The European Union in the time of crises: the internal struggle against the ideology of growth

Hanna Mroczka
The European Union in the time of crises: the internal struggle against the ideology of growth

Hanna Mroczka

Supervisor: Kristina Boréus
Subject Reviewer: Mikael Malmaeus
Content

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................. iv
Popular summary.......................................................................................................................................... v
List of Figures............................................................................................................................................... vi
List of Tables................................................................................................................................................ vii

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 1
   1.1. The EU stuck in crises........................................................................................................... 1
       1.1.1. A major problem on top of a mountain of minor solutions ............................................. 1
   1.2. Reasons behind the slowness of action ................................................................................. 2
       1.2.1. Snail in the room: with whom lies the responsibility? .................................................... 2
       1.2.2. The story of growth ......................................................................................................... 4
   1.3. Utopian solution or realistic alternative – degrowth .......................................................... 5
       1.3.1. Degrowth in the European Union .................................................................................... 6
   1.4. The aim of the study .............................................................................................................. 6

2. Background .................................................................................................................................... 8
   2.1. History of growth critique .................................................................................................... 8
       2.1.1. Marxism and socialism .................................................................................................... 8
       2.1.2. Limits to growth .............................................................................................................. 9
   2.2. Contemporary growth critique across academia and beyond ......................................... 10
       2.2.1. Economics ..................................................................................................................... 10
       2.2.2. Natural science .............................................................................................................. 11
       2.2.3. Social Sciences .............................................................................................................. 11
       2.2.4. Civil Society .................................................................................................................. 12
   2.3. Proposals of the alternative ................................................................................................ 12
   2.4. Can the EU degrow? ........................................................................................................... 13

3. Methods and Theoretical Framework ....................................................................................... 15
   3.1. Analytical approach ............................................................................................................ 15
       3.1.1. Selected Material ........................................................................................................... 17
       3.1.2. Limitation ...................................................................................................................... 18
   3.2. Theoretical Framework ...................................................................................................... 18
       3.2.1. Critical Framework of Post-growth Theory ................................................................. 19
       3.2.2. Political Opportunity in Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks ................................................. 19

4. Results........................................................................................................................................... 21
   4.1. The dominant discourse of the European Union .............................................................. 21
       4.1.1. Basic entities organised or constructed ........................................................................... 21
       4.1.2. Assumptions about natural relationships ......................................................................... 23
       4.1.3. Primary agents and their motives .................................................................................. 24
       4.1.4. Key metaphors and rhetorical devices ........................................................................... 25
   4.2. The opposition’s stance ..................................................................................................... 26
       4.2.1. Fierce critique by DiEM25 ............................................................................................ 26
       4.2.2. Nature central at the EU Greens ................................................................................... 27
The European Union in the time of crises: the internal struggle against the ideology of growth

HANNA MROCZKA


Abstract:

In the recent years, a growing body of research across both the social and natural sciences coming from a Marxist tradition has been focusing on the correlation between greenhouse gases emissions and economic development through the modern times. Throughout various research, the scholars argued that the link responsible for the climatic crisis lies in the very premise of the current economic model – reliance on relentless growth. Although economic growth is arguably beneficial for developing states in providing necessary social structures, it reaches its limits in the developed states and leads to severe consequences, such as environmental degradation and socio-economic pitfalls. Thus for the developed countries to move away from the danger of eventual collapse (both on global and national level), the governments must begin to abandon the harmful pursuit of economic growth. The European Union (EU), an organisation consisting of 28 wealthy states, has for many years now been faced with numerous crises, starting from the Great Recession, through immigration and growing social inequalities, to the peril of climate change. This situation has led many to question the very survival of the Union contributing to the popularisation of dangerous far-right politics all across member states. It appears that the precarious situation the EU is currently in, there are no opportunities for alternative strategies such as de-growth. However, as an Italian politician and philosopher, Antonio Gramsci reflected when commenting on European interwar period, the crisis is precisely the right moment for a critical transition. As Gramsci indicated, it is up to the opposition leaders to ensure that the opportunity is utilised properly, and the alternative thought ultimately succeeds. This thesis therefore aimed to explore the opportunity for an economic transition by analysing the political and economic discourses of the European Union as well as its view on crises and growth as reflected in the key financial and climate strategies. In order to study the opposition actors, the paper analysed the documents of two opposing parties operating within the EU - the European Green Party (EGP) and the Democracy for Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25). The thesis found that the direction of the EU was dominated by the ideology of growth leading to four severe consequences, namely (1) depoliticization of citizens and climate crisis, (2) instrumentalization of people, nature, and crisis, (3) underestimation of crises, (4) universalisation of harmful economic vision. When exploring opening windows for a transition, the paper found that an opportunity arose when focusing on concepts less imbued with political ideologies, such as participation or stability, both of which have proven to provide insight into the question of leadership and possible response to the current climate instability.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, climate crisis, European Union, economic growth, discourse analysis, ideology

Hanna Mroczka, Department of Earth Sciences, Uppsala University, Villavägen 16, SE- 752 36 Uppsala, Sweden
The European Union in the time of crises: the internal struggle against the ideology of growth

HANNA MROCZKA


Popular summary:
What is the relation between the social, economic and ecological crises? Why has the speed of the increase of global temperatures, environmental devastation and income inequality accelerated since the 1980s? Why has it been so difficult for global leaders to solve the daunting issues despite the greatest peaceful cooperation the world has witnessed and advanced technological solutions already available? A growing body of research coming from a Marxist tradition points to the allegedly strongest reason behind it – the pursuit of perpetual economic growth. Those researches, who are allied with the “degrowth” or “post-growth” community, suggest that it is the continuous economic growth, profit orientation, viewing material wealth as a value and the way that the economy is structured around it, that has led the world into the crises. Therefore, a transformation to a different type of economy is for them an absolute necessity in order to deal with the problems. Countries that would be first on the list to such transition are naturally the wealthiest states. The European Union (EU), which consists of 28 most developed states, is known for its strong market-economy preferences and has recently dealt with several crises, appears to be the perfect transition victim. This paper took a look into the climate and financial strategies of the EU issued in response to the socio-economic and ecological crises and compared them to the opposition actors that take an alternative stance – the European Green Party (EGP) and the Democracy for Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25). The thesis focus was on the language and the discourse present in the official documents and the way it dictated the economic, political and environmental trajectories of the actors. It was found that the documents of the European Commission were dominated by the ideology of growth which results in severe consequences, such as depoliticization of the citizens or underestimation of the climate crisis. Where it aimed to identify any possible openings for a post-growth discussion, it found that by concentrating on certain concepts that are arguably less politically imbued, some opportunity windows could open when discussing alarming issues. For instance, focus on participation, which proved important to all actors, could allow for a more inclusive transition. Additionally, the concept of stability and the importance both political actors devoted to it offered an interesting discussion especially with regards to the times of climatic instability.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, climate crisis, European Union, economic growth, discourse analysis, ideology

