

Anitra Nelson with editorial adviser Vincent Liegey. 2025. *The Routledge handbook of degrowth*. Routledge, 477 pp. ISBN: 978-1-032-64524-7 [hbk]; 978-1-032-65014-2 [pbk]; 978-1-032-65015-9 [ebook], Open Access link <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032650159>. £47.99.

Reviewed by Ratan Sarkar, E-mail: [rat91@tezu.ernet.in](mailto:rat91@tezu.ernet.in) & Eeshita Goyal. E-mail: [eeshita.goyal@niu.edu.in](mailto:eeshita.goyal@niu.edu.in)

The Open Access *Routledge Handbook of Degrowth* edited by Anitra Nelson, with Vincent Liegey as editorial adviser, is a monumental contribution that consolidates decades of scholarship and activism around the concept of degrowth. In contrast to simplistic caricatures of degrowth as austerity, shrinkage, or economic regression, the volume insists on positioning degrowth as a multifaceted critique of "growthism" and offering a constructive vision for alternative socio-ecological futures. As Nelson and Liegey argue in the opening chapter, "degrowth has come of age" by the 2020s, moving from marginal debates to mainstream recognition in global media and policy fora (p. 3). The editors frame degrowth as not merely an economic proposal but a civilizational reorientation that embraces sufficiency, conviviality, and solidarity within planetary boundaries (pp. 4–5). This premise sets the intellectual tone for the *Handbook* which interweaves historical roots, case studies, conceptual innovations, and future imaginaries.

The volume is structured into four parts. Part I provides diagnoses of the growth paradigm's ecological and socio-political crises. Éric Pineault's chapter on the "fossilised metabolism" of capitalism (p. 14) and Timothée Parrique's mapping of global inequalities generated by growth (p. 31) exemplify the book's critical empirical grounding. These contributions are consistent with wider literature in ecological economics, which has long established the unsustainability of perpetual material throughput (Hickel & Kallis, 2020). The recognition by the IPCC that GDP is an inadequate measure of well-being further underscores degrowth's policy relevance (p. 3). Although the ecological critique is rigorous, some readers may find the engagement with political economy uneven, as the tensions between capitalist accumulation and state structures receive less sustained treatment than in works like Foster and Holleman's (2020) analysis of capitalism's metabolic rift.

Part II explores the geographic and cultural "stepping stones" of degrowth, beginning with its French origins (p. 55) and extending to Italy, Germany, Catalonia, Czechia, Greece, Latin America, and Africa. Particularly illuminating is Roland Ngam's chapter on Africa, which reframes degrowth as a form of ecological reparations for centuries of necro-capitalist extraction (p. 166). Similarly, David Barkin's analysis of Indigenous Latin American practices (p. 153) situates degrowth within pluriversal epistemologies. These interventions enrich the predominantly European genealogy of degrowth, yet the coverage is asymmetrical, with Asian contexts conspicuously absent. The main focus on European activist-scholarly networks risks reproducing the same Eurocentrism that degrowth aims to critique.

Part III, "Concepts in Action," is arguably the most innovative section, elaborating on key practices and values such as conviviality, autonomy, frugal abundance, and the degrowth "doughnut." Andrea Vetter and Matthias Fersterer's discussion of commoning (p. 181) highlights the radical relationality underpinning degrowth, echoing Illich's (1973) vision of convivial tools. Mladen Domazet's adaptation of Kate Raworth's doughnut model into a degrowth framework (p. 211) demonstrates methodological creativity by quantifying social-ecological thresholds across the Global North and South. Adrien Plomteux's ethnographic account of "frugal abundance" in an Icelandic village (p. 232) provides a grounded counterpoint to abstract theorization. These chapters exemplify the *Handbook*'s strength: translating degrowth principles into empirical, lived realities. However, the collection occasionally struggles with coherence, as the diverse methodologies—ranging from ethnography to political philosophy—are not always in dialogue.

