Degrowth in the Netherlands: are the movement's ideas heard in Dutch politics?

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1. Introduction

That climate change is happening and that it requires action is an idea that is accepted by many of the citizens of the European Union, for instance, ninety percent agree that greenhouse gas emissions should be reduced to reach climate neutrality in 2050 (European Commission, 2021). How to get to a sustainable future and what that would look like is however less unanimously agreed upon. A big problem for many people is the question how certain climate policies would affect their life. Generally, people become less enthusiastic about climate policy if that policy would mean a perceived reduction in the quality of life (Henley, 2023). Policymakers are thus faced with what appears to be a dilemma at first sight: do we fight climate change harder and thereby decrease support for climate change, or do we seek to maintain support but thereby lose pace? For this reason, policymakers in the European Union and elsewhere have sought to kill two birds with one stone: fight climate change, and maintain an increase in life quality.

The specific approach chosen for this goal is what has been coined as *Green Growth* (European Commission, 2023). In essence Green Growth seeks to maintain economic growth whilst achieving a reduction in emissions at the same time. The technical term often used to refer to this process is *decoupling:* creating an economy where the graph plotting emissions can go down, whilst the graph plotting economic growth can go up. Ensuring that the economy can keep growing whilst cutting emissions namely puts those who fear a reduction in life quality at ease. The underlying philosophy here is thus that it is economic growth that is the way forward for human society, and that abandoning economic growth for the sake of the climate is not really an option because that would cause our quality of life to decrease. An idea that can perhaps best be summarised by one of its main drivers, the OECD:

> "Green Growth means fostering economic growth and development, while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which our well-being relies" (OECD, 2023).

Two big assumptions can be found in this one sentence. First, that it is nature that serves us. It refers to the 'natural assets' in a role of the provider without rights or agency of its own despite that these assets consist of many living beings from trees up to cows. Second, that our well-being relies on those assets. The OECD intrinsically connects our well-being to the continued provision of these resources and economic growth in general; it cannot imagine a world without this reliance. Similar trails of thought can be observed in EU policy albeit a bit greener in the phrasing: "the European Green Deal will transform the EU into a modern resource-efficient and competitive economy" (European Commission, 2023). Whilst it does not refer as strongly as the OECD to the natural assets, the emphasis is however still clearly on expansive economic terms such as resource efficiency and competitiveness.

These assumptions on what creates our well-being for us humans have long gone unchallenged but not anymore. Some prominent social scientists doubt their validity and challenge the idea that green growth is the only possible road to take. The two well-known *Green Growth* critics Jason Hickel and Giorgos Kallis, conducted a meta-study called *Is Green Growth Possible?* (2019) in which they analysed a big set of empirical papers with the question whether the goals of *Green Growth* can scientifically be found to be attainable.

They divided the analysis into the three parts of resource use, carbon emissions and theoretical future (technological) possibilities. For the first they found no empirical evidence that decoupling of resource use from economic growth is possible. Concerning the second part, carbon emissions, they found that "while absolute decoupling of GDP from emissions is possible and is already happening in some regions, it is unlikely to happen fast enough to respect the carbon budgets for 1.5 C and 2 C against a background of continued economic growth" (Hickel & Kallis, 2019). The reason for this is mostly that growth requires more energy and land use meaning more emissions, which nullifies the progress made in increasing the share of green energy. Finally, for the theoretical future (technological) possibilities often referred to even in IPCC reports, they also did not find any convincing empirical evidence. What they referred to the Jevons Paradox which states that any future gains in efficiency would be offset by the increase in demand due to the reduction in price thanks to that increase in efficiency. All in all, they therefore concluded that if we set the goal to significantly reduce emissions, we must at the very least stem growth if not descent into degrowth.

Under this heading of 'degrowth' and sometimes 'post growth', a larger groups of social scientists developed an alternative to the Green Growth narrative. Besides Jason Hickel with his book *Less is More* (2020), other writers such as Kate Raworth with her concept of the Doughnut economy and recently Paul Schenderling and a wider collection of experts with their book *There is Life after Growth* (2022), have written about the topic extensively. This group, which strongly critiques the idea of decoupling, offers a future perspective that is almost entirely the opposite, as it not intends to decouple emissions from growth but rejects growth as a guiding principle in the first place. They offer such a future perspective both by providing ideas for possible technical policy instruments but also importantly by challenging the prevailing narrative and offering new insights as to what makes our lives worth living.

Degrowth namely goes much further than just some economic arguments, and is beyond a scientific movement also a political one. It has normative ideas on how the world should be and advocates for these ideas too. In the end, it is a movement that seeks to stop and even reverse climate change, and has a certain way in mind to go about this. It argues for the transition away from the current economic model based on continued economic growth and towards one that is in their eyes more sustainable and, interestingly, equitable. In essence, the degrowth programme is namely not just a campaign to fight climate change but also for a wider distribution of wealth and a new way of life. Herein it strongly stands out compared to the other approaches such as Green Growth, as it denies the existence of an opposition that is often presented as a main challenge to climate policy: the supposed opposition between social interests and climate interests. Degrowth claims to offers a way to both improve the quality of life and fight climate change, because the manner of fighting climate change it proposes is by definition an improvement of life. Instead of two separate factors that compete, there is now only one.

Unfortunately, due to its relatively novelty, not much has been written about degrowth as a climate solution which can simultaneously enhance our quality of life from the perspective of political science. The scientific underpinning for the claims of degrowth are primarily

written by the advocates of the movement itself, and generally more sociological and anthropological in nature. The two names that come up the most when searching for literature are its two primary advocates Jason Hickel and Giorgios Kallis, who both have written books and articles on the topic. Articles that do touch upon the topic of politics are mostly interested in explaining the theoretical links between the degrowth philosophy and for example the principle of democracy such as *Degrowth, democracy and autonomy* (Asara, Profumi & Kallis; 2013), *Activities of degrowth and political change* (Heikkurinen, Lozanoska & Tosi; 2019), and *Democracies with a future: Degrowth and the democratic tradition* (Deriu, 2012). One article that did delve into the political arena is *From limits to growth to degrowth within French green politics* (Baykan, 2007). It analysed the emergence of a small degrowth party in French politics in the first decade of the 21st century. It did however not seek to place the ideas of degrowth in the wider political spectrum.

This is the point where this thesis comes in. Degrowth is very much alive in both thought, as shown by all the literature, but also in the minds of people, as shown by all the activists on the streets such as Extinction Rebellion. It is even reaching politics nowadays, as Jason Hickel's speech and interview in front of a parliamentary commission in the Netherlands indicated. To what extent degrowth's line of thinking has gained footing in mainstream politics is however less clear. With this we arrive at the main question posed in this paper:

> *How do the key claims of degrowth as a social and environmental movement land in the spectrum of Dutch political parties?*

Before the main research question on degrowth's presence in Dutch politics can be answered, some smaller sub questions must be clarified first. 1. What does the political context of the Netherlands look like? 2. How can a movement like Degrowth be ideologically analysed? 3. What are the key claims made by Degrowth? 4. How are the key claims of Degrowth represented in Dutch politics?. The paper will follow a similar set-up as these four questions. First, a theoretical understanding will be established on ideologically placing political parties, and the Dutch ideological-political current context. Then a theoretical understanding of degrowth thinking will be build based on a thematic content analysis of the two books *Less is More* (2020) by Jason Hickel, and *There is Life after Growth* (2022) by Jacob Schenderling. With the key claims found, the main analysis answering the fourth sub-question can then begin. Here, a directed content analysis of the party programmes of several Dutch political parties will seek to find out how those key claims are represented in Dutch politics. When all these questions are answered, the paper will finish with the interpretation of the results in the discussion section and a final conclusion in the conclusion section.

2. Theory section

2.1 Theorizing political differences in the Dutch party system

As explained in the previous paragraph, the thesis is divided into two main bodies: the theory section and the analytical section. This theory section, chapter 2, serves as a groundwork upon which to base the eventual answering of the research question in the analytical and discussion sections. The approach here is threefold. First, an overview will be created of the current Dutch political context. This will give the opportunity to create an initial understanding of how Degrowth might land in Dutch politics. Based on secondary literature, it may namely already be said that some parties are likely to be the ideas of Degrowth, whilst others may likely not be. Then, a more systemic overview will be created based on an already established methodology called the Manifesto Project. Following an explanation of the Manifesto Project's system, and a selection of usable codes from said system, the Dutch political context can be looked up from the eyes of this established framework, allowing the creating of some initial hypotheses on which parties are more or less likely to support Degrowth. Then, the third part of the theory section will delve into Degrowth theory itself. Here, primary degrowth literature will be discussed from which the key claims it makes needed to answer the research question will also be derived.

Now, moving on to the political context: As mentioned earlier, there is clearly some interest in Degrowth within some political parties as shown by the invitation of Jason Hickel to parliament, but one such invitation by a small set of political parties does not say much in the grand scheme of things. Dutch politics namely has, thanks to its proportional representative system and a lack of an electoral threshold, a long list of parties. In the most recent polling of *De Peilingwijzer*, a combination of two other pollers *I&O* Research and *Ipsos/*EenVandaag (Peilingwijzer, 2023), the list of political parties is 16 long. There are some which stand out such as the VVD, PvdA/Groenlinks, BBB, PVV, D66, and PvDD, but the others all have 5% or less. This begs the question: where to start?

2.2 An initial understanding of political difference in the Dutch party system

A good place to begin thanks to its already established link is the aforementioned invitation of Jason Hickel to the Dutch parliament to discuss his ideas with parliamentarians. The party that invited him was the Groenlinks - GreenLeft in English - party. An environmentalist party with a left wing economic ideology (Voerman & Lucardie, in van Haute, 2016). Although not much can be said yet about the exact degrowth position the party holds, as green policy can also very much be growth oriented policy as shown by the European Union, it does indicate at the very least an open mind towards the ideas of the movement.

With GroenLinks in the scopes, the next logical party to observe is the PvdA – Party of Labour – which has very recently decided together with the Groenlinks to enter the November 2023 parliament elections with a combined list and party programme (NOS, 2023). This means the parties are close enough together that they are willing to commit to what is practically an electoral merger. Unfortunately as of the writing of this study a party programme had not been written yet. The two parties did however release a combined 'Climate Vision' coined 'from lime green to bright red' (PvdA & Groenlinks, 2022), in which they set out their perspective on the future of climate policy.

Although the party is now therefore quite concerned with climate change, and perhaps even with some anti-growth sentiment, to such an extent they are willing to merge with a green party, this was not always the case. The origins of the party are, as its name betrays, in the labour movement. One of its recent leaders, Diederik Samson, explained the tension between green and labour through his own experiences (Trouw, 2011). Samson himself had been a Greenpeace activist, fighting against coal fired power plants. One day he however realised that closing down the plant would also mean closing down the jobs for the workers at the plant. Whether this is a line of thinking that's true or not, it does signify where the Labour party may be at odds with the Degrowth movement. A party that has in the past decades also shown strong neo-liberal tendencies (Becker & Cuperus, 2011). All in all, it could be that the party has recently shifted, but nevertheless it can be expected that the Greenleft wing is in more agreement with the Degrowth movement than the Labour wing of the future combined party.

A third and relatively new party compared to the previously discussed older two is the PvdD, Party for the Animals in English. Little to no scientific work is available on the party except for some student theses. The party itself describes itself as a party that has put animal rights, nature and the environment on the national political agenda and that has called for seeing economic growth as problem and not a solution (PvdD, 2023). Taking a quick look at their party programme shows the importance of these topics as well, as virtually every chapter in the programme concerns climate change and nature in one way or another (PvdD, 2021). Based on this, it is likely the PvdD has of all the parties discussed up to this point has the strongest inclination to agree with the Degrowth movement.

Apart from these parties there are of course many more. On the left wing but especially also on the right. Whether these support Degrowth is however quite doubtful. There is one other party that markets itself quite strongly as an environmental party, the party called D66 – Democrats 66' -, but which is also quite liberal (Voerman & Lucardie, 2001). In a study on the ideology of the Dutch electorate, and more importantly how to measure this beyond the archaic left-right scale, the voters of D66 were furthermore described to have a relatively high preference for a free market and a relatively low preference for economic equality. Such a radical systemic change as Degrowth proposes, is therefore likely not that strongly supported by the party at this time (Laméris, Jong A Pin & Garretsen, 2017). The same can be said for the VVD – People's Party for Freedom and Democracy- which measures even stronger than D66 on these scales, and can be classified as a strongly neo-liberal party (Cornelissen, 2017).

