time. Nørgård (2013) argues that an economy based on such policies offers the workers the possibility to regain control of their time and their activities. This idea is also present in Pullinger's (2014) arguments. Pullinger (2014) suggests the development of WTR policies to follow a green life course approach, inspired by the Belgian and Netherlands social policies that evolve with respect to the various steps of an individual's life (child, student, worker, parent, retirees) but adapted to take into account environmental considerations. In such an approach, time rights constitutes a key policy. Time rights is a tool allowing employees to work fewer hours a week or take career breaks, while being guaranteed their job back when returning. This means that such a policy 'provide[s] individuals high levels of freedom to control their own time' (Pullinger, 2014: 16). More generally, Levy (2017) highlights that what degrowth has to offer to individuals is 'the wealth of time' (309).

A Complex Discussion

The degrowth movement aims at giving a vision of a 'just, participatory and ecologically sustainable society' (Research & Degrowth, 2010: 2; Kallis, 2011). van den Bergh highlights that 'there is a problematic vagueness in the degrowth proposal in so far as the post-capitalist alternative to which it hints is not specified' (Kallis, 2011: 875, in response to van den Bergh's critique, 2011). Therefore, a discussion about concrete policies to achieve degrowth is very complex. Besides, many of the proposals for a WTR reviewed here are stemming from the Ecological Economics literature, which is not a unified field. This further exacerbates the difficulty of highlighting some clear and consensual ways in which to achieve a sustainable degrowth.

That being said, according to Levy (2017), there is a consensus about the rightness of WTR policies for the degrowth movement. In particular, Levy (2017) considers that such policies are 'the iconic reform for the degrowth movement' (316), as decreasing the time spend in the labour force can 'help break the habit of living to work, working to earn, and earning to consume' (Coote et *al*., 2010:3, in Levy, 2017: 320).

2.1.2. Basic Income

The basic income is a policy proposal discussed in the degrowth movement but also outside of the post-growth debate. It can take multiple names and forms (Van Parijs, 2004), as there are multiple answers to the many questions raised by the proposal. To whom is it going? On which criteria? How much? For example, Van Parijs, a strong advocator of basic income in Belgium, defines it as 'an income paid by a political community to all its members on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement.' (2004: 8) In Van Parijs's (2004) vision, it is a tool for more individual freedom (Van Parijs, 2004; Raventós, 2007). Note that, as a basic income can take many forms, some version of it are not compatible with a post-growth society. In the degrowth literature, there seems to be a consensus about the idea that a basic income has to be think as a complementary component of WTR policies, encouraging people to work less and making WTR policies sustainable (Méda, 2017, Heikkinen, 2018, Levy, 2017), rather than by itself.

According to Van Parijs, the idea of a basic income is to 'give all citizens a modest, yet unconditional income, and let them top it up at will with income from other sources' (Van Parijs, 2004:7). As it is unconditional, it provides individuals with an economic safety net (Kallis et *al*., 2012). Contrary to the social benefits scheme developed after the Second World War, which are directly related to the status of the worker (Gazier et *al*., 2014), the basic income is an 'obligation-free income' (Van Parijs et Vanderborght, 2017). In that sense, it frees people from what Van Parijs (2004) calls rightfully 'the employment trap', as it allows them to be freer and less dependent on a wage and allows a decommodification of labour (Raventós, 2007; Méda, 2017). Moreover, it provides workers with a bargaining power that empowers them to refuse what they consider as lousy jobs, as they are entitled to a basic income whether or not they have a paid job (Van Parijs et Vanderborght, 2017). According to Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017), the introduction of a basic income would not generate a massive number of people without paid work, as the ones who choose to spend less time in the labour market would, by doing so, creating employment possibilities for those who wish to work. Nonetheless, Van Parijs's vision raises many questions, such as how much money is needed for an individual to be free from the need to work, which are complex to solve. It depends on the context and on many different variables, which is why it is very complex to give a straight answer.

A basic income is also a tool of redistribution as it would facilitate and allow individuals to choose in which sphere of work (paid or unpaid) they want to spend their time (Kallis et *al.*, 2012, Raventós, 2007). In particular, it would offer the opportunity to women that are spending most of their time in the domestic sphere by obligation to spend their time in another form of work (Raventós, 2007). It also provides a solution to the aforementioned unequal access to meaningful unpaid work and activities that are likely to be less resource-intensive (Nierling, 2012; Kallis et *al*., 2012).

