

CALL FOR PAPERS FOR A SPECIAL ISSUE OF *ORGANIZATION*

‘Theoretical Perspectives on Organizations and Organizing in a Post-Growth Era’



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Call for papers for the Special Issue

The purpose of this special issue is to broaden and intensify the discussion of ways humanity might disengage from the putative imperative of unbridled economic growth. In the course of the last century, this imperative has come to dominate the priorities of scholars, policy-makers and ordinary citizens. The assumption that economic growth is an absolute requirement of the global political economic system is so entrenched that it is rarely questioned by mainstream economists (Daly, 2013) and is perhaps even more taken for granted in the field of organizational and management studies. Growth forecasts are *de rigueur* both at the macroeconomic level and at the industry or corporate levels. However, as Jackson (2009: 123) points out, mainstream economics is ‘ecologically illiterate’ because its preferred indicators of success, like Gross Domestic Product (GDP), that purportedly reflect a ‘strong’ economy, do not account for ecological destruction and the undermining of the quality of life on earth that inevitably accompanies unbridled economic growth. Even alternative measures of success, like the Genuine Progress Indicator, that attempt to quantify so called externalities and weigh in positive social and environmental contributions (e.g., housework and child care) and the Sustainable Development Goals developed by the United Nations do not systematically question the primacy of growth (Banerjee, 2003; Jermier, 1998; Reichel et al., 2016). To illustrate, the UN Sustainable Development Goals have ‘sustainable growth’ targets assessed with GDP. Similarly, the influential Stern report (*The Economics of Climate Change*) claims that ‘the world does not need to choose between averting climate change and promoting growth and development.’ Even more audaciously, Stern claims that ‘with strong, deliberate policy choices, it is possible to decarbonize both developed and developing economies on the scale required for climate stabilization, while maintaining economic growth in both’ (Stern, 2006: xi). As Fournier (2008: 529) puts it, perhaps it is the ideology of growth – ‘a system of representation that translates everything into a reified and autonomous economic reality inhabited by self-interested consumers’ - rather than growth per se that is the problem.

To escape the tyranny of narrow conceptions of growth, we believe it is necessary to critically re-examine economic and social relations in organizations and relations between

organizations and the natural environment. Hence, for this special issue, we invite scholars to reflect on how economic growth is conceptualized (implicitly or explicitly) in existing theoretical frameworks and in the paradigmatic underpinnings (often functionalist) of these frameworks. Relatedly, we think it is essential to reimagine organizations and their impacts under macro-economic conditions characterized by decoupling of resources, steady-state system dynamics, or even conscious degrowth¹—which requires a radical paradigm shift and other fundamental changes that can elevate human happiness, well-being, quality of life and other non-economic criteria from the periphery to the center of organizational analysis.

Critiques of unbridled economic growth are not new. The radical notion of degrowth, (*décroissance*--meaning economic contraction or downscaling—Latouche, 2004), however, presents organizational and management scholars with a paradigmatic challenge and with opportunities to reframe the field and its core set of assumptions. Degrowth is not a particular theory as such but can be described as *mot obus*, a ‘word grenade’ or ‘missile word’ that aims to create new visions of social, ecological and economic transformations; it is ‘a political slogan with theoretical implications’ (Latouche, 2009: 7). Degrowth authors challenge institutions that frame the economic, political and cultural dimensions of capitalism and neoliberalism, arguing that our current institutions have created the social-ecological crises we now face. Degrowth thinkers question the ongoing relevance of these institutions and their effects in their current (and incrementally reformed) configurations. For example, advocates of degrowth challenge the assumptions of green growth and sustainable development and argue that it is not possible to decouple economic growth from material and energy flows.

In ecological economics, degrowth is described as an ‘equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human wellbeing and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level, in the short and long term’ (Schneider et al., 2010: 513). However, degrowth is not just about producing or consuming less but also involves a repoliticalization of the economy and a radical break from conventional economic thinking because growth economies and societies do not know how to degrow (Fournier, 2008; Latouche 2004). Degrowth distinguishes well-being and prosperity from economic growth and aims to promote economic democracy and social justice and a ‘concern for a fair distribution (intergenerational and intragenerational) of economic, social and environmental goods and bads at all time-lines’ (Demaria et al., 2013: 202). Degrowth is not the same as austerity, which is a neoliberal project. In fact, as Chertkovskaya et al. (2017: 200) point out ‘arguments for austerity are always made in the name of growth’. More radical concepts related to degrowth include sharing, simplicity, conviviality, care, the commons, new forms of cooperatives, production for use, voluntary rather than wage labor, gifts/barter rather than profit (D’Alisa et al., 2015; Fournier, 2009). The emphasis is not on ‘less’ but ‘different’: ‘different activities, different forms and uses of energy, different relations, different gender roles, different allocations of time between paid and non-paid work and different relations with the non-human world’ (D’Alisa et al., 2015: 4).