Hanna Mroczka, Department of Earth Sciences, Uppsala University, Villavägen 16, SE- 752 36 Uppsala, Sweden
List of Figures

Figure 1: Global income deciles and associated lifestyle consumption emissions. ........................................ 3
Figure 2: Shares of cumulative world CO2 emissions, 1850-2014. ............................................................... 3
Figure 3: Correlation between socio-economic and earth system trends. ....................................................... 4
List of Tables

Table 1: Coding system adapted from Dryzek (2013) ........................................................................... 15
1. Introduction

1.1. The EU stuck in crises

“Why the EU is stuck in perpetual crisis?” asked Helen Thompson, Cambridge Professor of Political Economy, at the end of 2018—over ten years after the global financial crash of 2007-2008 (Thompson, 2018). Thompson pointed to a number of fundamental contradictions within the structures of the European Union which, unresolved, will only continue to rupture its functioning. While the economic crisis was the core of Thompson’s argument, the EU still currently tackles or recovers from several other crises, the recent migration crisis of 2015, the collapse of solidarity values and raise of far-right movements and the struggle to bring the Brexit deal to a final closure. Most importantly, the Union, together with the rest of the world, is faced by yet another crisis, much more serious and uncontrollable than all other—the problem of climate change. The EU’s approach to solving the crises has been through an acclaimed cooperation between its Member States, internal institutions, such as the European Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament among the largest, as well as the European citizens. However, the crises still daunt many Europeans, especially young or marginalised, who, faced with debts, unemployment and growing inequalities, struggle to make ends meet and are often forced to emigrate in the pursuit of a better life elsewhere (Jackson, 2011). Meanwhile, climate change and its effects currently throw a darker than ever before shadow on the future of the planet and the whole of humanity.

Although the interrelation between the crises is not as evident at first glance, many social and climate scientists, economists, and environmental activists claim that a strong correlation can be found between the causes of the current predicaments in Europe, namely the economic system based on the premise of infinite growth. For the growth opponents, the only way to solve the crises would be to renounce the fundamental premise and de-grow the economy. It may appear that in the precarious situation the EU is currently faced with, no alternative movements could succeed, however the crisis might precisely be the right moment for such a transition to occur. This thesis aims to explore this opportunity through the study of political discourses present in the key documents of the European Union. Before attempting to do so, it will first look into the current situation of the EU, particularly its response to the ecological crisis and the relation to growth.

1.1.1. A major problem on top of a mountain of minor solutions

The well-known Planetary Boundaries model proposed by Johan Rockström and Will Steffen among others (2015, p. 736) revealed that several crucial planet boundaries, such as land use, levels of nitrogen and phosphorus, have already been transgressed or are on the course to being dangerously surpassed. The most concerning boundary, climate change, depicted by the United Nations as “the defining issue of our time”, faces ever increasing risk of going beyond a point of no return (UN 2019). Moreover, recent studies on biodiversity have shown that humanity, which represents a mere 0.01% of all living things in the world, has caused the loss of over 80% of all wild mammals, half of plant species and the mass decline of world insect species (Ceballos, Ehrlich and Dirzo, 2017 et al. Carrington, 2018; Sánchez-Bayo and Wyckhuys, 2019). The most recent report by Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) found that the biodiversity loss occurs at an unprecedented rate contributing to climate change and severely threatening human wellbeing (IPBES, 2019). This is not to mention the yet unknown in entirety effects of the use of various chemicals, plastic pollution, satellites or any other factors that interfere with the Earth spheres. These disturbing patterns severely threaten the world’s ecosystems, and hence the very survival of humanity. There is also no doubt, as 97% of scientists worldwide agree (Cook et al., 2016), that environmental degradation is happening and that it is the human activity that led to the crisis. Since the dawn of civilisation, humanity has put a pressure to the planet leading the geologists to call the human era the Anthropocene. It was the industrial revolution that dramatically changed the course of events, although the most drastic changes occurred very recently (Zalasiewicz et al., 2018, p. 177). A simple look into the history book can already hint that it is not every human activity that contributed to such catastrophic changes to the planet.

Despite the global efforts, new technologies in place and consumers making smarter choices, the necessary change is not happening rapidly enough, and the time is running fast. Unsparing in his
criticism, a British climate scientist Kevin Anderson (Anderson, 2012, p. 16) argued that since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, climate politics have not only been heading in the wrong direction, but the situation has disturbingly worsened rather than improved. The evidence of this worrying occurrence is reflected in the global rise in greenhouse gas emissions year after year and the increase of the rate of their growth (Anderson, 2012, p. 17). In fact, only between 1990 and 2009, there was a 40% accelerated increase of carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel consumption (Jackson, 2011, p. 158; Peters et al., 2011)\(^1\). At this very moment of writing, the concentration of carbon dioxide (CO\(_2\)) in the atmosphere is the highest it has ever been in the human history, global temperature has already increased by 0.7 degrees only in the last 50 years with the pace of the increase is quickening every year, Antarctica’s ice sheets are melting at an escalating rate, whereas the sea level has never been this elevated (NASA, 2019). There is no doubt that simply not enough is being done. This situation might make one ponder that perhaps there are not enough solutions, however, as a 16-year-old climate activist from Sweden, Greta Thunberg, perfectly captured it in her speech to United Nations Secretary General António Guterres at the 24th UN Climate Change Conference in Poland in December 2018, “The climate crisis has already been solved. We already have all the facts and solutions”. Greta’s determination and bravery inspired people across the world to act for the planet and people but her words suggested something more. An idea that, if we have all solutions in place, there must be some other unexplained dimension, some “hidden power”, which is so potent that it prevents those ready solutions from being implemented.