According to Heikkinen (2018), a basic income could also facilitate the transition towards a degrowth society, insomuch as it appears to be welfare improving and could help shift individuals' preferences towards the welfare-enhancing society that a degrowth society could be. Therefore, what such a basic income aims at is converging towards what the degrowth movement aims at. It is interesting to note that, according to Van Parijs et Vanderborght (2017), the idea of a basic income partly takes its roots in the collapse of the belief that continuous economic growth is the right path to follow.

How a basic income is going to be designed, funded and sustained is highly dependent on the very goal of the basic income (a tool for individual freedom? a small, unconditional, complementary but not sufficient by itself income?) and on the policies that will be implemented with the basic income, such as WTR. More research on a basic income in a degrowth spirit is needed to be able to answer these questions on the feasibility and the rightness of a basic income in a degrowth society.

2.2. Shift in the nature of work: avenues for a service-based economy

Besides those policies that aim at changing the organization of work in a post-growth society, other scholars argue in favour of a change in the sectors where work takes place. In particular, a number of studies have explored the possibility of shifting the current product-based economy towards a service-based economy (Jackson, 2017; Bihouix, 2015; Asford et *al.*, 2012; Victor, 2017). The service-based economy is labour-intensive, as it requires more human capital than financial capital, as well as very likely to put less pressure on the environment (Jackson, 2017; Asford et *al.*, 2012). 'The carbon footprint of the social and personal services sector is between three and five times smaller than the footprint of the manufacturing and extractive sectors' (Jackson, 2017: 148). Hence, it would also be a way to achieve a degrowth society, either combined with WTR policies, such as advocated by Victor (2017), Bihouix (2015) and Asford et *al*. (2012), or not, as in Jackson's vision (2017).

Jackson (2017) considers that, even though work sharing policies are a logical path to follow to downscale the economy, work is such an important component of a meaningful social life, that 'reducing our opportunities to work – or reducing the quality of our experience in doing so – represents a direct hit on our prosperity' (Jackson, 2017: 146). According to him, work makes the individual be a part of society, something that has already been discussed in the second chapter. To face the problem of rising unemployment if transitioning towards a low-growth society, he argues that an alternative to the WTR is a shift towards employment-rich sector, for which there is a lower (or even no) productivity growth. The service-based economy that Jackson (2017) advocates is constituted by activities related to craft, care, creativity and culture, that potential technological progress could support but will never replace. Note that, as Gadrey (2019) argues, the notion of productivity is outdated and inconsistent to think about work in a sustainable perspective.

An interesting element of the service-based economy Jackson is arguing for, is that, in a similar way as in the work-sharing discussion, there seems to be a peculiar experience of time in such an economy. While the WTR scheme allows individuals to gain back control of their time with respect to the different dimensions of life, work in a service-based economy changes time into a quality; 'it is a different take on things, but which offers an instantly recognizable and distinctively more human social logic than the one which sees work as a chore and labour as a cost' (Jackson, 2017: 147). Jackson calls it the 'Cinderella Economy', where the economy regains its role as a means to an end, rather than the end itself. In this perspective, the firms are 'a form of social organization embedded in the community, working in harmony with nature to deliver the capabilities that allow us to prosper' (Jackson, 2017: 158). This is echoing with Ecological Economics's vision of the economy nested in the society, itself surrounded by the environment. Finally, Jackson (2017) highlights that such an economy would bring recognition to work that has not been acknowledged so far, such as domestic care or volunteer work, and this recognition could foster 'a more cooperative, and potentially more altruistic, society' (2017: 207). Moreover, this could be further encouraged through the adoption of some form of basic income in the service-based economy (Jackson, 2017).

The service-based economy of tomorrow should enhance 'human services that improve the quality of our life: nutrition, shelter, social care, education, leisure, recreation, and the maintenance and protection of physical and natural assets' (Jackson, 2017: 142). Jackson (2017) sees in that a parallel with the circular economy, which is founded on the idea of reusing, recycling, upcycling, etc. In other words, on the idea of reducing the material throughput and offering a high-quality service. Jackson argues that 'thinking in terms of services reveals new ways to decarbonize or dematerialize human activities' (2017: 142).