Beyond these two liberal leaning parties there is also the conservative bloc, represented until recently primarily by the CDA, but since its rapid decline the past 2 years and the fast rise of a newcomer, potentially the BBB if they keep up their success. Even less words have to be said for these two, as they have in the past years shown starkly pro agriculture-industry positions. The BBB rose up a response to the European Union's and Dutch government's intention to curtail nitrogen emissions, and quickly surpassed the CDA who was stuck in a government coalition executing the very plans. The BBB positions itself to a large extent as the party representing the farmers in the Netherlands. Its name includes

Boeren – farmers – after all. In terms of intended policy they seek to protect their and the agricultural industry's interests (BBB, 2023). That the party would embrace degrowth ideals if therefore highly unlikely.

Based on these works of academic literature and the available information on the political parties' websites we can come to the hypothesis that most political parties in the Netherlands do not support the Degrowth movement fully or even at all. Those that come closest are probably in order from probability high to low: PvdD, Groenlinks, PvdA. The others are either too free market oriented such as the VVD and D66, or too conservative such as the CDA and BBB. One party was still not discussed is the PVV. Given that they do not support the notion that climate change is human influenced they are most clearly of all not supportive of the Degrowth movement (PVV, 2021).

2.3 A systematic understanding of political differences in the Dutch party system: the Manifesto project

Next to consulting secondary academic literature like in the previous sub section, there is also another manner of finding out where a political party stands ideologically. A method that has in the previous decades been one of best known for such studies. Its name is the *Manifesto Research on Political Representation* project (Merz, Regel & Lewandowski, 2016). With a dataset consisting of 5089 political manifestos covering political parties in 67 countries and a single codebook, it offers a common framework for determining the policy positions of political parties that even allows for international comparison.

The method of analysis itself used in the Manifesto Project's system, of which an adapted version designed for this study will be explained more in depth in the method section, is a quantitative content analysis. Researchers wishing to use the method for their study can consult the codebook (Manifesto Project, 2021), of which the codes are updated every few years following the changes in the political world. The codebook furthermore also acts as a guide, explaining how researchers can successfully navigate the entire process, from picking manifestos, to coding them, to analysing the found data.

The Manifesto Project explains the process as consisting of two main steps. The first step is to prepare the manifesto for coding. The second step is to then code it. Given the method of quantitative content analysis, the text within the manifesto must be cut into countable pieces, quasi-sentences as the Manifesto Project calls them. The Manifesto Project choses to do this based on *units of meaning*. Each *unit of meaning* is a piece of text conveying one argument. Such a piece of text can be one sentence, but also multiple if these multiple sentences together only convey one argument, hence the term quasi-sentences.

Once the manifesto has been cut into quasi-sentences, the coding of these pieces of text can start. The approach is bottom-up, where each of the quasi-sentences is given one code value based on a pre-established coding scheme. The coding scheme consists of 7 domains that serve as umbrellas for general topics such as *Domain 2: Freedom and Democracy* and *Domain 4: Economy*. These 7 domains are further subdivided into categories. *Domain 4: Economy* for example has categories 401 through 416. Category 401 is called *Free-Market Economy: Positive*. This means that if a quasi-sentence shows an argument in favour of a

Free-Market economy, it is attributed the code 401. Each of these categories has several indicators which help recognize quasi-sentences. 401 is explained as: *Favourable mentions of the free market and free market capitalism as an economic model. May include favourable references to: Laissez-faire economy; superiority of individual enterprise over state and control systems; private property rights; personal enterprise and initiative; need for unhampered individual enterprises.* Some categories have sub-categories such as for example *201: Freedom and Human Rights: Positive*, with sub-categories *201.1 Freedom* and *201.2 Human Rights*. These sub-categories provide more specificity for those categories that need it. Quasi-sentences can only be given the code of these sub-categories, not their parent category which in this case merely serves as a aggregation purpose. Once all quasi-sentences have been coded, the salience of each of the codes can be counted. The more salient a code is in a manifesto, the more important that policy position likely is for the specific political party. This allows for the comparison between political parties on which policy positions they relatively value the most, but also allows for the placement of each party on a left to right wing scale as each of the categories is also attributed to either the left or right wing.

2.3.2 Ideologically placing degrowth in the Dutch party system

With the Manifesto Project's theory explained we can move on to how it can be used for understanding Degrowth. The Manifesto Project codebook provides an enormous coding scheme covering virtually the whole set of today's relevant policy positions. Although degrowth certainly contains some policy positions, it is not an all-encompassing ideology. It has a clear focus, and that focus is primarily the economy and climate change. Just going by its name *Degrowth*, referring directly to a proposed direction of economic policy (for the sake of climate change), we can see this to be the case. This is also supported by the scientific researchers and advocates of the movement itself. Kallis, Kostakis, Lange and Muraca (2018) for example summarize the goal of Degrowth as the following: "Degrowth signals a radical political and economic reorganization leading to reduced resource and energy use. The Degrowth hypothesis posits that such a trajectory of social transformation is necessary, desirable, and possible". A more in-depth analysis of the Degrowth narrative will be provided in chapter 3. It can thus be said that not the entire codebook is relevant for this study. Codes such as for example *607 Multiculturalism: Positive* are clearly not the primary concern of the Degrowth movement. This begs the question which if any codes can be used in this study.

Going through the entire list, two codes clearly stand out: 410 and 416. They stand out because they both directly concern the topic of degrowth. The first is called *410 Economic Growth: Positive*, the second *416 Anti-Growth Economy and Sustainability.* These two are basically each other's opposites. The first being a policy position that supports the growth narrative, the latter being a policy position that supports the anti-growth narrative. This gives us the opportunity to delve into the Dutch political landscape, and see to what extent each of these two policy positions is present within the political parties. The two codes are described as follows:

Table 1

Manifesto Project Codebook Codes 410 & 416

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410 Economic Growth: Positive
The paradigm of economic growth. Includes:

- General need to encourage or facilitate greater production
- Need for the government to take measures to aid economic growth

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[416 Anti-Growth Economy and Sustainability, comprised of:]

416.1 Anti-Growth Economy: Positive
Favourable mentions of anti-growth politics. Rejection of the idea that growth is good
416.2 Sustainability: Positive
Call for sustainable economic development. Opposition to growth that causes environmental or societal harm.

Note. Taken from Manifesto Project codebook (2023)

2.4 The Dutch political parties in the Manifesto Project's framework
Included in the Manifesto Project's database are coded programme's for the 2021 parliamentary elections of all the parties discussed in the previous section. This makes for the possibility to find out how salient the discussed codes *410: Economic Growth: Positive* and *416 Anti-Growth Economy and Sustainability* are in each of these programmes, and thus to what extent they may embrace the Degrowth movement. The codes are not that expansive and probably do not capture the Degrowth movement's set of ideas completely, but it should nevertheless offer at least some indication of where each of the parties can be placed.

First of we have the Party for the Animals – PvdD – which is expected to score highest in the salience of Degrowth points within the programme, and indeed it does. In total 2868 quasi-sentenced were coded with a meaningful code, of these 0 contained a positive message about growth, 64 a positive message for anti-growth, and 367 argued for sustainability. Relatively this means 2.2% of all quasi-sentences were arguments for degrowth and 12.8% of all quasi-sentences were arguments for sustainability, quite a substantial amount but perhaps not a surprise for a political party primarily geared towards animal rights and the environment.

Next up is Greenleft – Groenlinks – which is expected to also score quite high compared to the other political parties given its green and left positions. Although quite a bit lower than the PvdD, it did contain at least some quasi-sentences on degrowth, and quite a lot on sustainability. Of 1655 quasi-sentences coded, 8 (0.4%) were in favour of degrowth, and 112 (6.8%) were in favour of sustainability. Again, 0 quasi-sentences argued in favour of growth.

Then there is the Labour Party – PvdA – which given its close relationship with Greenleft is also expected to score relatively higher in Degrowth than most other parties. While this is the first of these three discussed that also contains positive arguments for growth, namely 3

quasi-sentences (0.08%) of the 3468 quasi-sentences coded, it did also contain some favourable to Degrowth, namely 15 (0.4%) and sustainability, namely 137 (4%). This means the Greenleft and PvdA are relatively close together on their policy positions, except for the 3 Growth positive sentences the PvdA has in their programme.

From here we move to the liberals, first the Democrats 66 - D66. In total 4357 quasi-sentences were coded. 20 (0.5%) of these were positive towards growth, 4 (0.09%) positive towards degrowth, and 292 (6.7%) positive towards sustainability. As expected the party is thus also looks relatively favourably to sustainability, but interestingly is also a lot more favourable towards growth than the other 3 parties already discussed. Given their liberal, free market, nature this however comes to little surprise.

Following D66, the People's party for Freedom and Democracy – VVD – is also substantially more in favour of growth. Of the 2945 quasi-sentences coded 76 (2.6%) were positive on growth, and much less were positive on degrowth: 3 (0.1%). Sustainability nevertheless did have some presence with 119 (4%) quasi-sentenced counted, less than all parties but the PvdA.

Lastly we move to the three parties likely least concerned with climate change, the Christian Democratic Appel – CDA – Farmer Citizen Movement – BBB- and Party for Freedom – PVV. As expected each of these score low in salience for degrowth and sustainability. Of 1662 quasi-sentences counted, CDA has 11 (0.6%) in favour of growth, 0 in favour of degrowth, and 61 (3.8%) in favour of sustainability. Of 818 sentenced counted, BBB has 2 in favour of growth (0.2%), 0 in favour of degrowth, and 13 (1.6%) in favour of sustainability. The PVV has of 683 quasi-sentences counted, 8 in favour of growth (1.2%) and 0 in favour of degrowth and sustainability.

With this group of the most important political parties in the Netherlands reviewed, it can be concluded that there are indeed few parties if at all that embrace degrowth. Closest comes the Party for the Animals, and the Greenleft and PvdA also hold at least some positive policy positions to Degrowth, but not substantially. Many other parties do embrace sustainability, but thus not in the Degrowth sense.

However, a strong shortcoming in these conclusions from the Manifesto Project's data and method of analysis is that it is quite simplified. Whether a party supports degrowth or not is reduced to a single line of code, and only looks towards whether they literally mention degrowth in the quasi-sentences. It could therefore be that many sentences that do include a policy position close to degrowth, but more indirectly so, are overlooked. For this reason a more substantial analysis of the Degrowth narrative, and afterwards of some of the party programmes could provide more expansive insights in how Degrowth is supported in Dutch politics. Still, with these statistics in hand, we can already exclude some parties for this coming analysis. It is very clear the last three parties discussed, CDA, BBB and PVV, are very unlikely to speak much of degrowth. Given the free-market orientation D66 and the VVD are also unlikely to support the substantial market influencing measures of Degrowth, despite D66 relatively favourable positions on sustainability. This sustainability is however largely in

the Green Growth form. The list of to be analysed parties will therefore be: PvdD, Groenlinks and PvdA

2.5 Expanding our understanding of degrowth in the Dutch party system
Based on the secondary academic literature and the codes of the Manifesto project we can come to a start of forming an idea of how degrowth lands in Dutch politics, it is however not yet sufficiently clear enough to come to solid conclusions. The codes developed by the manifesto project to capture degrowth thinking are far too narrow for the actually very broad ideology of degrowth as this section will show. To create such a more detailed understanding, this section will therefore engage in a thematic content analysis of primary degrowth literature.

At this moment there are two prominent books on the topic of Degrowth. One is internationally renowned, the other one is mostly known in the Netherlands. The first is *Less is More* (2019) by Jason Hickel and the second is *There is Life after Growth* (2022) by Paul Schenderling and others. Jason Hickel is at this moment one of the best known figures from the movement. He is active both in science with his article written together with Giorgos Kallis *Is green growth possible?* (2020) having been cited 1224 times up to this day, and in the public debate though for example his book *Less is More* (2022). He is furthermore often featured in the media: *Klimaatstrijd is klassenstrijd* (De Groene, 2023); *Groene groei van de economie? Dat is een mythe, zegt spraakmakend econoon Jason Hickel* (NRC, 2023); *Degrowth: A dangerous idea or the answer to the world's biggest crisis* (CNN, 2022). Apart from being heard by the public, he is now also getting attention from the political sphere. Recent he spoke he in Dutch parliament (Tweede Kamer, 2023), and in 2022 he and Georgios Kallis and Julia Steinberger received 9.9 million euros in funding over 72 months from the European Research Council for research on pathways to the post growth era. In short, given his connections within and outside of the degrowth network and active presence, his work can be taken as a good sample of the up to date thinking in the degrowth realm.