1.2. Reasons behind the slowness of action

Among various suggestions for the reasons justifying the slowness of action lie the entanglement of international relations, the complexity of the problem of climate change, the rising global population, the intrinsic nature of human and so forth. Although all these factors are to a greater or lesser extent well justifiable, they often fail to provide the full explanation. It is for instance the case with lack of scientific knowledge and the popularisation of it, but this can also be argued against. From the first serious environmental concerns raised by Jim Hansen in 1988 (Rich, 2018) to the latest 12 years warning issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2018), the brutal scientific honesty about the awaiting doom of the future have become the narrative of modern times. However, despite sparking frustration among (mostly) young people who voice their opinions with outstanding courage all across the world, it fails to be fully reflected in the political arena (Laville, 2019). Such political attitudes take an effect on the public opinion regarding the environment. Per Espen Stoknes, a Norwegian psychologist, economist and parliamentary (in Schiffman, 2015) points to long-term surveys which reveal a perturbing pattern that the citizens of wealthy states were much more concerned with climate change 25 years ago than they are today, even in knowingly greener Scandinavia. As Giljum and others (2005, p. 33) suggest, it may be because in the mid 80s, the character of environmental problems changed. From local or regional concerns, environmental problems have become "of a highly complex nature, international or global in scope and with multi-dimensional cause-effect-impact relationships, often characterised by time-lags" (Giljum et al. 2005: 33). The shift additionally coincided with a change in the economic and political trajectory focused on free market and rapid growth, known as neoliberalism (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016, p. xiv). This interrelation between a new character of economy and a new nature of environmental problem might suggest that modern economy and environmental degradation are not only inherently interlinked but also that the 1980s shift towards neoliberalism resulted in much more serious consequences for the planet (Eagleton-Pierce 2016).

1.2.1. Snail in the room: with whom lies the responsibility?

In climate politics, responsibility for climate change tends to remind of a children’s game “hot potato”. In order to play, all children stand in a circle and throw an object between each other pretending that it is a hot potato – if one holds it for too long the potato will burn their hands. They throw it to a song playing and once the song stops, the child with the hot potato in their hand has to hold onto it and ultimately loses the game. The hot potato often lands on rapidly developing states with growing

\(^1\)In the recent years, there have been also other significant environmental changes, with biodiversity loss among the most concerning ones. As WWF reports (2018, p. 90), wildlife populations decreased by 60% globally only between 1970 and 2014.
populations\textsuperscript{2}, in particular China and India. In 2015 Oxfam published a hard-hitting report using extensive data which highlighted extreme carbon emissions and income inequalities around the world. It found that the poorest 3.5 billion people are responsible only for 10\% of the global CO\textsubscript{2} emissions coming from individual consumption. In the report, the individual consumption accounts for 64\% of the total emissions, while the remaining 36\% is attributed to consumption by governments, investments and international transport (Oxfam, 2015, p. 3).\textsuperscript{3} Around 50\% of these emissions can be placed on the richest 10\% of people globally (Oxfam 2015: 4). These extreme inequalities are clearly portrayed in Oxfam’s consumption-based emissions champagne glass (Figure 1). The majority of the richest 10\% lives in OECD countries, which include all the members of the EU (Oxfam 2015: 7), although there can also be found low emitters due to unequal income redistribution. Rising new economies in China and India are of course a concern but as Oxfam (2015: 8) reports, only in 2008 “the average emissions of a person in the richest 10\% of Chinese citizens was about the same as the average carbon footprint of someone in the poorest 40\% of Europeans”. Additionally, a large share of China’s and India’s emissions comes from the production of goods consumed in the rich states (Oxfam 2015: 7).

![Figure 1: Global income deciles and associated lifestyle consumption emissions.](source)

The above are current emissions. To make the matter even more pressing, it is worth looking at the carbon debt the rich countries owe to the poorer ones (Kallis, 2018, p. 99). Shares of the accumulated world carbon dioxide emissions from the past 150 years (Figure 2) reveal that the weight of responsibility for climate change, the hot potato, should justly lie in the hands the Western countries\textsuperscript{4}.

![Figure 2: Shares of cumulative world CO2 emissions, 1850-2014.](source)

\textsuperscript{2} The population growth argument became popular with the publication of Paul R. Ehrlich’s Population Bomb (1968). The biologist argued that overpopulation was the main cause of accelerating disappearance of natural resources, but the overpopulation argument quickly found its opponents. Not because it is untrue – growing population is still a major concern – but that it fails to explain the core of the problem.

\textsuperscript{3} In a similar study conducted by Lucas Chancel and Thomas Piketty (2015), the scholars, while calculating the just financial contributions to climate fund, attributed an even higher percentage of the national emissions to individual consumption. They assumed that emissions associated to government expenditures and investments ultimately benefit the individuals of a given country.

\textsuperscript{4} Additionally, as Kallis (2018) accurately highlights, the emissions are total and not per capita, which would increase the Western nations’ contributions even more.
1.2.2. The story of growth

In 2015, a group of researchers led by Will Steffen released a study titled *The Great Acceleration* (2015). The graphs the scientists created show a clear correlation between a growing economy and planetary devastations especially in the last 50 years (Figure 3). Despite these important findings, the dependence on growth is still visible even in the climate politics. Economic growth is even listed as one of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals that 193 countries promised to adhere to after 2015 Climate Change Negotiations in Paris (Hickel and Kallis, 2019). The European Union and its Member States also place growth at the core of its politics and appear to prioritise it over climate action. One example could be reflected in the current plans on airport expansions of several European terminals. Despite acknowledging that greenhouse gas emissions (GHSs) from airplanes are the highest of all land transport methods combined and that at the time being greener alternatives are almost non-existent (EASA, 2016; European Commission, 2019), the EU supports the growth of the industry, only proposing minor, unsuccessful so far, solutions such as emission trading scheme (ETS) (Transport & Environment, 2018). The reason behind it appears to be that the EU does not want to stay behind the rest of the world as the single sector is one of the fastest developing industries in the world bringing incomes, taxes and overall more money in every European pocket, which allegedly could lead to better environmental protection. Such apparent hypocrisy leads to a situation where not only meeting the promised goals appears rather impossible, but also where dangerous actions get justified for being beneficial for the economy.

![Figure 3: Correlation between socio-economic and earth system trends.](image)

What is also worth mentioning, rapidly growing economy also fails to serve every European equally. Thus, it is not only the nature’s “wellbeing” that is fallaciously regarded as dependent on continuous growth and the current economic model. Capitalism also supports often inaccurate claims about “natural and universal” relationship between growing GDP and social wellbeing, or even happiness (Kallis 2018, p. 90). As the study conducted by the World Inequality Lab at the Paris School of Economics has shown, the idea that people’s wellbeing can be perpetually ensured by GDP growth is simply inaccurate (Blanchet, Chancel and Gethin, 2019). The inequalities in the wealthy nations have

---

5 Even the most progressive member countries such as Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and the UK have planned to expand their aviation sectors within the next few years arguing for it to be a strong pillar for their economy (Swedavia Airports, 2017; EIB, 2018; The Guardian, 2018a; Schiphol, 2019); The European Investment Bank (EIB 2018) even signed a EUR 81 million loan agreement with Copenhagen Airport.