Ashford et *al*. (2012) share some elements of Jackson's (2017) vision, arguing that a switch towards sectors that require more human capital like the service sector would reduce unemployment and limit the pressure on the environment. 'Reversing decades-old trends of designing labour out of production and services by redesigning the use of labour may actually be cost-effective. It will certainly utilize unused human capital and have social benefits as well.' (Ashford et *al*., 2012: 17). According to Ashford et *al.* (2012), the positive effects of such a change could be further exacerbated by the multiplier effect of employing human capital.

Bihouix (2015) suggests a switch to low-tech to better distribute work within a society, in a degrowth perspective. This would also lead to an economy oriented towards labour-intensive sectors, in particular towards the service sectors. Low tech can trigger some massive changes in various sectors of the economy. For example, according to Bihouix (2015), low tech in agriculture means organic small-scale farms which are labour intensive, in the industry, it would encourage handicraft, repair, etc., to a certain extent in a similar fashion as the circular economy. Bihioux (2015) acknowledges that some jobs would disappear, but the net effect of job loss and job creation would still be positive. Overall, he argues that 'un glissement très significatif s'opèrerait, des emplois de l'industrie et surtout des services marchands, vers l'agriculture et les services non marchands, tous deux vecteurs de bien-être pour la société' (2015: 215). A transition to low-tech in this perspective fits the paradigm of the degrowth movement as it aims at more well-being for individuals, is redistributive and is environmentally lighter.

3. *Steady-State*

'A steady-state economy is defined by constant stocks of physical wealth (artifacts) and a constant population, each maintained at some chosen, desirable level by a low rate of throughput' (Daly, 1974: 15). Daly (1974) argues that the steady-state economy must be designed in such a way that it 'provides the necessary social control with a minimum sacrifice of personal freedom' (19) and create a buffer area between pressures on the environment and the actual carrying capacity of the planet. There is a consensus around the fact that 'the appropriate long-term goal is sustainability' (Costanza et *al*., 2015: 121), even though there is no general agreement around what sustainability implies or means.

According to Lawn, 'ecological sustainability and distributional equity are the bedrock goals for achieving sustainable development' (2016: 111). Dietz and Pickett (2010) confirm that vision, claiming that equality is the central component of a steady-state economy. Furthermore, O'Neill (2015) puts forward that 'biophysically stable economies are more democratic and more equal, and their citizens are happier and healthier than those in growing or degrowing economies.' (1229).

Given the importance of equality in the steady-state perspective, it requires a fairer distribution of income among individuals (Dietz and Pickett, 2010). This can be achieved through a better distribution of income across the population or through the assurance of a paid job.

3.1.Income Distribution

Daly (2015) has suggested ten policies for a steady-state economy (204-209). One of them is to 'limit the range of inequality in income distribution'. In other words, it means decreasing the gap between the highest and the lowest wages in a society. This implies having a minimum and a maximum income set in a society. The former would assure that 'no person [is] receiving less income than what is deemed necessary' (Lawn, 2016: 103). This minimum income could take the form of a basic income, as previously discussed, or a job guarantee with a minimum wage (Lawn, 2016). With respect to the maximum income, those 'who have reached the limit could either work for nothing at the margin if they enjoy their work or devote the extra time to hobbies or public service' (Daly, 2015: 205). This could also be achieved through a system of taxes that would redistribute income from the wealthier to the poor (Dietz and Pickett, 2010).

Nonetheless, Dietz and Pickett (2010) argue that such policies are not enough and that it is necessary to democratize the institutions from which these high level of income disparities are stemming. 'Policies that promote employee ownership, co-operatives, and other models of democratic ownership are critical to reducing inequality' (Dietz and Picket, 2010: 61). These are the forms of enterprises advocated by the social and solidarity economy (Defourny and Nyssens, 2017).

3.2.Job Guarantee

Given the importance of work in a society and in an individual's life, numerous scholars argue in favour of a Job Guarantee scheme (Lawn, 2016; Alcott et *al.*, 2010; Hail, 2018), through which the government commits to offering a job to anyone who wishes to work but could not find a job. Such a policy would also suppress any involuntary unemployment (Lawn, 2016; Hail, 2018). It would primarily be designed to provide employment for a temporary period (Lawn, 2016). Lawn (2016) describes how such a policy could work:

> Job Guarantee workers would: (i) engage in a form of work similar to their usual or qualified form of employment, thereby minimising the depreciation of their human capital; (ii) if required, undertake training and/or further education; and (iii) produce goods and services predominantly of the public goods variety. (Lawn, 2016: 103).