Critiques of growth that emerged in mainly European contexts are also closely related to critiques of development in Latin America and Asia. Advocates of ‘post-development’ call for alternatives to development rather than development alternatives and the need to decenter development as a central discourse that represented reality for much of the global south (Escobar, 2011; 2015; Esteva et al., 2013; Sachs, 1992). Alternatives include movements like *Buen Vivir* (Gudynas, 2011; Kothari et al., 2015; Peredo, 2018), which emerged from

¹ The epistemic dominance of the term growth is also reflected in our language – in typing ‘degrowth’ the automatic spellchecker corrected it to ‘regrowth’.

indigenous struggles against development projects in Latin America and which reflect indigenous ontologies that require ‘the subordination of economic objectives to ecological criteria, human dignity, and social justice’ (Escobar, 2015: 455).

But there has been much less consideration of how organizations, as social institutions, serve the dominant growth assumption and give it momentum. Organizations that arise, survive and perhaps even flourish in an environment where the need for continual growth is taken for granted are shaped by that environment in ways that may not be transparent to their members. These considerations apply to organizational forms in general, but they arguably come to a head with business models. It is significant that in a special issue concerning ‘Business Models for Sustainability’ (*Organization & Environment*, 2016), some papers made no mention of growth or saw it only in terms of a standard requirement of business; one saw ‘de-coupling economic growth from physical resource consumption growth’ as something ‘that might need to be considered in future business models’ (Wells, 2016: 40); two papers devoted somewhat more attention to the possibility that growth might need to be limited (Gauthier & Gilomen, 2016; Upward & Jones, 2016); another suggested that organizational forms might be used to address concerns about growth (Abdelkafi & Täuscher, 2016). And after nearly 25 years since the establishment of Organizations and the Natural Environment (ONE) as a division of the Academy of Management, we have seen only occasional arguments that fundamentally challenge dominant views of organizations (and the growth imperative) or that provide alternative paradigmatic and critical theory perspectives: the primary focus of ONE research is on incremental change and ‘managing’ environmental issues (Banerjee, 2011, Jermier, 2014). It is hard not to see a gap here.

Key questions relevant to scholars of organizations and organizing emerge as we begin to take seriously alternatives to traditional, growth-driven societies. The questions center on revised notions of fiduciary responsibility, fundamentally different forms of organizing (e.g., B corporations, social enterprises, the resurgence of cooperatives), and firms engaged in developing the circular economy as first priority (cf. Perey et al., 2018). Questions also center on the role played by organizational cultures, structures, technologies, human resource ideologies, environmental management practices, and processes of organizational change--first in sustaining the traditional growth paradigm, and second in framing and bringing alternative paradigms forward.

Imagining a society without growth poses an immense challenge. Conventional economic wisdom tells us that resisting growth leads to poverty and economic and social collapse. Yet, ecological wisdom posits that unbridled economic growth leads to economic collapse and social collapse. Alternative visions call for abandoning an economy based on accumulation and embracing an economy of restoration and distribution. If advocates of narrow concepts of growth claim that ‘growth is a substitute for redistribution’ (Hickel, 2017), then the task in a postgrowth era is to create a system where redistribution becomes a substitute for growth. How this is to be achieved remains a profound challenge for society and organizational scholars. Proponents of the degrowth initiative argue that it clearly calls into question the capitalist assumptions prevailing in the industrialized world (Boillat et al., 2012). Others maintain that the degrowth movement allies with calls for ecological justice, another fundamental challenge to prevailing economic arrangements at all levels (Martinez-Alier, 2012).