6 In 2016, the aviation sector accounted for 3.6% of the total EU28 GHGs and for 13.4% of the emissions from transport (EASA, 2016, p. 37; Eurostat, 2017). The EU aviation GHGs increased by almost 100% between 1990 and 2016. In 2020, its global GHGs are projected to be around 70% higher than in 2005 and grow by a further 300–700% by 2050. So far, the only successful alternative is the use of biofuels, which, although less polluting than petroleum, still emits greenhouse gases, uses financial recourses and massive agricultural fields that could be otherwise used for growing food.
been on the increase since 1980. Almost all countries of the European Union (except Belgium falling not far behind) have an increasing income inequality with top 1% growing more than two times faster than the bottom 50% and capturing 17% of regional income growth, whereas relative poverty increased from 20% in 1980 to 22% in 2017 (Blanchet et al. 2019, p. 29).\footnote{Apart from raising inequalities within the states, the popularisation of neoliberal politics and economic growth can be even more directly linked to human wellbeing, when studying the increasing rate of stress, psychological burnouts, anxieties and even serious depressive disorders (Easterlin et al., 2010; Welzer, 2011; Kalis, Kerschner and Martinez-Alier, 2012; Cosme, Santos and O’Neill, 2017). The situation is especially worrisome among young people who, from an early age, are forced to join the relentless pursuit for competitiveness, innovation and self-development, at the same time being faced with growing insecurities of their future reflected in large debts and climatic changes (Jackson 2011: 160). As the French National Suicide Observatory reports, suicide is the second cause of death among 15 – 24 years old (le ministère des Solidarités et de la Santé, 2018). The British National Health Service (NHS, 2018) revealed that in England the number of children affected by some mental disorders increased significantly over the last decade. The Polish National Health Service every year spends more funds on treating young people with depressive disorders (Karwowska, 2019).}

In the times of crises, it is becoming increasingly clear that the European Union prioritises economic growth over rapid climate action and wellbeing of its citizens. Aware of the ecologic and social concerns, the Union has only adjusted its political jargon to continue economic expansion and to avoid properly addressing the situation. The sophisticated language of sustainable development, circular economy, inclusive growth, decoupling, green consumerism and others help the Union argue that in order to combat the crises, reduce the emissions, end poverty, social exclusion and inequalities, more growth is necessary (European Commission, 2010). According to George Monbiot (2017), those buzzwords serve a perfect illusion “designed to justify an economic model that is driving us to catastrophe”. It appears therefore vital to recognise this language and understand what really hides behind it, before it is too late to deal with all the costs and symptoms of a constantly expanding economy.

### 1.3. Utopian solution or realistic alternative – degrowth

Findings such as The Great Acceleration or the Oxfam reform can inform about the type of transformation necessary and the fact that the transformation needs to first take place on a grand scale in the countries with the highest-consumption based emissions, with the rest of the world quickly to follow. In order to stay below 2°C rise, Annex 1 countries\footnote{Although there are differences in development between European states, all members of the European Union belong to Annex I group (United Nations 2018).} have to “reach emission reductions of the order of about 40 per cent by 2015, 70 per cent by 2020, and over 90 per cent by 2030, with similar reductions globally with a lag of a decade or two – a disturbingly short time frame.” (Anderson 2012, p. 35). Additionally, replacing fossil fuel energy with renewable one is incompatible with expanding economy and there are other environmental costs of new environmental production (Trainer, 2007). Anderson assures that such impossible mission is in fact feasible, but it requires abandoning any win-win situations or profit opportunities and take a serious political approach with policies designed at serious industrial changes and personal sacrifices. In order to progress, the question of “how can a serious lifestyle change be ever possible?” should be replaced with ‘how can living with a 4°C global temperature rise by 2050 or 2070 be possible?’ As Anderson (2012, p. 35) sums up, “Ours is now a world of very difficult futures, and the sooner we acknowledge this, the sooner we can seriously address the challenges we face.”

Assuming that such a transformation could occur in the next 10 years, can it happen without serious social consequences? How to limit the production sector and close down large industries without job losses and how to prevent social unrest after restricting individual consumption? How could people be persuaded to make such radical changes? Is it possible to drastically decarbonize the society and abandon an economic model premised on continual expansion, at the same time ensuring wellbeing and stability? A growing body of researchers take a bold step arguing that the transformation is not only necessary and possible but can also be attained with a number of positive alternatives and benefits (Ferguson, 2019, p. 162). Proponents of a socio-economic organization who try to step away from the current economic model use terms such as “post-growth”, “zero-growth”, “beyond growth” or “without growth” to capture their ideas, ensuring that the critique of perpetual economic growth lies at the core of their thinking (in Mastini, 2018). Perhaps the most coherent and radical of the critiques comes from
the “degrowth” community (in Mastini 2018). The theory argues that economic degrowth, understood as “a transformation of society with a concomitant reduction in economic activity and throughput” is necessary, desirable and possible under certain socio-political conditions, such as, for instance, absolute equity, participatory democracy or a strong sense of community (Kallis et al. 2012, p. 4; Kallis 2018, p. 112). As Kallis reassures in the opening of this book Degrowth, “Even in the Dark Ages, the sun still shone. (…). All it takes for a good life is sharing and enjoying the excess of what we produce. Sounds simple and even utopian, but behind this luring idea stands a serious critique and valuable solutions which are worth exploring.” (Kallis 2018, p. vii). Indeed, degrowth appears as a bright alternative in the dooming future but a number of W- and how-questions nonetheless remains.

1.3.1. Degrowth in the European Union

One of the places where a number of those questions prevails regards the possibility of degrowth in the political arena. In the analysis of 128 peer-reviewed articles focused on degrowth conducted by Inês Cosmé and others, the researchers found that although degrowth is often referred to and analysed as “a bottom-up local process, the proposals are largely top-down with a national focus” (Cosme, Santos and O’Neill, 2017, p. 331). It is therefore becoming increasingly clear that an economic transformation towards degrowth model has to enter the realm of national politics as soon as possible if it were to succeed. There is a number of scholars who already look at the opportunity of degrowth from the governmental level (Jackson, 2009; Alexander, 2012; O’Neill, 2012; Koch, 2018). However, in the times of money gains and political fundamentalism, the truthful discussion about saving the planet and the people often gets forgotten or pulled into an ideological battle between electoral candidates (Latour, 2018). The question is therefore no longer whether abandoning growth in the developed nations is necessary or possible – this has been well proven already – but how to change political mindsets and the understanding of urgency and priorities. In the European Union, which consists of twenty-eight wealthy target nations, the leading governments tend to be more occupied with securing against waves of immigrants, rarely realizing that climate change will only lead to the increase of human migration (Latour 2018). Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the European Union is a powerful political actor of a unique character, where peace and solidarity between culturally different and historically hostile nations has been rendered possible. Additionally, its proclaimed global leadership in environmental governance and a binding character on the Member States gives it a more holistic perspective for designing environmental policies and solving transboundary problems. There are indeed a lot of obstacles in the Belgian headquarters, but with the electorate which is not intrinsically tied by national sentiments, the potential of the EU in the post-growth transition is certainly worth exploring.