Paul Schenderling is less well known internationally, but has in the recent year gained quite some traction in the Netherlands. Since writing his book he was invited by numerous media to do his say, from radio (NPORadio1, 2023) to television (KRO-NCRV, 2023). The book itself, is also very much focussed on the Netherlands. Next to its main writer Paul Schenderling, it was namely also co-authored by a varied group of experts from all arrays of political life. It is precisely this factor that gives the book such an interesting position. With the goal in mind to write a book that would not just provide an interesting idea mostly speaking to the usual audience of climate activists, Paul Schenderling sought out a broad coalition of experts all with different political leanings. Part of the group were official members of political parties ranging from the Christian democrats, to the conservative-liberals, to the social democrats and new left. The ideas of the book therefore resonate with at least a part of all the major political factions in the Netherlands, and therefore provides a set of ideas that can be accepted from the perspectives of different ideological leanings.

The goal of this part of the study is to find out what claims the degrowth literature makes so as to move beyond the two simplified codes discussed earlier. It is therefore explorative in nature. It also does not seek very specific data points, but more so the broad concepts

discussed in the texts. It does however seek to create a collection of ideas discussed in text, and requires them to be separated into different groups. In short, this initial and first stage of the research conducted in this study is very foundational and serves as a basis upon which to build the other two parts. Moreover, the data needs to rely on inductive coding, as it is an exploration of the ideas expressed in the texts of the authors without any prior knowledge and theoretical frameworks to base the analysis on. For these reasons, a thematic content analysis is the best fit (Anderson, 2007).

As its name indicates, a thematic analysis relies on the discovery of themes within the object of study, usually a text/ transcript. Themes can be defined as the following: "attribute, descriptor, element, and concept (...) an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas (…) considered a thread of underlying meaning implicitly discovered at the interpretive level" (Vaismoradi, Jones, Tarunen & Snelgrove, 2016). A hurdle to overcome scientifically is the highly intuitive process behind a thematic analysis. The researcher seeks out the themes from a certain implicit understanding, which is often hard to concretely define. For this reason the aforementioned authors developed a phased process of theme development. The four phases are: initialisation, construction, rectification and finalisation.

1. The first phase concerns itself with the first reading of the texts, and finding the pieces of text to be coded. The guiding principle in determining which pieces of text are meaning units and which are not in the context of this analysis is whether they can be classified as a claim made by the authors, as it is claims this specific study is looking for.
2. The second phase then takes these identified units of meaning and classifies, compares, labels and defines them. During this step, each of the pieces of text are entered into excel. In this phase general themes should start to emerge from the initial chaos. Where there first was a long list of claims, there should now be several groups of claims that are related to one another.
3. In the third phase not much new is added, but what has been discovered is reflected upon. The researcher distances themselves from the research here, and comes back later with a fresh mind.
4. Once this is done, the last phase called finalisation starts. Here the discovered claims are related and moulded into the theoretical framework provided by the Manifesto Project. Here a coding scheme should emerge akin to that of the Manifesto Project, which can be used for the second analysis of this study; the analysis of the party programmes. The second section of the methodology section will provide more detail in how this coding scheme is developed.

2.6 Claims of Degrowth Theory

The goal of this part of the study is to find out the specific narrative written down by the degrowth authors. The authors/ texts analysed are *Less is More* (2020) by Jason Hickel and *There is Life after Growth* (2022) by Paul Schenderling. The approach of finding the claims discussed by these authors is a thematic content analysis. The specific approach is the one designed by Vaismoradi, Jones, Tarunen and Snelgrove (2016). These authors set up a framework consisting of the four stages of initialisation, construction, rectification and finalisation, which will be utilised in this analysis.

2.6.1 Initialisation

This first phase concerns itself primarily with finding out what is to be analysed in the first place. In part this phase already happened in the theoretical section and so the goal is clear: finding the claims discussed by the degrowth authors. Combing through the texts therefore consisted of finding pieces of text that conveyed a certain claim. These could be factual claims like the following sentence: "Recent data shows that water sanitation measures alone explain 75% of the decline in infant mortality in the United States between 1900 and 1936, and half the total decline in mortality rates" (Jason Hickel, 2020). But they can also be normative claims like: "It's not growth itself that matters - what matters is how income is distributed" (Jason Hickel, 2020) and "It's as if the wisdom traditions want to tell us: by focusing on 'having,' we keep chasing continuously, while the deepest sources of joy are extremely close, situated within life itself " (Paul Schenderling, 2022). In short, all sentences containing any sort of claim or idea on what is or should be were written down in excel. Each of these sentences contains generally one meaning/ point.

2.6.2 Construction

With all the claims found and written down in excel boxes, the constructive phase could begin. This is the phase where the search for patterns starts. The question here is whether amongst all the found sentences, some group of general claims could be found. It is about turning the data from a chaotic list, to an ordered categorisation. This is a multi-step process. A researcher does not just look at the data once, and immediately spots and writes down the observed patterns. Generally, it is wise to start big, and to then slowly narrow down. This is how it was done in this study as well.

Initially five themes were found. These were coined: 'distribution of wealth', 'public services/ goods', 'immaterial happiness', 'growth narrative' and 'equality is sustainability'. Each of these themes represented what appeared at this stage a unique box. What follows here is a short list of examples per theme:

Table 2

Initial five themes

1	Distribution of wealth	"Societies with unequal income distribution tend to be less happy. There are a number of reasons for this. Inequality creates a sense of unfairness; it erodes social trust, cohesion and solidarity. It's also linked to poorer health, higher levels of crime and less social mobility. People who live in unequal societies tend to be more frustrated, anxious, insecure and discontent with their lives. They have higher rates of depression and addiction" (Jason Hickel, 2020)
2	Public services/ goods	"Countries whose governments have invested in universal public healthcare and education have seen some of the world's fastest improvements in life expectancy and other indicators of human welfare" (Jason Hickel, 2020)
3	Immaterial happiness	"Intrinsic values are far more powerful, and more durable, than the fleeting rush we might get from a boost in income or material consumption" (Jason Hickel, 2020)
4	Growth narrative	"when we look at measures of overall happiness and wellbeing, it turns out that even these indicators have a tenuous relationship with GDP. This rather puzzling result is known as the Easterlin Paradox, after the economist who first pointed it out" (Jason Hickel, 2020)
5	Equality is sustainability	"Consumer research shows that because Denmark is more equal than most other high income countries, people buy fewer clothes - and keep them for longer - than their counterparts elsewhere. And firms spend less money on advertising, because people just aren't as interested in unnecessary luxury purchases" (Jason Hickel, 2020)

Although these themes were able to capture all found sentences from the texts, they were still rather general, unspecified. Given that the eventual goal of this study is to find out how the degrowth narrative lands in Dutch politics, it is necessary to work towards a rather tight and rigid framework that leaves as little vagueness as possible. That will make the eventual coding of the political party manifestos a lot easier and more precise.

2.6.3 Rectification
That brings us to the third phase of the content analysis: creating some distance between the researcher and the analysis and coming back to it with a fresh mind. This allows the researcher to spot the gaps easier, and if needed reshuffle some of the themes. This is exactly what happened. From the five themes initially present, only three themes were left at the end of this phase. Some themes were combined, others reworded to better fit the narratives in the texts. They were furthermore regurgitated into something more akin to a list of broad claims, and form what the manifesto project would call the domains. The three found in the end were: *1. Critique on Growth and Economic Model 2. Importance of Socio-*

economic Equality 3. Striving for Human wellbeing. These three domains form the three essential claims made by Degrowth. They show that degrowth is an ideology not merely focussed on a narrow set of policy positions, but a wider group of ideas where each domain serves as a pillar for the bigger whole. The first domain is the most obvious of the three. Here Degrowth's primary anti-growth positions can be found. The second domain shows Degrowth as a social movement. The third domain delves into mainly post-materialistic ideas. Below each of the three themes will be discussed in more detail, including some examples from the texts.

Domain 1 – Critique on Growth and GDP
Degrowth is a story about climate change. The goal of the movement is after all to reduce the impact of humanity on the climate and thereby prevent the negative effects of the change. Perhaps not surprising therefore that the most important domain found is a critique on the economic system and narrative itself. It is a critique from the perspective of fighting climate change, but interestingly also from a perspective more socially oriented: arguing that it is not even in the human's best interest to have a growth oriented economy.

This first domain contains just one claim, but one that is subdivided into two categories. The reason that they are modelled as one claim, instead of two separate ones is that they are essentially the same claim, namely that the growth ideology is not a good thing. This claim however also clearly contains two separate arguments, which are important to distinguish from one another as they so signify an important element of the degrowth line of thinking; that growth is not only bad for the planet, but also for humans themselves. This claim is therefore coined *Growth impact on climate and environment, and humans.* Its sub-categories are *Growth impact on climate and environment: negative* and *growth impact on humans: negative.* This distinction between growths impact on nature was thus made because it shows an important element of Degrowth thinking. That they critique growth for its negative impact on the climate is to be expected, as it's a movement fighting again climate change primarily. That growth was also heavily critiqued for its negative impact on humans was therefore a surprising yet very interesting finding:

> "The relationship between GDP and human welfare plays out on a saturation curve, with sharply diminishing returns: after a certain point, which high income nations have long surpassed, more GDP adds little if anything to human flourishing" (Hickel, 2020)

> And

> "In fact, nations can succeed on a wide range of key social indicators - not just health and education , but employment, nutrition, social support, democracy, and life satisfaction - with as little as 10.000 per capita, while staying within or near the planetary boundaries" (Hickel, 2020)

Domain 2- Importance of Socio-economic Equality

This second domain dives deeper into what was already referred to in this first domain: the degrowth story is also inherently a socio-economic one. Apart from having a negative impact on our climate, this domain observes that growthism also has a negative impact on human equality in our society. The claims within this domain therefore primarily call for observing this inequality and its causes, and acting on it with the goal of reducing it.

The first claim is therefore coined *Redistribution: positive.* This claim includes positive references to the redistribution of wealth. Suggested policies range from taxes to the increased provision of public services and goods such as for example minimum wages and public transport. Its also again a critique on the current narrative on what it is that brings human wellbeing in our society. Wellbeing here refers to multiple factors. The most obvious one is a guaranteed income through social security and progressive taxing, but important in the texts are also public services such as health care, education and sanitation. It's not just about making people's lives more comfortable, but also about making them longer:

> "Countries whose governments have invested in universal public healthcare and education have seen some of the world's fastest improvements in life expectancy and other indicators of human welfare" (Hickel, 2020)

The second claim is coined *Inequality: negative*. It is separated from the first, as it does not argue so much for redistribution, but is more a form of warning against what happens when said redistribution does not happen. Like the redistribution claim, it observes socio-economic inequality, and in this claim's specific context mentions its danger to society through for example social unrest, a loss of institutional trust and general instability:

> "Societies with unequal income distribution tend to be less happy. There are a number of reasons for this. Inequality creates a sense of unfairness; it erodes social trust, cohesion and solidarity. It's also linked to poorer health, higher levels of crime and less social mobility. People who live in unequal societies tend to be more frustrated, anxious, insecure and discontent with their lives. They have higher rates of depression and addiction" (Hickel, 2020)

The third claim is coined *Inequality causes consumption.* During the energy crisis of 2022/2023, and through the general effects of climate change such hot summers it has become apparent that it is the poor who suffer the most. In this sense climate change is therefore often connected to social policy. For example by subsidising climate adaptive measures that also alleviate such health risks such as heat. The point degrowth/ post growth makes within this theme goes further than that however. It does not just seek to treat the symptoms of climate change through social policy, but claims a direct causal effect between low socio-economic equality and climate change through the intermediary of consumption and thus pollution:

> "Inequality makes people feel that the material goods they have are inadequate. We constantly want more not because we need it but because we want to keep up with the Joneses" (Hickel, 2020)

and

> "The data on this is clear, people who live in highly unequal societies are more likely to shop for luxury brands than people who live in more equal societies" (Hickel, 2020)

The opposite is also true for societies that are more equal according to degrowth:

> "Consumer research shows that because Denmark is more equal than most other high income countries, people buy fewer clothes - and keep them for longer - than their counterparts elsewhere. And firms spend less money on advertising, because people just aren't as interested in unnecessary luxury purchases"

Degrowth thus looks upon high consumption not as an intrinsic human need, but more so an effect of the unequal society we live in. Were we to live in a more equal society, people would consume less, and in turn pollution would be lower.