Part IV projects degrowth futures through utopian, ecofeminist, and decolonial lenses. Olivier De Schutter's chapter on poverty reduction (p. 349) is especially salient, countering critiques that degrowth would exacerbate inequality. By foregrounding redistributive policies and universal basic services, he bridges degrowth and human rights frameworks. Equally compelling is Susan Paulson and colleagues' chapter on

ecofeminist and decolonial feminist futures (p. 389), which critiques capitalist patriarchy and androcentric tendencies within degrowth itself. Bob Pease's chapter on masculinities (p. 403) extends this agenda by interrogating gender binaries. These forward-looking contributions underscore degrowth's transformative potential, though they also reveal unresolved tensions: is degrowth primarily a movement of epistemic rupture, or can it be institutionalized within existing governance systems?

Methodologically, the *Handbook* exemplifies interdisciplinarity. Contributors draw on ecological economics, political ecology, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy, aligning with the editors' commitment to a pluriversal approach (p. 7). Yet, as with many edited volumes, the quality and depth of chapters vary. Some provide rich empirical material, while others remain programmatic. The lack of a synthetic conclusion that reconciles divergences is a missed opportunity. While the editors' final chapter outlines research directions (p. 465), readers may desire a stronger integrative framework.

In situating the *Handbook* within broader debates, it is clear that it resonates with recent critical literature on postgrowth and socio-ecological transformation. Hickel and Kallis (2020) argue that degrowth is indispensable for climate justice, while Latouche's earlier writings emphasized cultural and political imaginaries beyond economism. The *Handbook* extends these arguments by foregrounding diverse geographies and practices. Yet, compared to Raworth's (2017) *Doughnut Economics*, which has achieved mainstream policy traction, the degrowth framework remains more radical and less institutionally palatable. This raises the question of whether degrowth should remain a counter-hegemonic movement or seek policy mainstreaming—a debate that runs throughout the volume.

The strengths of the *Handbook* lie in its breadth, diversity, and commitment to interdisciplinarity. It provides students, researchers, and activists with a definitive reference that captures degrowth's plural voices. Its limitations stem from uneven representation across global South contexts, occasional conceptual fragmentation, and the challenge of accessibility for non-specialist readers. The technical density of some chapters may deter activists or policymakers who require more pragmatic entry points.

Nevertheless, the *Routledge Handbook of Degrowth* is a landmark publication. It not only consolidates degrowth's status as a serious intellectual and political project but also expands its horizons by engaging with decolonial, feminist, and ecological justice perspectives. For pedagogy, the book offers rich material for courses in environmental studies, political economy, and sustainability transitions. For policymakers, it provides conceptual tools to rethink well-being beyond GDP. For researchers, it opens avenues for comparative studies of degrowth practices and imaginaries. Most importantly, it challenges readers to reimagine futures rooted not in accumulation but in sufficiency, solidarity, and conviviality.

In conclusion, Nelson and Liegey's volume is more than a handbook; it is a manifesto of intellectual courage in times of planetary crisis. Its significance lies not only in documenting the past twenty years of degrowth scholarship and activism but also in envisioning pathways for the next twenty. As glaciers melt and social inequities deepen, the *Handbook's* central message resonates urgently: degrowth is not a retreat but an invitation to craft more just, convivial, and sustainable futures (p. vii).

## References

- Foster, J. B., & Holleman, H. (2020). The theory of unequal ecological exchange: A Marx-Odum dialectic. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47(2), 431–460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2014.889687>
- Hickel, J., & Kallis, G. (2020). Is green growth possible? *New Political Economy*, 25(4), 469–486. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2019.1598964>
- Illich, I. (1972). *Tools for conviviality*. Calder & Boyars.
- Raworth, K. (2017). *Doughnut economics: Seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist*. Chelsea Green Publishing.

\*\*\*

Dr. Ratan Sarkar is Assistant Professor, Department of Education, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tezpur University in Assam, Assam, India. ORCID ID: 0009-0008-5480-0165. Dr. Eeshita Goyal, the Corresponding Author, is Assistant Professor, School of Business Management, Noida International University, Greater Noida, India. ORCID ID: 0009-0002-8349-6162