1.4. The aim of the study

Since any growth model requires higher consumption and production, a call for a transformative action does not need to be argued for any further. It is still, however, necessary to explore how such transformative action could in fact occur, and how could political will of the wealthiest countries’ leaders be steered into the right direction, especially at a large international scale.

This thesis therefore aims to explore the opportunity for an economic transition within the European Union and by that act to contribute to the quest for degrowth debate at a large transnational scale. It will attempt to do so by applying an ideological and critical discourse analysis approaches to the study of the key European Union documents regarding climate and financial strategies and compare them to the opposition strategies proposed by two actors participating in the upcoming elections, the European Green Party (EGP; EU Greens) and the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25). The thesis aims to seek any possible opening spaces that could become the platforms for debating the necessary economic transition.

---

9 Due to Brexit unsolved deal, participation in the elections and uncertainty of the future relationship with the EU at the time of writing this paper, the United Kingdom will still be counted as a member of the European Union.
10 However, a case for European nationalism can still be revealed. Here, it is worth looking at Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “cultural hegemony” of Europe and its link with the political discourse. The concept will be touched upon further in this paper, but it is not of focus in this thesis.
The three research questions are:

- How does the stance in relation to the crises and economic growth inform the climate and financial strategies of the European Union?

- What stance in relation to the crises and economic growth is taken in the documents presented by the opposition, the European Green Party and the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25)?

- To what extent can a focus on concepts less imbued with political ideology open up a space for a discursive transformation?

With this aim in mind and through the above research questions, the following chapter starts by an argumentative literature review. That is outlining the post-growth critique of economic growth and discussing the need for economic transition proposed by the degrowth community in further detail. Chapter 2, the methods, reveals the analytical approach developed for the study of the selected documents and the theoretical framework that was used. Chapter 3 will present the results from the reading of the documents, followed by the analysis of those findings in Chapter 4 and the discussion that emerged in light of the research problem and questions. Finally, the concluding chapter will synthesise the key points from the whole of study and discuss areas for further research.
2. Background

2.1. History of growth critique

For a start, it can be said that the critique of economic growth presented by degrowth community is deeply rooted in the critique of an economic model, for which growth is a vital precondition and a driver: capitalism (D’Alisa et al. 2015; Kallis 2018; Schultz and Bailey 2014). A definition of capitalism is therefore necessary. According to Kallis (2018, p. 43, italics in original), “capitalism is a political, cultural and economic system dominated by – and geared around – the imperative of investors to turn a profit”. Kallis goes further into saying that in order for capitalism to uninterruptedly occur, initially unproductive expenditures have to be gradually (and at an increasing scale) privatised and commercialised which results in an endless cycle of expansion (Kallis 2018, p. 43). An important premise of capitalism is the continuous technological improvement and increasing efficiency which means that more output can be produced for any given input. This can lead to benefits but also severe consequences such as job losses as less and less people are required to produce the same goods (Jackson 2011, p. 157). Karl Polanyi, an Austro-Hungarian economic historian, presented another serious consequence of capitalism. Through his careful study of the economic history of Europe, Polanyi showed how capitalism led to “disembeddedness” of the economy from man (in Sachs et al. 2010, p. 147). Economy, he argued, had been deliberately detached by governments from the public spheres in order to allow for commodification of labour and land, ultimately leading to the loss of power and freedom among the peoples. (Sachs et al. 2010, p. 16).

Maintaining the above premises, capitalist economy has undergone further metamorphosis in the second half of the twentieth century. In the metamorphosis, “capital set forth to reassert the hard core of its exploitation of labour and nature.” (Kovel, 2007, p. 73). As Kovel continues, in the 1980s, under right-wing political leadership of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, the capitalist system acquired “an aura of inevitability and even immortality” and it did everything it could do to restore its pivotal element, “growth” (Kovel 2007, p. xiv). Kovel describes this new globalised growth as “cancerous growth” – an ideology which, almost unnoticeably, spreads in all disciplines of human life and ends up embedded in the minds. It is this growth ideology, functioning in the contemporary context of neoliberal capitalism that is the ultimate object of the post-growth critique (Demaria, D’Alisa and Kallis, 2015, p. 192).

2.1.1. Marxism and socialism

Although economic growth as an object of critique refers mainly to the late twentieth century phenomenon, first scepticism about rapid economic expansion can be traced back to the emergence of larger-scale fossil-fuelled economic activities in the Industrial Revolution (Kallis 2018, pp. 61-64). The system based on class exploitation, mass consumption and production, accumulation of the capital and surplus wealth has been functioning as a steady critique for almost 200 years since Karl Marx and Engels published their famous Communist Manifesto in 1848. It can be argued that degrowth movement comes from the Marxist tradition of thought but despite many points in common, there are many substantial differences (Mayert, 2018). Mayert distinguishes degrowth theory from ecomarxism pointing out that, although similar, is a profound understanding and critique of the system as a whole, the two theories divert from each other (Mayert 2018, pp. 2-11). One of the differences is the point of focus. Whilst ecomarxists focus on capital accumulation, the degrowth school places growth in the centre claiming that it will always lead to more exploitation (Mayert 2018, p. 6). Another difference lies in ecological thinking, understanding of nature and technological solutions. While ecomarxists try to defend Marx’ interest in nature, Mayert argues that the 19th century theorist’s fascination with technology and inherent anthropocentrism does not go hand in hand with degrowth rejection of techno-fixes as the solution to the crisis and degrowth treatment of nature as a powerful agent on its own (Mayert 2018, p. 11). The divergence between the two schools of thoughts might be useful for latter navigation of the stance of the opposition parties.