The final claim in this domain observes that pollution is often still stimulated or at least not disincentivised, and therefore argues for an economic model that incentivised less pollution through for example cutting subsidies and increasing or adding taxes on pollution. It also observes an inherent inequality in this system, where those who pollute often do not experience any disadvantages for this pollution while the world does suffer from it. This claim is therefore coined *p The polluter should bear the costs :*

> *"A drastic reduction in purchasing power of the richest would therefore in itself have a substantial impact on the reduction of emissions at global level"* (Hickel, 2020)

Domain 3 – Striving for human wellbeing
That last point serves as a good bridge to the third and final domain. This third broad claim of the Degrowth literature went past economics and into the realm of post-materialism. Degrowth observes that life is not just about earning money and consuming products, but also has important other factors such as our relationships and our purpose. This third domain is sub-divided into three claims. The first of which refers to these other needs and is therefore called *Importance of Intrinsic Needs*.

The degrowth/ post growth authors foresee a future with a in many ways radically different societal mindset on what is a good life than we have now. Some of these ideas were also indirectly present within the first theme, namely the push for a refocussing from growth and income to a wider form of human welfare as a guiding principle. What the authors seek can be best referred to as immaterial welfare. Herein they propose a way of life that is not necessarily new, post-materialism has been present for a while already after all, but does offer a new perspective by connecting it so intrinsically to climate change.

Like in the first theme, this theme could also be subdivided into three sub-themes. The first of these is the following: *Intrinsic needs are important.* In arguing for this, they are aware of the old roots of their lines of thinking:

> "Postmaterialism has very ancient roots. Almost all worldviews agree that human life is about who we are and not about what we have, in other words: about living well instead of consuming a lot" (Schenderling, 2022)

But also refer to recent research signifying the importance of such immaterial factors:

> "But the researchers found that the Nicoyans' extra longevity is due to something more. Not diet, not genes, but something completely unexpected: community. The longest-living Nicoyans all have strong relationships with their families, friends, and neighbours. Even in old age, they feel connected. They feel valued. In fact, the poorest households have the longest life expectancies, because they are more likely to live together and rely on each other for support" (Hickel, 2020)

In their argument for such a shift in thinking, the authors again challenge the common narrative. Within this specific theme that challenge is mostly aimed at the question of subjective satisfaction as opposed to the more objective factors such as physical health in the first theme. This brings us to the second sub-theme: *Material consumption does not bring substantial and lasting happiness*. Often referred to are national happiness statistics:

> "Indeed, in the Netherlands, since the 1960s, household consumption has increased fivefold, while the measured level of happiness has remained relatively unchanged. This underscores the idea that increased material consumption does not necessarily lead to greater happiness or well-being."

The theory often cited here is the one called the Easterlin Paradox:

> "when we look at measures of overall happiness and wellbeing, it turns out that even these indicators have a tenuous relationship with GDP. This rather puzzling result is known as the Easterlin Paradox, after the economist who first pointed it out" (Hickel, 2020)

The main point here is that many people, and even governments, strive to achieve happiness through financial affluence, but that this goal is sadly unattainable as, are we to believe the claims, happiness generally is not very dependent on how much financial wealth you as an individual or your country has. What does matter is that your emotional needs are met. Of course security, and thus a minimum amount of money, is a part of this, but equally important are connections with fellow humans and a sense of purpose that keeps you going, according to de degrowth/ post growth literature.

The third sub-theme is again a critique on our current way of life, but more specifically on how we live literally. From the advent of TV's to today's widespread adoption of smartphones and social media, to unhealthy lifestyles, people are constantly and evermore so influenced by external stimuli and commercial interests:

> "A striking and concerning example of this is the so-called attention economy. This means that companies are now competing for what experts call the scarcest commodity in our economy today: our time and attention" (Schenderling, 2022).

While we are thus ever more distracted by digital apparatuses, the authors also refer the negative effect this has on our real sources of happiness:

> "The time spent on quality sources of happiness that we have identified, the activities that genuinely make us happier, is actually decreasing. For example, the time spent on caring for others (outside the household) has decreased to an average of 3 hours per week. The time spent on social contacts has also decreased, from an average of 11.5 hours in 1975 to 8.2 hours in 2016, as well as the time parents dedicate to caregiving tasks." (Schenderling, 2022)

The authors thus sketch an image of a society that is not really aware of what would truly bring happiness. We are all addicted to chasing certain pleasures ranging from financial wealth to digital stimulation, and suffer from averse effects such as stress due to overworking and overstimulation. While this way of life not only has a negative impact on the climate, it requires a lot of production and consumption after all, it arguably also has little positive impact on our individual lives. This is how the authors connect it to climate change: refocussing from material to immaterial happiness would allow us to significantly reduce emissions. Interestingly, there is even more to it, as will become clear in the third and final discovered theme.

2.6.4 Finalisation: expanding the theory

With the list of claims complete, the essential narrative of the movement can thereby be summed up as the following: An equal distribution of wealth both through the provision of public services and a guarantee of income leads to numerous benefits for society ranging from better health, education, to happiness and in turn less pollution. The Degrowth narrative herein intrinsically connects the distribution of wealth to effective climate change mitigation and adaptation, fighting it not merely symptomatically but seeking to address its causes.

These claims and this essential narrative expand the understanding and capturing of the key claims of degrowth beyond the earlier discussed codes as found in the Manifesto Project's codebook. Whilst the Manifesto Project's codes 410 and 416 are quite narrow and merely focussed on an anti-growth sentiment and sustainability, the new set of codes derived from the degrowth literature is clearly much wider. It offers a more coherent Degrowth vision, including multiple areas ranging from the climate, to social equality and human welfare. This expanded understanding of Degrowth will likely help in better capturing the ideology in the political party programmes in the analytical section, and will therefore create a more complete understanding of the movement's presence in Dutch politics.

3. Method & Research Design

The main purpose of this study is finding out how the key claims of Degrowth land in the Dutch political spectrum. To achieve this goal, the analytical part of the paper analyses multiple Dutch political party programmes to find out to what extent the Degrowth narrative is already present if at all.

3.1 Directed Content Analysis

Like the analysis of the degrowth claims within the theory section, the final analysis is also a content analysis. This is because just like the first part of the study, this part picks up some pieces of text and seeks to derive data and conclusions from them. The specific goal and therefore also approach of this final part is however fundamentally different. Whereas the first part seeks to find out what claims the Degrowth authors make from the ground up, in other words while only having the said texts as a reference point, this final part of the study has the earlier parts to build upon. In scientific terms, the first part thus relies on inductive coding, while this final part relies on deductive coding. The benefit of this approach with a pre-established framework is that it is essentially more structured and specific, and therefore bears the name *Directed Content Analysis* (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It can be tailored to find the specific answers this study is looking for.

Earlier in the theoretical section the Manifesto Project was already discussed as a good manner of determining the policy positions of political parties (Merz, Regel & Lewandowski, 2016). Given that the method developed by the Manifesto project is specifically designed to analyse political party programmes and that is in essence also what the analyses of this study seeks to do, the method developed by the Manifesto Projects serves as a good base to build upon, as it very much is a form of directed content analysis. The problem is however that the already established coding scheme of the Manifesto Project does not align with the specific needs of this study. A problem because essential to a directed content analysis is a pre-existing framework upon which to base the codes (van Staa & de Vries, 2014). As discussed in the theoretical section, the coding scheme namely contains a mere two codes that can be related to the Degrowth story, and these two have a rather lack of depth. A more in depth coding scheme tailored to this study must therefore first be developed before the directed content analysis can be executed. This will be done through the first analysis, which will seek to find the claims made in the Degrowth literature and derive a coding scheme from those.

As to how to make such a coding scheme, we can follow the Manifesto Project's example as outlined in Merz et. al. (2016) and the Coding Handbook (Manifesto Project, 2021). Like the original Manifesto Project's scheme, the coding scheme of this study will consist of several domains. These domains serve as broad categories under which several related codes can be grouped. In this study's case, these domains are the broad claims made by the Degrowth literature derived from the thematic content analysis of this literature, with the more specific codes being the more specific claims. Each discovered broad claim, or domain, will be given a number. Each specific sub-claim will also be given a number. This will create a coding scheme where for example sub-claim 2 of broad claim/ domain 3 will have the code 32. Of course not all quasi-sentences will be fit for a code as developed in this study. When a

quasi-sentence for example makes a claim on immigration, that would not fit within the degrowth narrative. Such quasi-sentences are given the NA code, as per the guidelines of the Manifesto Project's codebook (Manifesto Project, 2021).

Before any coding scheme comes into play however, the object of analysis must be prepared. Luckily given that we know the object of the study, the party manifesto's, and the method of making them codable, identifying all of the quasi-sentences as per the Manifesto Project's method, there is not much left to do. The Manifesto Project Database namely provides data files of virtually all relevant western political parties filled with separated quasi-sentences for free to any researcher who needs them. The only thing left to do is to then recode all these quasi-sentences with the coding scheme developed in this study.

With a set of fully coded party programmes, the analysis can move to the findings. Two approaches can be used here. Firstly, the coded quasi-sentences offer manner of descriptively showing policy positions in each party programme (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Specifically interesting found quasi-sentences could for example be used as exemplars of the specific positions of a party. The second approach is more quantitative in nature. With all the quasi-sentences given a code, the salience of certain positions can be measured through the counting of the amount of times a given code is attributed to a quasi-sentence is a programme (Curtis et. al., 2001, in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Such a quantitative approach allows to comparison of the salience of specific codes within one party programme, but also between several different programmes. When it comes to answering the main research question of this study, this therefore allows to provide an idea of how present Degrowth thinking is, if at all, and if so in what way. Given that the broad claims are subdivided into sub-claims, it could furthermore potentially show some claims are present to a certain extent. A party may for example only embrace one sub-claim of the three under the broad claim.

3.2 Coding Scheme
Below is the coding scheme developed following the example of the Manifesto Project and based upon the Degrowth literature discussed in the previous theory section. As was explained in the theory section, the list of claims is divided into three domains: 1. Critique on Growth 2. Importance of socio-economic equality and 3. Striving for human wellbeing. In the coding scheme, for each domain, the name of the domain is listed first, followed by the list of claims falling under this domain and short definitions of these claims.

Table 3

The three domains and their claims in code following the Manifesto Project's method

Domain 1: Critique on Growth

[11   Growth impact on climate and environment, and humans, comprised of:]

11.1   Growth impact on climate and environment: negative

Negative references to growth and GDP in relation to their impact on the climate and environment. Argues that it is the chase of high growth and GDP that leads to the widespread pollution in the world. Favours Degrowth policies.

11.2   Growth impact on humans: negative

Negative references to growth and GDP in relation to their impact on humans. Argues that growth and GDP do not substantially improve an individual's life and may even exacerbate inequality

Domain 2: Importance of Socio-economic equality

21   Redistribution: positive

Positive references and calls for the redistribution of wealth. Suggested policies range from taxes to the increased provision of public services and goods such as for example minimum wages and public transport.

22   Inequality: negative

Observes socio-economic inequality in society and explains it as a problem or even danger to society.

23   Inequality causes consumption

Directly connects consumption to inequality and vice versa. Argues a reduction in inequality would mean a reduction in consumption

24   The polluter must bear the costs

Observes that pollution is stimulated or not disincentivised and that it is the richer, both business and individuals, that generally pollute the most. Argues for an economic model that incentivises less pollution and consumption. For example through cutting subsidies and increasing/ adding taxes on pollution.

Domain 3: Striving for Human wellbeing

31   Intrinsic Needs are important

Values intrinsic needs such as connections, purpose and personal development and argues these bring general well-being and happiness. Arguing for a different perspective on what human wellbeing is.