It includes a minimum hourly wage paid to workers in the Job Guarantee scheme, in order to meet the minimum income required if one wishes to achieve a distributional equity (Lawn, 2016). Moreover, drawing on work from Mitchell and Muysken (2008), Lawn (2016) argues that such a minimum income would set a threshold for the economy as a whole, ensuring that no worker would be paid below that wage. Such a policy program could potentially reverse the trend of inequality (Hail, 2018) and, as Jackson highlights, 'this would send a powerful signal about what is valued in society' (2017: 207). Nonetheless, Hail (2018) points out that, for such a scheme to be socially sustainable, there is a need to change individuals' perceptions and attitude towards unemployment, insecure jobs and public work. Moreover, he highlights that 'people's willingness to consider a job guarantee scheme depends on how it is framed to participants and the public more widely' (Hail, 2018: 244).

The Job Guarantee disentangle the goal of full employment from economic growth (Alcott et *al.*, 2010; Hail, 2018). According to Alcott et *al.* (2010), a Job Guarantee policy would not achieve a reduction of the economy and must be combined with other policies such as WTR policies that would meet that goal. Moreover, according to the Report of the Steady State Economic Conference, which was held in 2008, there was a strong consensus that working time reduction policies must be organized (Dietz et *al*. (eds.), 2010). It was also pointed out that incentives to decrease the paid working time are needed, so policies encouraging that were suggested. For example, offering the same benefits, rights and protection to part-time workers and full-time workers, taxing more to discourage people from working too many hours (Alcott et *al.*, 2010). 'The challenge is to free people from the systemic and social pressures that prevent them from choosing to work less' (Alcott et *al.*, 2010: 86).

In Alcott et *al.* (2010), Pullinger suggests the use of the labour productivity gains to decrease the length of the working day or week, advocating for a WTR policy such as discussed previously. Daly (2015), in his ten policies for a steady-state economy, argues in favour of decreasing the hours worked by workers. He advocates for more freedom to choose what is convenient for each individual and actually allow for the various options to be feasible. There are no major differences between a WTR policy in a degrowth or a steady-state economy, especially given that the WTR is used in a degrowth perspective to downscale the economy and reached a steady-state. Therefore, we will not discuss the WTR in more details and we refer the reader to the section about work-time degrowth.

4. *A-Growth*

The a-growth perspective advocates for an agnostic position towards growth. The concept was first coined by van den Bergh (2011). It is also present in Raworth's arguments for a new regenerative and distributive economy, which she has named the Doughnut Economy (2017). This section is divided in two parts. Firstly, it presents the core concept and arguments of a-growth. Secondly, it discusses the place of work in an a-growth society.

4.1. The Core of the Concept

van den Bergh suggested in 2011 an alternative position between what he considers as the two polarized perspective of 'green growth' and anti-growth (van den Bergh, 2015). Through a-growth, he advocates for an indifference to GDP growth. It implies that whatever the trajectory of GDP growth, the economy would not care (van den Bergh, 2017; 2018). In line with this idea, Raworth's (2017) Doughnut Economy is agnostic about economic growth 'in the sense of designing an economy that promotes human prosperity whether GDP is going up, down or holding steady. […] To create economies that make us thrive, whether or not they grow' (245). Therefore, a-growth is neither against GDP growth nor in favour of it, but clearly against the fetishism for GDP growth (van den Bergh, 2015).