Our aim for this Special Issue is to invite scholars from different disciplines to address these challenges. Are there theoretical resources in the management and organizational studies field (and/or in source disciplines) that generate new and fruitful questions about degrowth? Can the degrowth and post-growth paradigm enrich theoretical thinking about organizations and organizing? Are there new empirical questions that flow from the juxtaposition of the growth critique literature and the mission and typical subject

matter published in *Organization*? We are seeking theoretical and empirical papers that harness the growth critique literature and elaborate it in new and bold ways of relevance to organizational and management studies scholars and to scholars in related fields. We invite papers that explore a wide range of themes and questions including the following:

- Which theories of organization and organizing are least compatible with the growth critique literature and in need of revision or sidelining? Which theories hold the most promise for a post-growth era? Are there new theories that must be authored for a post-growth world?
- What are the silences and absences of theorization about growth and what alternatives to growth are being conceptualized in institutional and organizational analyses?
- Are all forms of growth bad? What would good growth look like, theoretically and ethically? How will we know good growth?
- What are the different units of analysis (macroeconomic, institutional, country specific, organizational) of degrowth and how should degrowth be theorized and assessed at different levels of analysis?
- What macro and micro level transformations are needed to abandon growth and embrace alternatives to growth? How should these transformations be theorized?
- What are the organizational implications of degrowth? What ideal types and other models of organization are needed in a postgrowth era?
- What are the theoretical impacts on business models for organizations operating in a degrowth world?
- What are the institutional foundations of growth ideology? What impacts do these foundations have on organizations and individual actors? What theories help answer these questions?
- How does degrowth impact levels of inequality in societies and organizations? What radical theories need to be developed to link degrowth and inequality?
- What do we measure as success or prosperity if we are not placing our faith solely in economic growth? How can we theorize organizational effectiveness without submitting to the traditional growth imperative?
- What power and political structures maintain the primacy of growth in institutions and organizations? How are alternatives to growth delegitimized by these forces of power?
- How would we theorize strategies of resistance to institutionalized growth?
- How does degrowth thinking transform models of North-South relationships?
- What forms of political and economic transformations in, between and among organizations will need to take place if degrowth is to be achieved?
- In what unique ways can feminist theories of growth/degrowth address ecological, social and economic problems?
- Can theorists learn lessons from indigenous cultures or practices concerning the structure of a zero growth economy?

Submission

Papers may be submitted electronically from 30 April 2019 until the deadline date of 30 May 2019 (final deadline) to SAGETrack at: <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/organization>

Papers should be no more than 10,000 words, excluding references, and will be blind reviewed following the journal's standard review process. Manuscripts should be prepared according to the guidelines published in *Organization* and on the journal's website: <http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal200981/manuscriptSubmission>

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Bios

Bobby Banerjee is Professor of Management and Director of the Executive PhD Program at Cass Business School, City University of London. He received his PhD from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and has held academic positions at the University of Wollongong, RMIT University, University of South Australia and University of Western Sydney. His research interests include sustainability, climate change, corporate social responsibility, critical management studies and Indigenous ecology. He has published widely in international scholarly journals and his work has appeared in *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Management Learning*, *Organization and Organization Studies*. He is the author of two books: *Corporate Social Responsibility: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* and the co-edited volume *Organizations, Markets and Imperial Formations: Towards an Anthropology of Globalization*. Bobby serves on the editorial board of several international journals and is a Senior Editor at *Organization Studies*.

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Ana Maria Peredo is a Professor of Political Ecology at the University of Victoria, Canada. Her research focuses on grassroots alternative organizations, social justice and participatory action research. She is a member of the editorial boards for *Journal of Business Venturing*, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, and the *Journal of Social Enterprise*. She has co-edited four special issues and a book. In 2008, she was the co-editor on a special issue on 'The Role of Management Education in the Context of Poverty' for the *Journal of Management Education*. In 2014, she co-edited a special issue for *Organization* on 'Worker Cooperatives as an Organizational Alternative: Challenges, Achievements and Promise in Organizational Governance and Ownership'. The same year, she co-edited a special issue on 'Co-Operating at the Edge: Innovating for Social Inclusion, Sustainability and Solidarity Economies' for the *Journal of Co-operative Studies*. In 2017, she was a co-editor for a book on 'Indigenous Aspirations and Rights: The Case for Responsible Business and Management' (Routledge, 2017). Currently, is a co-editor for a special on the 'The Ethics of the Commons', for the *Journal of Business Ethics*. Ana Maria has received numerous research and community leadership awards.

Robert Perey is a Research Associate at the University of Technology Business School. In collaboration with Andre Reichel he has designed and facilitated the series of degrowth professional development workshops at the Academy of Management since 2011. His research investigates transitions in social imaginaries and impacts on business models. His publications addressing alternates to growth include a book in the CBS Advances in Organisational Studies Series (ed. Stewart Clegg) *Ecological Imaginaries Reframing Organization* and two book chapters on 'Degrowth as a Transition Strategy' (*A Future Beyond Growth: Towards a Steady State Economy*, Routledge, Oxon.) and 'De-growth' (*Positive Steps To A Steady State Economy*, CASSE NSW Australia).

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