32   Material consumption: negative

Negative references to material consumption and the culture surrounding it. Argues that it does not bring a lasting positive effect on the human individual.

33   Modern way of life: negative

Negative references to our modern way of life such as heavy digital use, high amounts of stress, and physically unhealthy lifestyles.

4. Empirical results

Analysed were the three party programmes made for the 2021 parliamentary elections of the PvdD, Groenlinks and PvdA. Each party's results will be discussed in two steps. First a quick and general analysis will be conducted mainly based on the quantitative count of each of the codes in the party's party programme. This will offer perspectives on for example the total share of Degrowth positions in the party programme of a political party, of what specific positions this share is made up of, and how they different parties compare in their numbers. Then, a more detailed analysis will go through each of the codes providing examples of quasi-sentences from the party programme coded with the respective code. This offers the opportunity to pick pieces of text from the programmes that exemplify the positions of said parties well. This allows for a more in depth look into the party programmes and their content, beyond the numbers of the quantitative analysis.
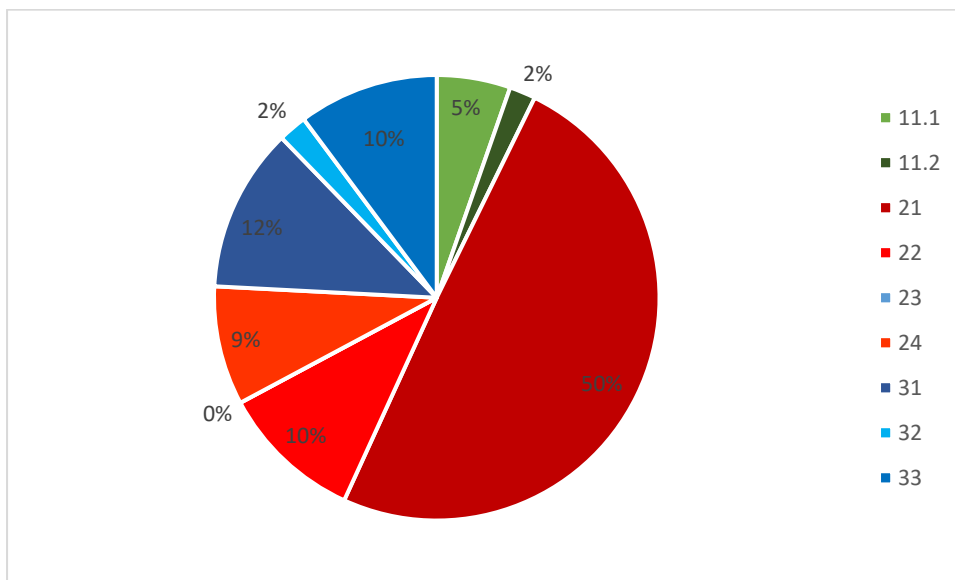
4.1 PvdD

Figure 1: Salience of the key Degrowth claims in the PvdD party programme

First up is the PvdD. The pie chart above shows the relative distribution of each of the codes as counted in the party programme. The legend on the right shows the codes with their respective colours. The two green codes are part of *Domain 1: Critique on Growth.* The four red codes are part of *Domain 2: Importance of Socio-economic equality,* and the three blue codes are part of *Domain 3: Striving for human wellbeing.* For a complete overview see the coding scheme on the previous page or in appendix A.

In total 2910 quasi-sentences were found in the entire programme. Of these 2322 were given the NA code, meaning they did not contain a Degrowth position as per the coding scheme of this study. 588 quasi-sentences, about 20%, therefore did contain a Degrowth position. This means the amount of Degrowth positions is well above the count using the original Manifesto Project's coding scheme, which only counted 2.2%.

The internal makeup of the Degrowth positions of the PvdD shows a strong inclination for the Domain coined as *Importance of Socio-economic Equality* taking up about 69% of all Degrowth positions counted. Next up is the domain *Striving for Human wellbeing* with a share of about 24%, and last is the domain *Critique on Growth* with a share of about 7%. This means the core tenet of Degrowth, namely the critique on Growth itself, was spoken of less than its other elements such as equality and human wellbeing.

Within the domains there are also some categories that stick out. Within the largest domain, *Importance of Socio-economic Equality,* the claim *Redistribution: positive* dwarves all others. *Cautionary eye on inequality* and *Polluter pays* were spoken off about equally. Interestingly, the claim *inequality causes consumption* was counted zero times.

The second largest domain, *Striving for human welfare*, saw two claims of about equal size, *Importance of Intrinsic Needs* and *Modern way of Life: negative*, and one substantially lower *Material consumption: negative*.

The third domain, *Critique on Growth*, counted *Growth impact on climate and environment: negative* three times as much as *Growth impact on humans: negative*. There were thus more positions that painted growth in a negative light for its impact on nature, than for its impact on humanity.

4.1.2 PvdD in more detail

Domain 1: Critique on Growth

First up is the first domain of the coding scheme and the essence of Degrowth itself: *Critique on Growth*. While it was the domain with the lowest amount of quasi-sentences attributed to it in the PvdD party programme, it nevertheless included some vital positions for the party. Most of the quasi-sentences coded under this domain with its two claims were situated in the earlier chapters of the party programme, showing that while they weren't featured that often, they were placed in a prominent and visible positions. Of the two claims in the domain, the critique on growth focussing on its effect on climate and environment was mentioned more often than critique on growth focussing on humanity.

That quantitative count does not mean everything is shown by the fact that the PvdD is very clearly antigrowth despite the low salience of this policy positions within the programme. On the first page of the introduction of the entire programme of a hundred pages, the party already mentions that "Economic growth is not the solution, but the problem." Much more clearer than this a political party cannot be. It does however expand on this position throughout the programme, offering different takes on this position depending on the content of the specific chapter. In the first chapter called *liveable Earth,* the party for example mentions that "We need to stop the endless economic growth on a planet that doesn't grow with us." Referred to here is the idea that humanity is at this moment consuming several earths a year worth of resources, and that this is not a sustainable strategy: "If every global citizen were to consume like the average Dutch person, currently three Earths would be needed". For the PvdD the solution to this is thus less growth, or degrowth in other words. The party also dives into more specific topics, such as for example

mobility. When it comes to air travel it posits the following: "The Netherlands strives for a significant reduction of aviation at all Dutch airports". Lastly, the party also critiques growth as a prevailing narrative within society and politics: "The stubborn focus of established politics on economic growth and the accompanying increasing consumerism, combined with towering subsidies for harmful activities, has irresponsibly allowed the biodiversity problem to escalate". Growth as an economic model is, in the eyes of the party, thus not desirable: "Our growth economy promotes the shortest possible use of products, which leads to a shortage of resources and an excess of waste." It leads both to unnecessary drain on our resources, requiring more productive power, that is in turn wasted due to all the unused waste we produce. In short: growth as goal in and of itself is not desirable due to the ecological damages it causes.

The second claim counted under the umbrella of this domain is *Growth impact on humans: negative*. Although it was counted 3x less than its sister claim, it nevertheless was like its sister put in important positions in the programme, generally being discussed in the first half of the hundred page text. It was most prominently featured in chapter 4., called *systemic change*. Here the PvdD explains that growth and the economic system as a whole is not only bad for the environment, but also disadvantageous for humans: "The current economic system is unjust, unstable, unsustainable, and does not bring happiness to people." In this sentence we already see some connection to the other domain *Striving for human wellbeing*. Growth here is framed as not beneficial, but harmful to even human happiness. This connection between ecological and social impacts is also supported by the PvdD: "The goal should not be growth, but the well-being of humans, animals, and the planet. The ecological and social crises are closely interconnected." At this moment, the part finds that the economic is however still too focussed on the short term and proofs unfair to those not at the top: "Prioritizing short-term interests and a strong belief in economic growth have come at the expense of our planet and those who are less empowered in the labor market." All in all, the PvdD thus agrees with degrowth. They also that "Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is not a suitable indicator for our prosperity and well-being, and it is not an end in itself", which is another important element of Degrowth. Instead of seeing success just in economic terms, we should start seeing success more in terms of human welfare. Degrowth, and the PvdD, posit that growth often does the opposite. More on this in this results section on the third domain.

Domain 2: Importance of Socio-economic equality
Next up is the domain called *Importance of Socio-economic equality*. This domain is most salient in the party programme of the PvdD and consists of 4 claims. One claim, *inequality causes consumption*, was however counted 0 times so in practice in contains only three claims in this programme's case.

The first claim, *Redistribution: positive*, was counted most of all claims in the coding scheme. Given that the PvdD is a left thing party and thus generally concerned with equality, not very surprising. Nevertheless, in this analysis it shows that of all the Degrowth elements, redistributive concerns are at least quantitatively most salient in the programme. In terms of specific topics, what the quasi-sentences spoke of again depended on the chapter. First up is

again a bit of a systemic critique. Its redistributive ideas can be summarised in the two following sentences: "The prosperity of one should no longer come at the expense of the well-being of another" and "It is the government's responsibility to guarantee a social minimum for all residents". From here the party moves to more specific policy proposals. Of course an important one is the income of people: "For this purpose, the taxation and reward systems need a radical overhaul, and the minimum wage is increased by forty percent". It also proposes a basic income: "Under the right conditions, a basic income can provide income security and strengthen employees' positions in relation to employers".

Given that the PvdD is at its core an environmentalist party, much of its programme is tailored to public transport as a greener alternative. Nevertheless, said public transport is also brought up as a socio-economically beneficial: "Netherlands actively works towards promoting affordable, sustainable, and fast international train connections" and "Significant investments are being made in improving public transportation, aiming to reduce people's dependency on cars". Important here is not only the availability of the service, but also its accessibility: "Educational and healthcare institutions, as well as government services, are easily accessible by public transportation from every residential area".

Two other public services the party argues for are healthcare and education. The party is for example concerned with the increased privatisation of these: "Austerity measures, privatization, and market forces have led to healthcare focusing primarily on profit maximization. Pharmaceutical companies and management layers in increasingly larger hospitals often prioritize profit over patients". Instead, the government it should invest more: "The government should invest in teachers and schools". When it comes topics such as childcare, the party also seeks increased support: "Parental leave regulations will be expanded: the existing nine-week, partly paid parental leave will be converted to three months of fully paid leave. Parental leave will be available to all parents".

Last but not least, there are quite some points made about the housing market. Given the housing crisis of the past few years, not that surprising. When it comes to rent the party suggest the following: "Rental prices will not be raised in the coming years." And also argues for building more: "It's time for public housing once again!".

The second claim in this domain, *Inequality: negative*, continuous in the same vein as the first: that of inequality. In its specific context it is however more about seeing it as a bad thing, or a dangerous thing, than about suggesting policies such as the first claim does. Nevertheless, it does brace many of the same topics. The party for example observes strong inequalities in society: "Rent, gas, water, electricity, healthcare premiums, childcare, subscriptions, taxes, and transportation make life expensive" and "In recent years, the inequalities in Dutch society have only grown larger", and it is also concerned with the position of employees: "The power position of employers is excessively strong in certain sectors". Although these positions thus do look unfavourably to inequality, it must be said they do not fully reach the Degrowth perspective on it. As shown in the analysis on Degrowth earlier in this study, degrowth namely also argues that inequality is not only a bad thing for people, but also a structurally destabilising factor for society as a whole.

The third claim The *polluter must pay* combines the ideas of inequality with care for the environment. It therefore also has two main elements as found in the PvdD party programme. Firstly, the PvdD is concerned with the big amount of subsidies still in place for polluting practices, secondly the party is concerned that those who pollute, often do not bear the costs, especially the rich. They point towards the responsibility that major polluters have, both in cause and solution: "Major polluters who play a significant role in the climate crisis and who have benefited the most from economic growth must now also bear the costs of the climate transition". The party also seeks to alleviate the pressures on those who are not responsible for pollution: "Motorists who drive fewer kilometers will pay less tax than those who cover a lot of mileage", and specifically taxing those modes of transport that have to this day been privileged: "Tax benefits for air travel, such as exemptions from VAT and excise duties, are being abolished".

Domain 3: Striving for Human wellbeing
Last but not least within Degrowth is the domain *Striving for Human wellbeing*. Within the PvdD it holds quite a share, namely about 24% of all Degrowth positions within the party programme. Two of its three claims are present by about the same amount, with only *Material consumption: negative* being less salient by a factor of about five.

