

ABSTRACT

Years of mounting pressure and manifold crises ranging from environmental to economic and financial, accompanied by growing social and health concerns, have led to increasing recognition that the growth imperative and the Western consumer lifestyle may have come dangerously close to collapsing our world. Although different perspectives and strong disagreements on how to deal with such a situation prevail, a growing number of actors within the global community agree that the current economic and social structures are unsustainable and that profound change is required.

Degrowth, one of the possible alternative pathways long disregarded as utopian, has started to receive more attention over the last decade owing to the burgeoning scientific literature and an active community. Voluntary simplicity, one of many concepts and grassroots practices within its broad umbrella, with millions of adherents globally, may be seen as the closest insight into the realm of Degrowth currently available by showcasing that such imaginaries are not only viable but achievable and realistic. Researching and a better understanding of voluntary simple living provide possibilities for approximating a new societal model based on human well-being and coexistence with the environment.

This thesis delves into two less-explored aspects of simple living: the characteristics of adherents to alternative lifestyles concerning Maslow's self-actualization process and their approach to work as seen through the lens of the self-employed. Through exploring narratives of adopters to alternative lifestyles, and the meaning-making they ascribe to their lived experiences, the research described in this thesis aims to gain deeper insights and a better understanding of the worldviews and characteristics of people who claim to be happier with having and consuming less. Revealing the nature of the lives of self-actualized individuals and the importance self-actualization may have for the Degrowth narrative contributes to the literature by bridging the existing gap between theory and practice within fields of Degrowth, voluntary simplicity, and self-actualization. This thesis gets us a step closer to understanding that the prime movers toward a Degrowth society are coming from the grassroots and that the imaginaries of Degrowth are within our reach – created and lived by self-actualized people in parallel to the mainstream on the margins of society.

Keywords: degrowth, voluntary simplicity, simple living, alternative lifestyle, self-actualization, work, business