According to van den Bergh, the aim of policies in an a-growth strategy is to increase individuals' welfare and achieve environmental sustainability, in particular by mitigating climate change, while being 'agnostic about what will happen to the economy once good environmental and social policies are pursued' (van den Bergh et Kallis, 2012: 912). van den Bergh (2015) argues that the pursuit of GDP growth is an enormous constraint, in the sense that the goal of having to reach a certain level of economic growth take precedence over everything else. In particular, it constitutes a major barrier to implementing policies to mitigate climate, given that low or no growth is likely to stem from them (van den Bergh, 2018). As it gets rid of the barrier of having to reach a certain level of economic growth, the a-growth strategy will smooth the way to implementing climate mitigation policies (van den Bergh, 2018). 'The a-growth strategy […] is aimed at finding a genuine balance between all aspects of social welfare.' (van den Bergh, 2018: 69)

These welfare and ecological considerations are also present in the Doughnut. It is a regenerative and distributive economy that takes into consideration both the social requirements for individual well-being and the ecological constraints, while being agnostic about GDP growth (Raworth, 2017). It is based on the same core elements that lie at the foundation of Ecological Economics, that the economy is embedded in the society, itself nested in the environment. The Doughnut is the 'safe and just space for humanity' that lies 'between its social foundation of human well-being and ecological ceiling of planetary pressure' (Raworth, 2017: 44). It aims at bringing every human being into that space by constructing the required social foundations, such as the access to sufficient food, water and energy, education, healthcare and sanitation, decent housing, work and income, as well as social support and information network, in a context of peace, of gender and social equity and access to politics and justice for all(Raworth, 2017, see page 45). But also, by designing the organization of society to limit the pressure on the environment and stay below a number of thresholds above which there would be irreversible damages to nature, even though some of these thresholds have already been overshot (Raworth, 2017). In other words, the Doughnut Economy aims at achieving ‘human prosperity in a flourishing web of life’ (Raworth, 2017: 60).

van den Bergh’s (2011) development of a-growth stems from the shortcomings of the GDP as an indicator of progress (van den Bergh, 2015), a critique that is not unique to a-growth. van den Bergh’s a-growth is also developed on the basis that a degrowth is not enough given that as it ‘can be the result of producing less efficiently, i.e. having less output with more inputs, including more resources, energy, pollution and waste.’ (2011, 882). Raworth (2017), on the other hand, goes further than van den Bergh’s argument as she suggests an entire new compass for humanity that comprises the idea of social welfare and environmental sustainability. In other words, van den Bergh’s argument focuses on disregarding GDP growth given that growth could come from inefficient production, whereas Raworth’s (2017) concentrates on developing a new set of indicators for guiding humanity, from which GDP growth is omitted.

4.2. Work in an a-growth economy

van den Bergh’s arguments offer another perspective but are not sufficient to provide suggestions about employment in an a-growth strategy, as Kallis highlights ‘van den Bergh proposes an ambitious policy agenda but offers no associated political proposals on how this could become possible’ (2011: 878). Therefore, we only discuss the question of employment in the frame of the Doughnut.

In the Doughnut, the economy is considered in its diversity and it acknowledges that the household, the market, the commons and the state are ‘all four means of production and distribution’ (Raworth, 2017: 78) even if they are directed towards different aims and categories of individuals. Therefore, the worker is not only perceived as a worker/consumer/capital owner, but also as a parent in a family, as a citizen of the state, as a customer, as a creator: it ‘acknowledge[s] our many other social and economic identities’ (78). This means a more holistic perspective when designing the organization of labour. This acknowledgment that the worker is not only a worker implies the recognition of the household as the core of the economy, ‘because the household provision of care is essential for human well-being, and productivity in the paid economy depends directly upon it’ (81). The inclusion of the household in the economy appreciates the importance of the work done in the household and opens up the way for relieving women from that too often endured burden. In a more macro perspective, this implies 'recognizing that the household, the commons, the market and the state can all be effective means of provisioning for our many needs and wants, and they tend to work best when they work together' (Raworth, 2017: 287). Jackson (2017) highlights major similarities between the vision offered by the Doughnut and his perspective of a prosperous service-based economy.

With respect to work-sharing policies, Raworth (2017) argues that these kinds of policies would be easier to implement if the employers were the workers themselves, which is close to the ideas emerging in the social and solidarity economy (Defourny et Nyssens, 2017). Raworth (2017) also highlights the high potential of moving from taxing labour to taxing resources use, as it would imply more people being employed. Finally, as Raworth (2017) highlights, further research and experiments are needed to be able to design policies that would equip the Doughnut to, for example, provide enough employment.

5. *Conclusion*

It seems that the guiding thread throughout these different perspectives is to develop an economy which is welfare-enhancing and aims at achieving social equity, by being redistributive and offering space for and recognition of unpaid work, while remaining within the ecological boundaries of the finite planet. These elements take various aspects but appear to be at the core of each of these visions of what a post-growth society could be.