11Most degrowth advocates see themselves as strictly anti-capitalist, although some of the post-growth researches, such as Tim Jackson, pragmatically suggests that focus on specific words is not as important – economic growth simply cannot continue in wealthy states (D’Alisa et al. 2015, p. 204).
The divergence is also important for better understanding of the degrowth theory and its correlation to 20\textsuperscript{th} century socialism. In the paper titled \textit{Socialism Without Growth}, Giorgos Kallis (2017) analyses the Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) country members to argue how the lack of or misinterpretation of economic growth might lead to negative effects. During the Cold War rapid industrialisation, technological progress and extensive economic growth was an important element for the development of the Eastern bloc – these practices ultimately resulted in the creation of highly polluting states as well as a hierarchical society, “state capitalism”, where workers ultimately lost the control over “the destiny of the surplus” (Kallis 2017, p. 9). With growth pursuit in mind, acclaimed socialist economies of China as well as the Soviet Union and the satellite states had to become more capitalist, “by a state-governed process of enclosures, accumulation and exploitation of nature and workers” (Kallis 2017, p.11). Degrowthers assume that growth is, by its very nature, exploitative and will always require higher extraction of materials. Thus, any attempt to make it more inclusive or socialist simply cannot be sustainable (Kallis 2017, p. 2). It is also assumed that growth is even deeper embedded in our social, economic and political thinking than the status quo of capitalism. When it comes to socialism as a system, André Gorz (2012), a theorist who inspired the degrowth movement, debated in the opening of his book \textit{Capitalism, Socialism, Ecology} whether socialism completely collapsed as a system but Kallis defends socialism arguing that “a genuine socialist economy would not exploit the work or resources of other economies” as the system wants to bring an end to exploitation (Kallis 2017, p. 9). For that to happen, economic growth needs to be completely rejected and the truthful socialist thinking needs to be brought together with ecological thinking which is the ultimate attempt of degrowth (Kallis 2018, p. 5).

### 2.1.2. Limits to growth

The twenty-first century critique of economic growth is deeply rooted in the radical environmentalism, social movements and alternative economic thinking of the 1960s and 1970s, in particular with the work of the Club of Rome, New Left thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse, social critics such as Ivan Illich, and ecological economists, like Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and, later, Herman Daly (D’Alisa \textit{et al.} 2015, p. 2; Ferguson 2019, p. 3; Kallis 2018, p. 2). In 1972 the Club of Rome’s commissioned \textit{The Limits to Growth} by Donella Meadows and colleagues which became an extremely important and relevant to this day publication. Through complex carefully developed computer models of the Earth biophysical, social and economic systems, the study showed that the future of mankind is seriously threatened in the face of rapid population growth and continuously increasing depletion of natural resources. The growth is set to reach its limits sometime during the twenty first century and lead to eventual decrease of the population due to lack of the recourses (in Ferguson 2019, p. 3). As the study concluded, in order to prevent the catastrophe, the governments would have to actively restrain economic growth and pursue politics ensuring equal distribution of resources worldwide (p. 3). Unfortunately, with the rise of post-Keynesian\textsuperscript{12} free-market fundamentalism at the time, Meadow’s study met with a strong backlash and gradual repudiation of it in the political arena. However, in the beginning of the twenty first century, the \textit{Limits to Growth} were re-examined and its findings proved to be remarkably close to the current levels of resource depletion, population growth and pollution increase (Ferguson 2019, p. 4). Around the same time as the \textit{Limits to Growth} were published, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen supported the findings with thermodynamics and economics and recommended immediately downscaling the global economy\textsuperscript{13} (Kallis 2018, p. 3). His student, Herman Daly, further developed Georgescu-Roegen’s theory to propose less radical “steady-state economics”, where he argued that the costs of GDP growth should not be greater than its benefits which is the case at such aggregated levels (Daly 1999 in Ferguson 2019, p. 29). Finally, today’s growth critique takes great inspiration from the work of Herbert Marcuse’s \textit{One-Dimensional Man} and Ivan Illich’s \textit{Tools for Conviviality} among others, where the philosophers voiced their concerns regarding the impact of capitalist expansion politics on social structures and relations. Illich was an advocate of creating a society in which “modern tools are used by everyone in an integrated and shared manner, without reliance on a body of specialists who control said instruments” (Deriu in D’Alisa \textit{et al.} 2015, p. 107). At the same time, Marcuse called for an active “Great Refusal” of the

\textsuperscript{12} Keynesian economics, developed by the British economist John Keynes in 1930s in response to the Great Depression, called for more public spending in order to boost economic growth. Although economic growth was crucial for Keynes, the important difference to latter neoliberalism was that governments had to play active role in the economic sector.

\textsuperscript{13} Georgescu-Roegen was the first one to use the word “décroissance” (French for “degrowth”) in 1979.
political status-quo in order for the society to free itself from the external control and be able to live in accordance with its truthful needs (Cattaneo in D’Alisa et al. 2015, p. 198). The growth critique and the proposed alternative also takes inspiration from feminist movements, as well as non-Western philosophy such as Latin American Buen Vivir and Southern African Ubuntu, which show that it is possible to live with respect to social and ecological limits (D’Alisa et al. 2015).

2.2. Contemporary growth critique across academia and beyond

Today, contemporary scholars across various fields of science and activists all across the world rigorously point to the environmental and social consequences of the way the modern global economy is organised. They claim that abandoning the pursuit for economic growth in the rich nations is economically and socially feasible and the “sacrifices” may lead to huge improvements, but it requires a strong political will and social participation. It is crucial to add here that despite being rooted in many transitions of critical thought and occurring across the fields, “degrowth is rich in its meanings and does not embrace one single philosophical current. Its practitioners do not admire a single book or an author” (D’Alisa et al. 2015, p. 195).

2.2.1. Economics

In the famous Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change conducted for the British Government, the economist Nicholas Stern clearly states that economic growth has been, and continues to be, the main emissions driver (Stern, 2007, p. xi). Stern also observed that emission reductions of more than 1% per year have “been associated only with economic recession or upheaval” (Stern, 2007, p. 204). Despite highlighting the dangerous correlation between economic development and emissions, Stern (2007: xi) claims however that stabilizing the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is possible and consistent with continued growth.