The first claim, coined as *Importance of Intrinsic Needs*, dives into the immaterial needs of humans. PvdD showed quite a wide attention to this topic. It started of by connecting the issue to the at that time still ongoing covid pandemic: "the crisis has made many realize that intangible values such as friendship, love, care for loved ones, good health, and time for each other are much more valuable than the pursuit of acquiring more and more material possessions". With this realisation in hand, the party then moved to arguing for a different manner of measuring progress: "The government will use the already developed Broad Well-Being Monitor for determining and guiding policies". Such a broad wellbeing monitor would namely also include other factors beyond material wealth. One such important factor is the mental wellbeing of people. When it comes to mental health, the party suggest the following: "People with mental or physical health issues should have quick access to a doctor or therapist". It furthermore also seeks to create a healthy environment for kids, both educationally as well as physically: "Philosophy will also be included in the standard curriculum, and more time will be allocated for art and drama" and "In each neighbourhood, space will be created for sports facilities for young people, such as public soccer and basketball courts, and skate parks". Lastly the party presses the importance of self-development: "The Party for the Animals wants study time to be about taking time for development and self-discovery", and a good way to approach that is through art: "Art and culture prompt reflection, evoke emotions, touch, or disrupt".

The second claim of the domain, *Material consumption: negative*, was discussed to a lesser extent. The party's stance on the topic is quite simple: "The Party for the Animals advocates for reduced consumption", and also gives a simple reason for this: "We have more belongings than ever before, yet with the same ease, we discard those belongings into the trash".

The last claim, *modern way of life: negative*, was discussed more extensively. It is generally divisible into two topics: the bad shape of our mental health, and the bad shape of our physical health. When it comes to the mental part, the party says the following: "Dutch people are experiencing increasing work pressure. We are constantly connected Work and personal life are barely separated anymore (especially now that we are working from home so much), we are always reachable through our smartphones, and social media drains our energy." Physically we are not faring much better. The first problem physically is the environment: "Currently, we live in an unhealthy environment, causing more and more people to suffer from lifestyle-related issues such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, lung diseases, and cardiovascular diseases". In addition, our diets are also not optimal according to the party: "Unhealthy food has been made so accessible and affordable that it has taken a toll on our public health", and sees the government as responsible for this even in the case of children: "The government allows supermarkets to endlessly promote unhealthy products, and in schools, children can satisfy their thirst and quick cravings at sponsored soda and snack vending machines".
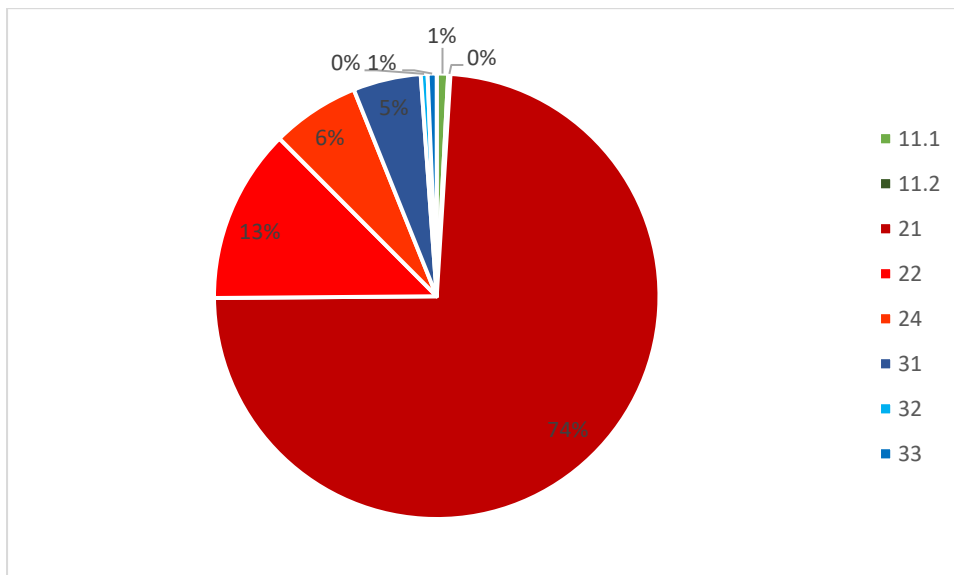
4.2 GroenLinks

Figure 2: Salience of the key Degrowth claims in the Groenlinsk party programme

Next up is Groenlinks. The pie chart above shows the relative distribution of each of the codes as counted in the party programme. The legend on the right shows the codes with their respective colours. The two green codes are part of *Domain 1: Critique on Growth.* The four red codes are part of *Domain 2: Importance of Socio-economic equality,* and the three blue codes are part of *Domain 3: Striving for human wellbeing.* For a complete overview see the coding scheme on the previous page or in appendix A.

In total 1856 quasi-sentences were found in the entire programme. Of these 1241 were given the NA code, meaning they did not contain a Degrowth position as per the coding scheme of this study. 615 quasi-sentences, about 33%, therefore did contain a Degrowth position. This means that just like in the case of the PvdD, the count of Degrowth positions is

above that of the count using the original Manifesto Project's coding scheme. Furthermore, it is higher than the count of the PvdD party programme.

As to why this is, there is a clear cause. Whilst the domain *Importance of Socio-economic equality* was already large in the PvdD programme, it is even larger in the Groenlinks programme. In total, the domain accounted for about 93% of all Degrowth positions counted. The other domains had a much lower salience, with *Striving for Human welfare* taking up about 6%, and *Critique on Growth* about 1%. This means that Groenlinks speaks an almost negligible amount on Degrowth except for its socio-equality element.

Within the domain *Importance of Socio-economic equality* it is once more the redistributive claim that is repeated the most, with 74% of all Degrowth positions in the programme. The other two, *cautionary eye on inequality* and *Polluter pays* are present by about the same relative percentage as in the PvdD. Like with the PvdD, the claim *Inequality causes consumption* is not referred to. When it comes to the domain *Striving for Human wellbeing*, Groenlinks mainly speaks of the *Importance of Intrinsic Needs*. For the 6 quasi-sentences that contained a *Critique on Growth*, five were concerned with the climate and environment, and one with humanity.

4.2.2 Groenlinks in more detail

Domain 1: Critique on Growth
First up is again the domain that contains the essence of Degrowth. Whilst it had quite a presence in the PvdD programme, this is not the case for the party programme of Groenlinks with only six sentences counted under code. Five of these were critique based on growth's impact on the climate and environment, and only one on its impact on humans.

Even these six sentences that were counted were not as convincing as the sentences counted in the PvdD party programme. They were in the end included under *Domain 1*, but barely so. The critique on growth was furthermore very narrow, almost completely focussing just on the topic of prohibiting short flights: "We will cease short flights within 750 kilometers for which the train provides an alternative, and we will not fill the resulting capacity with other destinations." and reducing the size of existing airports: "Schiphol and the regional airports will become smaller and focus on aviation that is important for the Netherlands." The one sentence that was coded under *11.2 Growth Impact on humans: negative* argued for a world where general human wellbeing takes precedence over growth: "Where economic growth is not central, but rather broad prosperity: the well-being of the entire society and a healthy planet". Whilst thus not being an outright critique on growth itself, it does signify some hesitation towards striving just for growth alone and also takes other factors into consideration.

Domain 2: Importance of Socio-economic equality
Whilst this domain already had quite a presence in the programme of the PvdD, it is completely dominating in the party programme of Groenlinks. Just the first claim alone *Redistribution: positive* represented 75% of all quasi-sentences coded as Degrowth. Just like

in the case of the PvdD, the claim *inequality causes consumption* was not present and will therefore not be discussed.

When it comes to the first claim *Redistribution: positive* it becomes clear Groenlinks is a left wing oriented party in favour of strong redistribution in certain areas. Of course it being a green party, one of its main points is to make the process towards a green society fair: "Fair climate policy means that the strongest shoulders bear the heaviest burdens" and that the spoils are also shared equally "And we share the proceeds of greening fairly". A distinctive element in Groenlinks' calls for redistribution is their focus on citizen action and entrepreneurship. They argue strong for for example independent local energy production: "Energy cooperatives formed by residents and local entrepreneurs receive affordable loans, expert advice, and are subject to less stringent regulations, enabling them to invest in clean energy." Such fair energy policy also means reimbursing the damages done by the old form of energy production: "We allocate sufficient funds to repair and reinforce homes in the natural gas area in Groningen and invest in regional development." When it comes to sustainable production, the party also argues for helping entrepreneurs to transition towards green methods: "The proceeds will be used to support farmers and fishermen in transitioning to nature-inclusive agriculture and sustainable fisheries."

Moving to public services, Groenlinks is both in favour of expanding their availability as well as accessibility. For example for the people living in rural regions: "In smaller towns and rural areas, we invest in maintaining open and accessible facilities, such as schools and hospitals". This also means ensuring public transport connections for travel within the country and outward: "Our ambition is to enhance public transportation accessibility throughout the Netherlands" and "High-speed trains will connect the Netherlands with more European countries". Other important topics in the programme are healthcare, education and of course housing: "Effective healthcare requires a strong government that guarantees care for those in need and addresses the growing health disparities between the rich and the poor." and "We ensure smaller class sizes and increased classroom support" and "The government will take charge again and launch a housing offensive from the public housing fund for (social) rental and ownership housing".

Last but not least is the topic of financial equality. The party argues both for taxing richer people and business more, as well as providing more for those with less financial means. A plan that certainly sticks out is the following: "From the age of eighteen, all young people will have the right to a starting capital of 10,000 euros". Other plans for providing more money to those with little include policies such as a basic income: "We embrace the ideal of a basic income: that there is a floor that no one falls below", and minimum wage that follows the average "The ultimate goal is for the minimum wage to consistently be 60 percent of the average wage", decreasing taxes: "We will lower taxes on labor and ensure that those with low and middle incomes make significant gains", and helping with debts: "For individuals with problematic debts, we will establish a National Debt Fund that takes over their debts interest-free". Lastly, the other side of this is to tax the richer more, and to prevent tax avoidance: "We will cease fiscal subsidies for large corporations, reverse the reduction in corporate tax, and tackle tax avoidance aggressively".

The second claim in this domain, *Inequality: negative,* touches upon many of the same topics as the first. First of all, the party points towards the negative direction has taken in the recent years: "that we witnessed was a deterioration in quality, increasing inequality in society, and an overwhelming workload for professionals. The rebellion against market-oriented thinking in the public sector was already in full swing before the pandemic, and the crisis has only intensified it". The party critiques the inequality present in a wide variety of areas. One problem it sees is the shortage of help: "It is unacceptable that vulnerable young people wait for months on waiting lists, and caregivers struggle with excessive work pressure". and "The waiting lists for social housing are enormous, making it nearly impossible for starters and people with low incomes to find a home", with dire consequences: "The number of homeless individuals has doubled in the span of ten years". When it comes to the cause behind this problem, the party points primarily towards the right wing and their line of thinking: "At the same time, the crisis has shown how deeply ingrained the traces of that right-wing view of humanity are in our society. It painfully became clear how vulnerable the situation of many people is and how great the uncertainty is". The party argues this has led to systematic inequalities: "Where taxes for high incomes were lowered and wealth inequality continued to grow, more and more people with low incomes are struggling to make ends meet" and "wealth inequality is passed down from generation to generation". As to why equality is important, the party posits the following: "Only through economic security does everyone have the space to think, live, and act sustainably".

On to the third claim, *the polluter must pay.* The party starts out relatively in the beginning of the programme with the following sentence, making its position clear: "GroenLinks makes polluters pay, and the strongest shoulders bear the heaviest burdens". That this is often not the case yet is a problem for the party: "Many large companies have generated high profits for their shareholders for years, often through fossil activities and with government support", it therefore proposes policies such as a CO2 tax: "With our CO2 tax, alternatives to fossil fuels become more attractive, and companies will pay a fair price for the damage that CO2 inflicts on the climate". It furthermore also seeks to limit the use of materials: "Manufacturers will pay a raw materials tax and will be obligated to use an increasing percentage of recycled materials", and seeks to incentivize recycling by the consumers as well: "A deposit system will be implemented for cans and glass wine bottles to prevent them from ending up in nature". Another topic the party seeks to limit the consumer in is driving: "Through road pricing, drivers will pay for usage in a fair and privacy-friendly manner, reflecting their environmental impact" and the delivery of goods: "We will prevent wastage and unnecessary trips by parcel delivery services by mandating transparent shipping costs and compulsory coverage of actual return costs". Finally, the common bogyman, flying, also isn't spared: "With a Dutch ticket tax, we discourage frequent flyers".