The direction towards more welfare resonates with the evolution of the meanings and perception of work since the 18th century. As Ferreras (2007) highlights, there is a crucial dimension to work which is its expressive dimension, as discussed in the second chapter. Moreover, towards the end of 20th century, work became a possible source of fulfilment for the individual. Therefore, it seems that the welfare-enhanced society suggested by post-growth proponents would be in line with how perceptions towards work tend to evolve.

The transition towards a post-growth society which would increase individual welfare, achieve equity between people, be inclusive of the multiple dimensions of a person while respecting the ecological boundaries of the planet is a huge challenge. Because, as Raworth highlights, we are 'financially, politically and socially addicted to growth' (2017: 30), but also because 'sustainable development is a multidimensional challenge: economic, environmental and social' (Ashford et *al*., 2012: 6). As a result, more research is required (Antal, 2014) and as highlighted by Kallis (2011), the feasibility of the policies put forward by post-growth proponents is yet to be evaluated. It is even more complicated to predict the outcome of such policies as it will be highly dependent on which combination of policies is implemented.

Furthermore, this literature review suggests that, by aiming at a high level of individual welfare while respecting the ecological limits of the environment, the post-growth society offers more freedom to the individual by reframing the place of work within a society as well as in one’s life. In particular, it seems to be directed towards allowing the individual to reclaim its work, in terms of work as a process, work as a meaningful occupation and work as only one component of life among others.

Conclusion

> The default vision of continued, unlimited growth in material consumption is inherently unsustainable, but we cannot break away from this vision until a credible and desirable alternative is available. (Costanza et *al*., 2015: 215).

Through this study, we have used the guidelines of Ecological Economics as a frame of reference to analyse three propositions about how a society which is not organized around the pursuit of endless economic growth would look like. In particular, we have considered what these propositions implied in terms of employment. This is a very important question given the key role played by work in a society and in one's life. The question of employment without growth is also a very political and complex question. In response to the fear that no growth would lead to ever-rising unemployment, ecological economists and scholars have designed different proposals to counter unemployment. From work-time sharing policies, to job guarantee and an encouragement of service-sectors, unemployment is not expected to have an important share in a future post-growth society. Employment, on the other hand, is aimed at taking a very different place in society's and individuals' life. The review of the literature suggests that post-growth perspectives, by replacing the economy as embedded within society, itself nested within a finite environment, replace work as one component of society and as one element of people's life. The shared goal of degrowth, steady-state and a-growth is to remain within the ecological boundaries of the planet while offering a high level of welfare for individuals. This involves reaching social equity, in terms of income, gender parity, opportunities to work and enjoy leisure time, but also grant individuals freedom to allocate one's time according to one's wishes.

Wealthy societies such as many European countries have become structurally dependent on economic growth. Because of the core place that GDP growth has taken over the decades, a transition towards post-growth society encounters many obstacles. 'Our beliefs about economic growth are almost religious: personal in nature, political in consequence, privately held, and little discussed' (Raworth, 2017: 243). This contributes to making the discussion of concrete policy proposals for a post-growth society very complex. Moreover, such a transition requires a global change, therefore scholars usually discuss broader policies than only labour-related one.

‘More generally, a major increase of research efforts about reducing dependence on growth in necessary to address the many problems of growth-constrained economies’ (Antal, 2014: 284). Therefore, there are multiple avenues for future research. In particular, as this constitutes a literature review, it could be used as a foundation for an empirical study that would assess policies such as work-time reduction policy that have already been implemented in European countries. A further study could also include the debate about computerisation in the discussion (see Frey and Osborne, 2017 for example). More broadly, there are many other interesting aspects that are discussed in the post-growth literature that could be included in a larger study, especially as a transition to post-growth requires a systemic change (Kallis, 2011) and that the ‘economy is embedded in a broader social and cultural system’ (Røpke, 2005).

Such a transition may seem impossible but as Daly (2005) highlights, ‘the alternative to a sustainable economy, an ever growing economy, is biophysically impossible. In choosing between tackling a political impossibility and a biophysical impossibility, I would judge the latter to be more impossible and take my chances with the former’ (102).

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