Among the most known contemporary economists intrigued by Stern’s findings, although disagreeing with conclusion about growth, are Kate Raworth, Tim Jackson, Thomas Piketty, Dan O’Neill, and Serge Latouche among others. Raworth (2017) became famous for her attempt to deconstruct the way university students are taught economics, i.e. based on the simple circular flow model of money and goods which ultimate aim is to grow GDP between firms and household. Raworth argued that the neoclassical model does not only neglect the essential for economy elements, like the ecological limits, but it also dangerously influences the way people think about economic life. She instead suggested a model shaped like a doughnut which would account for the missing factors, aim for well-being instead of growth, and make people see nature and themselves as part of economy (Raworth 2017),\(^\text{14}\). In his book Prosperity Without Growth, Tim Jackson (2009) calls for an end to harmful and unsustainable growth economy and presents possible no-growth pathways that enable achieving economic prosperity and social wellbeing, without harming the planet. Jackson also fervently criticises quick exit solutions to growth problems, such as decoupling (Jackson 2009, p. 48). “A Modern Marx” as the Economist (2019) called him, Thomas Piketty showed through his influential data that there are diminishing returns to capital as growth continues beyond a certain point. What it means it that growth strategies can be beneficial to rapidly boost a lower-income country’s economy but the costs of it are ever increasing (in Kallis 2018, p. 82). One of these costs is the inequality gap. Whilst the global gap is not actually shrinking, the intrastate gap, especially within the wealthier nations, started to dangerously enlarge (Asara et al., 2015, p. 376). Further, building on the work of Herman Daly, a British ecological economist Dan O’Neill has argued that economy based on the concept of (environmentally and socially aware) “enough” ultimately leads to more long-term social benefits than economy based on constant expansion (O’Neill, 2013). Finally, Serge Latouche, perhaps most radical of all the above, questions the motives behind a continuous pursuit of any type of political or environmental strategy based on growth, including the discourse of sustainable development (D'Alisa et al. 2015, p. 31). Latouche argues that

\(^{14}\) It should be mentioned that although Raworth criticises economic growth, she does not agree with the negative terminology of “degrowth” (Kallis 2018, p. 158).
just because growth in bicycle sells can be regarded as beneficial for human health and nature, it should not be used to justify the unequal and negative growth, e.g. in military products, that harms people and the planet (Latouche, 2009). The French economist calls for an immediate replacement of growth prioritisation with a pursuit of economy based on social conviviality and respect for nature (D’Alisa et al. 2015, p. 31).

2.2.2. Natural science

Economic growth pursue has also been strongly criticised by some of most known contemporary climate scientists. In their paper, Anderson and Alice Bows-Larkin (2011, p. 40) upheld this claim and concluded that the necessary levels of mitigation to avoid a complete climate catastrophe are incompatible with economic growth or economic prosperity in the wealthy Annex 1 nations. Because of the lack of climate actions in the previous years, the only feasible scenarios to hold global temperature increase below 2 degrees Celsius right now must include drastic reduction measurements. The scientists go as far as to say that “(extremely) dangerous climate change can only be avoided if economic growth is exchanged, at least temporarily, for a period of planned austerity within Annex 1 nations” (Anderson and Bows-Larkin 2011, p. 41). Anderson is also sceptical about technologies, such as temporary solutions of “lighter” fossil fuels like liquified natural gas (LNG), or negative emission technologies (NETs) and Bio-energy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS). Although Anderson acknowledges that “appropriate technologies are a prerequisite for achieving a low-carbon future”, he claims that they are not sufficiently timely and might result in a dangerous technological optimism, which could divert the focus from the real solution (immediately reducing the high energy supply) and led to other catastrophic consequences (Anderson 2012, p. 26). Glen Peters, the research director at the Centre for International Climate Research (CICERO) involved with many other in global carbon budgets, highlights the importance of acknowledging the inequalities in GHGs emissions based on national ranges of development (Global Carbon Project (GCP), 2018). One interesting finding by Peters and others (2012) was a rapid rebound in carbon emission in the aftermath of financial crisis of 2008-2009. The crisis itself led to important emissions decrease due to drop of international trade and lesser dependency on imports in support of domestic activities (Peters et al. 2012, p. 3). The findings have shown that global financial crisis highlighted the pre-existing challenges for world CO2 emission reductions, namely GDP growth, and “was an opportunity to move the global economy away from a high emissions trajectory” (Peters et al. 2012, p. 4).

2.2.3. Social Sciences

In the field of social science, a number of scholars have studied the social impact of the way economy is organized and the way that organisation taken for granted. Wolfgang Sachs, a fervent critic of development discourse, warns how the “Promethean task of keeping the global industrial machine running at ever increasing speed” occurs at costs of social freedoms leading to Orwellian future instead of one where diverse society can cherish (Sachs et al. 2010, p. 35). Arturo Escobar, a Colombian anthropologist also known for the critique of development, argued further that in European pursue of modernity, the society became an object of planned change (in Sachs et al. 2010, p. 158). Other anthropologists, such as Alf Horborng adds to the idea of control, considering today’s societies as stuck in a “global game” where limited resources are being unevenly distributed and where capitalism and consumerism are fallaciously being portrayed as “biological properties of our species” (Hornborg, 2016, p. 161) Jason Hickel preconditions that until the control stemming from current economic trajectory is changed and growth ideology abandoned, “our best attempts to decarbonize” will simply be devoured (Hickel 2018). Hickel recently wrote a paper with Giorgos Kallis (2019) about green growth theory – the main strategy assumed in national and international policies, including Sustainable Development Goals, based on technological solutions, such as NETs, efficiency and absolute decoupling of GDP growth from GHGs emissions and resource use. Based on extensive empirical evidence, the scholars concluded that green growth theory finds no support in the recorded evidence; firstly, because no projections models show possibility of absolute decoupling on global scale; secondly, because the rate of achieving permanent absolute decoupling is not sufficient to prevent exceeding the 1.5°C or even 2°C threshold (Hickel & Kallis 2019, p. 15). Finally, professors of psychology such as Harald Welzer and Svend Brinkmann discuss how the idea of endless growth has gradually crept into “our souls” and become embedded in “our emotional and cognitive lives” (Welzer 2011). The economic
values of technological improvement, competitiveness and need for more and better entrenched into the economic storylines have gradually become the values reflected in all spheres of personal activities, travel plans, career preferences, the way we view ourselves, and even finding a partner (Welzer 2011; Brinkmann 2017). In other words, economic values began to dictate the course (and the speed) of people’s lives making it increasingly more difficult to keep up (Brinkmann, 2017). “I shop, therefore I am”, as Barbra Kruger’s artwork (MoMA 2019) contentiously reminds the viewers, captures what the social scientists attempt to express. In the free-market and free-choice, the society is becoming captivated on two levels. Firstly, by becoming depoliticised, and secondly, by becoming controlled by a sophisticatedly designed ideology.