Domain 3: Striving for Human wellbeing
The final domain, *Striving for Human wellbeing*, although larger than the first domain is still relatively very small compared to domain two. Within the domain, only the claim *Intrinsic needs are important* has some salience. The other two claims were counted only three and four times.

The first claim focusses primarily on four topics. The first is the mental wellbeing of people: "We will counter societal stigma surrounding mental health conditions through public campaigns". The party seeks to bring increased attention to the topic. A second area of interest next to mental wellbeing is mental development: "School is envisioned as a place where you can learn, develop yourself, and pursue your dreams". Here, schooling is framed as a place where people do not just learn practical skills, but also discover themselves. Such discovery can also be done through culture and art: "The richness of our country can be measured by the stories we tell each other, the images we form, the music we create, and the new worlds we imagine". Last but not least is of course also the community building aspect: "We will encourage new gathering spaces (such as community centers) in places where they have disappeared and provide better support for existing ones".

The second and third claims, *Material consumption: negative* and *Modern way of life negative,* were only counted three and four times respectively. Consumption is looked upon negatively due to the waste of food: "Globally, we waste one-third of all food". The party also suggests policy to counter this: "We will prohibit supermarkets from discarding or rendering food unfit for consumption". The modern way of life is looked upon negatively primarily due to the unhealthy influences of tobacco and alcohol: "We will reduce targeted alcohol and fast-food marketing aimed at young people".
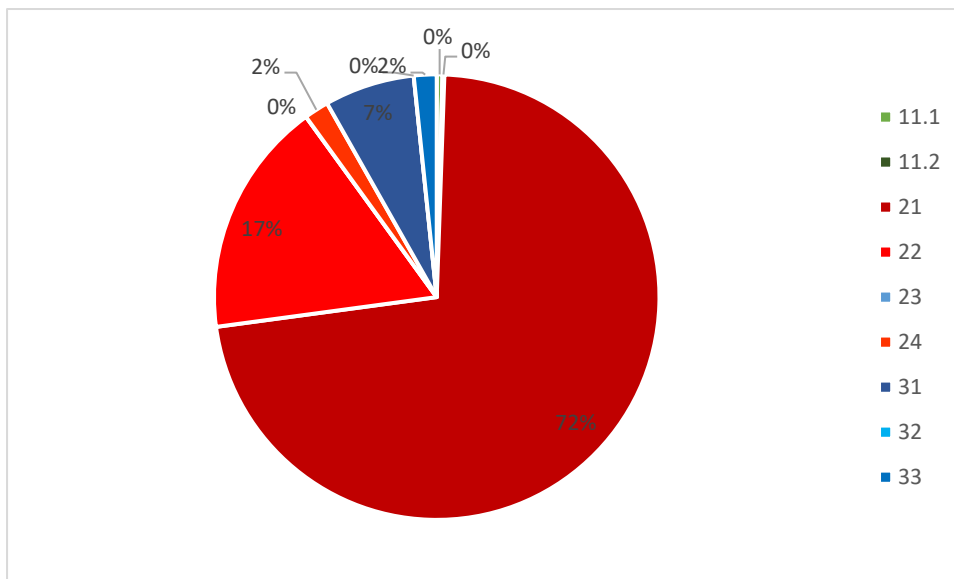
4.3 PvdA

Figure 3: Salience of the key Degrowth claims in the PvdA party programme

Last is PvdA. The pie chart above shows the relative distribution of each of the codes as counted in the party programme. The legend on the right shows the codes with their respective colours. The two green codes are part of *Domain 1: Critique on Growth.* The four red codes are part of *Domain 2: Importance of Socio-economic equality,* and the three blue codes are part of *Domain 3: Striving for human wellbeing.* For a complete overview see the coding scheme on the previous page or in appendix A.

In total 3510 quasi-sentences were found in the entire programme. Of these, 1870 were given the NA code, meaning they did not contain a Degrowth position as per the coding scheme of this study. 1640 quasi-sentences, about 47%, therefore did contain a Degrowth position as per the coding scheme of this study. This means that just like in the cases of the PvdD and Groenlinks, the count of Degrowth positions is above that of the count using the original Manifesto Project's coding scheme. Compared to the two parties, the PvdA is both above PvdA and Groenlinks.

Like in the case of Groenlinks, the domain *Importance of Socio-economic equality* dominates and explains why the total share of Degrowth positions is so high in the programme. By what amount it dominates is also similar: About 81% of Degrowth positions can be attributed to the domain. The other two domains are like is true for Groenlinks, also very small. *Striving for Human wellbeing* is slightly bigger, accounting for about 7% of all Degrowth positions. The domain *Critique on Degrowth* is even more negligible than in Groenlinks's case, with only 0.5% of the PvdA Degrowth positions falling under said domain.

Again there are some similar differences within the domains as well. Within the domain *Importance of Socio-economic Equality* it is once again the claim *redistribution: positive that is by far the largest.* Substantially smaller within this domain compared to both Groenlinks and the PvdD is however the claim *Polluter pays.* Within the domains PvdA is quite similar to Groenlinks, but different compared to PvdD. The biggest difference is the PvdD's larger salience of *Modern way of life: negative.*

4.3.2 PvdA in more detail

Domain 1: Critique on Growth

The first domain is even smaller within the PvdA than in Groenlinks. For the first subclaim *Growth impact on climate and environment: negative* six quasi-sentences were counted, for the second *Growth impact on humans: negative* only two were counted. The quasi-sentences pitted under these claims were again like in the case of Groenlinks rather vague. They were counted under this domain, but only barely so. The first subclaim is represented in the PvdA's programme by references to Earth's limited capacity: "This also leads to increased use of resources for production and consumption, surpassing the Earth's carrying capacity" and humanity's drift for expansion: "The ecological crisis is caused by the unchecked exploitative drive of industrialized capitalism". Suggested policies are for example a reduction in livestock: "To address this, the livestock population needs to be reduced, and a shift towards nature-inclusive circular agriculture is essential. The second claim is represented by a worry that financial interests are often above what is important for general human welfare: "Where things go wrong is in the fixation on short-term financial and economic gains. There has been a process of financialization and dehumanization".

Domain 2: Importance of Socio-economic equality

Again like in the case of Groenlinks, the PvdA's largest share by far of Degrowth positions is taken by this second domain. Internally, it is also again the first claim, *Redistribution: positive*, that is taking up the largest share. The third claim*, Inequality causes consumption*, is like for the other two parties also again missing. The fourth claim, *The polluter must pay*, is relatively very small within the PvdA. The share of the first claim is so high that it is hard to

fully capture all ideas proposed by the party in the form in which the previous two parties were discussed. This section will therefore discuss only the main points made by the party, and will forgo of more detailed propositions.

One of the first sentences in the programme summarises the whole ideology of the party well: "To achieve true freedom, we strive for existential security for everyone. Existential security is the right to a decent life. A place where you can come home, an income you can rely on, a safety net for when things go wrong, and opportunities for your children" The party then deals with this topic of existential security through various areas of society. The first dedicated chapter in the programme is coined *Our plan for good work and a fair economy*. This chapter deals with the following topics: first of all they party seeks job security for everyone: "We achieve this by creating enough quality jobs with a decent compensation". Then, the party also wants to ensure everyone can have a meaningful job: "Individuals with disabilities or those who are unable to work before entering the job market should be assured of a decent income". A third point here is ensuring a fair economy, meaning a fair pay for everyone but also ensuring those with a lot of wealth are taxed: "The strongest shoulders bear the heaviest burdens". This leads to the fourth topic, relieving poverty and debt: "We believe that providing perspective and space gives people in poverty the best opportunity to come up with the best solutions together with others". The party here refers to the poverty trap, and seeks to help those in need to create better lives.

The second major chapter in the party programme is on healthcare. Healthcare, according to the party, should not be about whats best for the market, but the human: "For this, collaboration is necessary along with strong government oversight. Our choices: Ban on profit distributions by health insurance companies. The money we collectively contribute to healthcare goes towards healthcare, not towards insurance companies' profit". The party furthermore seeks to keep healthcare cheap for everyone, for example by reducing insurance costs: "We will gradually reduce the deductible (own risk) to zero".

The third major chapter deals with Education. First of all, the party wants to heavily invest in education: "That's why we are making a structural additional investment in teachers, school leaders, and support staff in education". The party also wants to ensure that education starts early and well for all: "All young children (ages zero to four) will have free access to publicly funded childcare with well-trained pedagogical staff". This ideal of ensuring good education for everyone, not just the wealthy, is further exemplified by the argument for free extra schooling for everyone: "All children who require extra education, homework assistance, or coaching in study skills should be able to receive that through the school". Schooling also never stops: "Employers will be obligated to ensure that employees receive comprehensive and valuable training that is as qualified as possible"

The third major chapter delves into housing. The party starts of with arguing for the straightforward solution of building more houses: "The government will once again take the lead in housing construction. We assist housing associations and municipalities in building affordable homes, and prevent the construction industry from collapsing during the crisis". Next up, the party also wants to make sure that the houses that are already there, aren't too

expensive: "We tackle speculators, slumlords, and property owners who exploit the market, ensuring that rents become affordable once again".

Other topics falling under claim 1 are discussed throughout the following chapters. These include transportation, both public and private: "Public transportation fares will decrease" and "Electric driving is accessible and affordable for everyone. This can be achieved through a combination of investments and broadening of fiscal regulations. This way, electric driving becomes accessible to everyone, not just higher incomes." Lastly, the PvdA does not just intend to make life better for Dutch people, but is also concerned with foreign workers: "Decent working conditions for migrant workers".

The second claim in this domain, *Inequality: negative,* also has a strong presence in the PvdA programme and touches many of the same topics as the first claim. Starting of with the general problems in the country: "A comfortable home, work with a decent salary, a helping hand when needed; for too many Dutch citizens, these have become uncertain" and "Nearly half of the renters in the private sector spend forty percent of their monthly income on rent". The party however also goes beyond income and housing, towards topics such as for example health: "The highest incomes in our country live on average 7.5 years longer than the lowest incomes"

The last claim in the domain, *The polluter must pay*, had a relatively small share compared to the others of its domain. The party discusses a varied amount of topics here. For example ceasing investing and even taxing polluting production: "Banks and pension funds cease financing polluting activities" and "We introduce an industry tax on nitrogen emissions (following the Danish model)". Additionally, the party also seeks to target consumer behaviour: "Expand the deposit system to include cans" and "For road tax, it's not ownership but usage (the number of kilometers driven) that holds the most weight" and "We eliminate the VAT exemption on airfare tickets".

Domain 3: Striving for Human wellbeing
The last domain although holding a quite a share compared to Groenlinks, is still smaller than in the programme of the PvdD. In the PvdA's case, this domain primarily consists of the claim *Intrinsic Needs are Important*, and to a lesser extent of the claim *modern way of life: negative*. Again, the claim *Material consumption: negative* has a very low presence, in the PvdA's case even zero.

In the spirit of the party the first claim *Intrinsic Needs are Important* is mostly talked about through the lens of work, more specifically the right of free time next to work: "Freedom means being able and allowed to participate. That there is a place for everyone to be themselves. To pursue your dreams. To make a contribution. To develop in a way that suits you. After a hard day's work, you want to relax. With your partner on the couch, exercising, enjoying something with friends or family, or just doing nothing. That's nice, but also important for recuperation". A part of this is also allowing people to do more of the kind of work that they feel a passion for but might not bring in high amounts of money: "The tax-free volunteer allowance is also increased". Lastly, important in the development of every human in the eyes of the party is education: "Quality education is much more than just

cognitive knowledge. The years in school are also a period in which you develop your own identity in relation to others". Policy is therefore necessary to ensure education of good and holistic quality: "Every school will have more space for music, culture, and sports, with well-trained specialist teachers". On my such secondary activities are important, the party comments the following: "Art and culture provide a sense of togetherness, comfort, creativity, inspiration, and imagination"

The other claim discussed, *Modern way of life: negative*, is like its fellow within the domain also focussed on the work life balance. First of all, the party notices an unfairness in the current society: "We're working harder, but getting less in return" and "But nowadays, when you ask someone how they're doing, the answer is often "good, busy." We're working from home more frequently, and often working overtime". There is thus an imbalance in our work hours vs free time hours, but also in our health: "However, it's expensive to live healthily. Unhealthy food is cheaper than healthy food". Not just for adults, but also children: "Ban on unhealthy advertising targeted at children. We raise awareness among adults about the risks of smoking, alcohol, and drugs". Generally, the party simply sees modern society as becoming more and more difficult to live in, and seeks to remedy this: "Part of this is due to the fact that our society has become increasingly complex in terms of technology, social dynamics, culture, and economy over the past decades".

5. Discussion

The ultimate goal of this thesis is to find out how each of the key claims of degrowth as a social and environmental movement land in the spectrum of Dutch political parties. Based on the directed content analysis conducted in the results section it can be said that the Degrowth line of thinking indeed already has some presence in the Dutch political context as hypothesised in the theoretical section. However, the results have also shown that just going by the original code of the Manifesto Project is not sufficient. The empirical results of this study are quite different from the results that would have been achieved with just using the Manifesto project's code: whereas the Manifesto Project's code indicated a salience of Degrowth thinking of only 2.2%, 0.4% and 0.4% for the PvdD, Greenleft, and PvdA respectively, the analysis of this study resulted in much higher numbers of 20%, 33% and 47% for the PvdD, Greenleft, and PvdA respectively. As expected, all three parties analysed hold a substantial amount of positions that can be related to the Degrowth movement. At the same time, and also as expected, it varies how favourable each of these parties is to the degrowth movement's claims. It is clear that each party, with its specific concerns, also takes up some of the claims more than the others.

Purely judged on the numbers, the party with the highest relative salience of degrowth positions compared to non-degrowth positions is the Pvda, followed by Greenleft and then the PvdD. One very important result is, however, that just basing the conclusion on such numbers sketches a very skewed image. Indeed, the PvdA is on paper dominated by Degrowth thinking. But just by looking into the distribution of the different claims discovered in the Degrowth texts we are already seeing some oddities. More than 90% of Greenleft's and more than 80% of the PvdA's degrowth positions are namely found within the second domain *Importance of socioeconomic equality.* The other two domains hold a relatively low share in both parties, especially the first domain *Critique on Growth* containing one of the essential claims of degrowth which has an arguably negligible share.

The PvdD shows a different story. Like in the case of the PvdA and Greenleft, the second domain is relatively large compared to the other two domains, but in the PvdD's case the other two domains nevertheless also have quite a presence. The third domain, *Importance of Human wellbeing*, with a share of close to a quarter of all degrowth positions, and the first domain, *Critique on Growth*, with around 7%. It is thus clear that the PvdD thinking on Degrowth is a lot more diverse than is the case for the other two parties.

This raises the question on how to interpret these results. Can it be said that the key claims of Degrowth land in political parties such as the PvdA and Greenleft that hold a high amount of Degrowth positions in total when their set of degrowth positions is very skewed distribution towards just one domain? This brings us back to the research question. In the introduction:

> *How do the key claims of degrowth as a social and environmental movement land in the spectrum of Dutch political parties?*

Answering the research question is obvious when it comes to the PvdD. The key claims of degrowth clearly all have a substantial presence in this party. For the other two parties the situation is less obvious. The Greenleft is very clearly an environmentalist party, but whether they truly and fully support degrowth is doubtful as it does not explicitly critique the growth economy as for example the PvdD does. Whether this is because they believe in a Green Growth economy, or because they haven't made up their mind yet can not be said by this study. The PvdA seems even less in favour of full degrowth policy. The party even mentions policy positions occasionally that seek the opposite of degrowth, namely a growing economy: "Our choices: Workers share in the growth" and "With the right policies, the Dutch economy will run on clean growth by 2030, rather than on polluting fuels". Again, whether these are just pragmatic positions following today's economic tradition or fully engrained beliefs of the party cannot be said.

Whereas both the parties thus do not contain the full set of degrowth claims, they do very strongly support the element of degrowth that is socio-economic equality. Here we come to another conclusion of this study, namely that degrowth goes beyond just being an environmentalist movement. In fact, a very large amount of the claims found in the degrowth literature argued in favour of the traditional leftist topic of socio-economic equality, but also more new-age critique's on the modern way of life such as consumerism and unhealthy mental and physical lifestyles. When looking towards Degrowth, it is thus important to see it in its whole, and not just as a climatological movement, as it is reality much more than that. It is a movement that seeks a radical societal transformation in all its aspects.

This brings us to another important point in interpreting the results. The nature of the method of analysis resulted in a list of separate claims, but in reality these claims form a complete story. The list of Degrowth claims is thus not merely more numerous than that of the original Manifesto Project's code, but also more holistic. Essentially, Degrowth can be summarised in the following sentence mentioned earlier in the theoretical section: *An equal distribution of wealth both through the provision of public services and a guarantee of income leads to numerous benefits for society ranging from better health, education, to happiness and in turn less pollution*. This holistic vision was not embraced by any party, especially the Greenleft and PvdA, for two reasons. 1. Some claims were very dominant whilst others were barely discussed or not discussed at all and 2. Even the PvdD, with a relatively diverse set of Degrowth claims, did not frame these in the holistic manner as Degrowth is described above.

It seems the most dominant aspect of Degrowth in the Dutch political context at this moment is namely the second domain on socio-economic equality. Given that all three parties discussed are from the leftwing, this is not very surprising. However, especially the lack of claims from the 1st domain in both the Greenleft and PvdA show that Degrowth as a whole is not yet embraced. Some claims were even barely discussed or not discussed at all by any party, even though these were quite essential in the Degrowth story. For example, claim *23 Inequality causes consumption*. Part of the Degrowth vision is that socio-economic inequality and pollution are connected. This line of thinking was however not found

amongst the parties. This brings us to the second point: none of the parties discussed Degrowth holistically. All discussed quite a wide set of claims, but none framed these into a single story. A story as outline in the sentence laid out earlier.

This combined vision, which includes all the three domains, is thus not explicitly present in any of the three parties. As to why this is unfortunate, we can go back to the first paragraph of this thesis and the main problem statement of this study. We live in a world ravaged by climate change and social upheaval. While climate change is often framed as just the intellectual's problem, Degrowth with its vision that looks to both social and climatological issues as connected, could serve as a very strong counter towards this line of thinking. If applied correctly, Degrowth could potentially both relieve the pressure on the climate and people's economic security, and even make us intrinsically happier.

A great outlook towards the future, but also the harbinger of the limitations. Degrowth is a great ideology on paper, but is as of yet still very far away from true implementation. As shown by the results of this study, its line of thinking is starting to infiltrate the Dutch political context, but until it is accepted by a sizable amount of the political spectrum, its feasibility has been shown, and a strategy of implementation has been created it remains what it critics attack it with: a utopian ideal. This is not to say there is zero work on what its implication could look like, as the two advocates Jason Hickel and Jason Schenderling show in their books with examples of possible policies, but the fact remains the road ahead is long and this study cannot provide many answers to how to walk it. Future research could therefore focus on two essential areas: How do we go about implementing degrowth, and how do we convince the world of its need and feasibility?

6. Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis was to find out how each of the key claims of degrowth as a social and environmental movement land in the spectrum of Dutch political parties. In conclusion, it can be said that some parties, namely the PvdD, Greenleft, and PvdA are favourable to at least some of the Degrowth's claims. Of these three, it is however only the PvdD that seems to fully embrace almost all of Degrowth's key claims, and even then a holistic vision such as Degrowth provides seems to lack. The second important conclusion of this study is thereby that Degrowth is not merely a set of claims, but a holistic narrative which can be best summarised in the following sentence: *An equal distribution of wealth both through the provision of public services and a guarantee of income leads to numerous benefits for society ranging from better health, education, to happiness and in turn less pollution.* Only when a party embraces this vision in its holistic completion, can it be said to fully embrace Degrowth, and that is currently not the case for any political party in the Dutch political context.

That being said, the results of this thesis are of course not without limitations. The samples used for the analysis used in this thesis were the political party programme's. Whilst these are written by the parties, and should therefore provide a good indication of their positions, the parties are of course more than these documents. They are big organisations with thousands of members, and depending on the party maybe millions of voters. Gaining a more complete and solid picture of the true policy positions of the party requires a more extensive analysis also focussed on this human aspect. To remedy this, additional analyses could work with for example media data (Heibling & Tresch, 2011) and/ or "expert, elite, and mass surveys; text analysis; and legislative voting behavior" (Laver, 2014). One such an opportunity was already shortly discussed in this thesis: the parliamentary interview of Jason Hickel, which could be another great source of information on Degrowth's position in the Dutch political context for future research.

Still, despite these limitations, this study did manage to bring the understanding of Degrowth within the Dutch political context further than it was. First of all, this thesis extracted and made scientifically measurable the key claims of Degrowth. Where before there were many extensive articles and books on degrowth, there now is a clear list of its key claims. With this list of key claims this study furthermore managed to find out quite well how the movement lands in Dutch politics, and provided detailed information both on the salience of the different claims within Degrowth in each of the political parties, as well as the precise focusses of each of the parties. It is now clear that Degrowth as a movement lands to some extent in each of the parties, but not fully, and that each of these parties also has their own preferences for specific claims. Future scientific research could, next to expanding based on the aforementioned limitations, therefore also expand based on these findings. As to how, we already arrive at the social relevance of this study.

At the start of this thesis climate change was explained as a social dilemma: do we choose saving the planet or human prosperity? This study has shown degrowth proposes both, found out with what claims it seeks to do so, and how these claims land in Dutch politics. Now the question arises: how? Future research could, armed with the knowledge on how

Degrowth lands in Dutch politics, start with seeking to find out not only how to make it stick, but also how to make it embraced, and most importantly, how to make it work. As to what society itself could do with the findings of this thesis we again comeback to the holistic vision of Degrowth. With a world ravaged by climate change, but also a populace afraid of the (radical) action required to tackle it, Degrowth could, if explained well, provide the way forward. It has the potential to bridge the social concerns with the environmental ones, and create a happier society at the same time. Whilst at this point most political parties seem to lack such a clear idea for the future and rely more on a long list of separate measures, the Degrowth ideal could shape these technocratic lists into something that humans have always required: a vision for a better future to believe in.

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Appendix A

The three domains and their claims in code following the Manifesto Project's method

Domain 1: Critique on Growth

[11   Growth impact on climate and environment, and humans, comprised of:]

11.1   Growth impact on climate and environment: negative

Negative references to growth and GDP in relation to their impact on the climate and environment. Argues that it is the chase of high growth and GDP that leads to the widespread pollution in the world. Favours Degrowth policies.

11.2   Growth impact on humans: negative

Negative references to growth and GDP in relation to their impact on humans. Argues that growth and GDP do not substantially improve an individual's life and may even exacerbate inequality

Domain 2: Importance of Socio-economic equality

21   Redistribution: positive

Positive references and calls for the redistribution of wealth. Suggested policies range from taxes to the increased provision of public services and goods such as for example minimum wages and public transport.

22   Inequality: negative

Observes socio-economic inequality in society and explains it as a problem or even danger to society.

23   Inequality causes consumption

Directly connects consumption to inequality and vice versa. Argues a reduction in inequality would mean a reduction in consumption

24   The polluter must bear the costs

Observes that pollution is stimulated or not disincentivised and that it is the richer, both business and individuals, that generally pollute the most. Argues for an economic model that incentivises less pollution and consumption. For example through cutting subsidies and increasing/ adding taxes on pollution.

Domain 3: Striving for Human wellbeing

31   Intrinsic Needs are important

Values intrinsic needs such as connections, purpose and personal development and argues these bring general well-being and happiness. Arguing for a different perspective on what human wellbeing is.

32   Material consumption: negative

Negative references to material consumption and the culture surrounding it. Argues that it does not bring a lasting positive effect on the human individual.

33   Modern way of life: negative

Negative references to our modern way of life such as heavy digital use, high amounts of stress, and physically unhealthy lifestyles.