2.2.4. Civil Society

The critique of growth can also be found outside of academia. In journalism, two writers, George Monbiot and Naomi Klein, have become particularly known for their sharp criticism of the current economic system and its impact on people and nature. One of several important arguments presented by Klein is that the specific occurrence of environmental disasters, for example severe destruction in the poorer regions and neighbourhoods, is not only exacerbated by unequal capitalist policy planning, but it is also used by the political elites to create fear and consequently to strengthen the capitalist discourse (Klein, 2007, 2014). Monbiot writes without a sign of doubt, “capitalism collapses without growth, yet perpetual growth on a finite planet leads inexorably to environmental calamity” (Monbiot, 2019). The Guardian columnist, who often participates in civil disobedience actions organised by an international movement Extinction Rebellion, also says that no system and no strategy based on economic growth can lead to climate solutions and encouraged the people to immediately act against it (Monbiot 2019). A strong suggestion that the solution to the environmental problem is no longer in minor reforms within the economic status-quo could also be seen at youth climate strikes. The children, inspired by Greta Thunberg, who openly criticises the economic organization of welfare societies and lack of political will, unitedly called for a system change (The Guardian, 2019).

2.3. Proposals of the alternative

It appears rather clear from the above that a relentless pursuit of any type of economic growth will continue to further harm the nature and human relationships. The only solution is therefore the complete opposite: to rapidly de-grow the economy. More specifically, as degrowth advocates put it, the solution is to pursue “an equitable downsizing of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level, in the short and long-term (and which is) offered as a social choice, not imposed as an external imperative for environmental or other reasons” (Kallis and Schneider 2008). An immediate question that follows, “how does one degrow an economy?”, can already find a number of specified answers among the degrowth community. Firstly, the answers can be found in the two, frequently referred to, strategy frameworks were proposed by Serge Latouche (2009) and Fabrice Flipo (2007)\textsuperscript{15}. Flipo understood as occurring simultaneously on five different dimensions, or as the author referred to, in five “sources of degrowth”. Later Demaria and others (2013, p. 196) enriched Flipo’s study by adding one more source. Thus, the six sources of degrowth are: ecological (through understanding that nature has value on its own), cultural (rooted the critique of development), regarding true meaning of human life and wellbeing (in modern societies), bioeconomic (with respects to ecological limits, based on reduction of material and energy usage and prioritisation of non-technical solutions), democratic (must deepen democracy), and just (cannot be based on human exploitation), (Demaria et al. 2013). Latouche (2009, p. vii) suggested eight independent objectives that could prompt “a virtuous circle of serene, convivial and sustainable contraction”, these are: re-evaluate (e.g. values and priorities), reconceptualise (meanings of progress, welfare, etc.), restructure (social relations), redistribute (resources and power), relocalise (production and consumption), reduce (poverty, alienation, ecological impact, and other negatives), re-use (material and recycle (sources of energy). Secondly, there is already a number of specific degrowth policy proposals. In the above-

\textsuperscript{15} it should be mentioned before that different researches focus on different branches of the transition, however the general framework ought to be always accounted for.
mentioned comprehensive study by Ignes Cosmé and colleagues (2017), the authors gathered and presented 75 different degrowth proposals. The team classified the proposals into multileveled types of approaches, ranging from top-down versus bottom up, local, national or international, and based on their alignment to policy objectives, such as sustainable scale, fair distribution, and efficient allocation. Additionally, “the proposals identified align with three broad goals: (1) Reduce the environmental impact of human activities; (2) Redistribute income and wealth both within and between countries; and (3) Promote the transition from a materialistic to a convivial and participatory society” (C 2017: 325), which indicated the multidimensional character of change. The proposals vary in topics, types of approaches, geographical factors and complexity, ranging from more specific advertisement bans, through growing initiatives, such as work-sharing, to complex reforms, such as institutional democratisation, strong welfare system and universal basic dividends (Cosmé et al. 2017). Many of the proposals can be triggered on the public level, however it can be said that the majority needs to start with a political will and top-down promotion.

2.4. So, can the EU degrow?

In the recent years, the extensive research has given substantial evidence to the social and ecological costs of economic growth and serious alternative proposals that could prevent the environmental catastrophe and at the same time ensure security and well-being in the society. The European Union appears to acknowledge the seriousness of the present challenges. With regards to climate change, it often proclaims itself as a world leader in international climate policy and it can be generally said that the Union’s efforts in the global struggle against climate change have been in many ways greater than those of other OECD countries (EPRS 2018). The European Commission also seems aware of severe consequences for the European region, including destruction of infrastructure, serious impacts on human health and high economic costs. It also clearly acknowledges that an over 2-degree temperature rise compared to pre-industrial era will result in “a much higher risk that dangerous and possibly catastrophic changes in the global environment will occur” (European Commission 2018). Yet, the progress is still very slow or almost non-existent (Anderson, 2013). The obstacles and slowdowns have been often explained by internal disagreements with more conservative and coal-dependent members, such as Poland16. However, such blame-game allowed the countries from a seemingly more progressive block, such as the Green Growth Group17, to hide their own actions behind the bad neighbours – a successful tactic that allows for new or the maintenance of destructive behaviour. Additionally, the responsibility is strongly rooted in the overall EU’s trajectory which tends to prioritise economic growth over social wellbeing and environmental protection (Oberthür and Roche Kelly, 2008, p. 37; Remling, 2018; Machin, 2019). Based on the study of the EU Adaptation Policies and Environmental Action Programmes, Remling (2018) and Machin (2019) effectively concluded that the current political discourse of the European Union creates a tension between the declared ambitions to act and the maintenance of market rationality. Both researches also observed that the neoliberal discourse present in the EU led to the ultimate depoliticization of the problem of climate change and, in turn, marginalisation of alternative solutions and dismissal of the crucial society’s involvement in the action (Remling 2018, p. 489; Machin 2019, p. 214)

When it comes to the alternative proposals, the degrowth debate in Brussels has recently gained attention during the Post-Growth Conference at the European Parliament in September 2018 and with an open letter issued for this occasion. The letter was signed by 238 academics calling on the European Union to bring an end to the harmful ideology of growth and instead seek a post-growth future based on “a fairer distribution of the income and wealth that we already have.” (The Guardian, 2018b). Some politicians within the European Parliament, such as some of the members of the European Green Party,

16 in a study by Climate Action Network, Poland ranked the lowest in ambition and progress in fighting climate change out of all members of the Union because of their stiff opposition to climate action nationally and in the EU (CAN Europe 2018. Off target. Ranking of EU countries’ ambition and progress in fighting climate change.)

17 The Green Growth Group consists of Ministers from 16 Member States, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Luxemburg, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland, and Estonia, plus Norway. The Group has been working jointly for a few years to ensure that EU climate policy is more ambitious and sustainable. In 2019, the Group successfully convinced the European Parliament to strengthen its 2030 climate policy ambitions and raise emission reductions to 55%.
have begun to openly criticise the economic trajectory of the Union and its devastating influence on the environment (Henley, 2018; European Greens, 2019). Justifiably however, the degrowth community remains rather sceptical about the role of the EU in the economic transformation. As Kallis even said, “Right now, the EU is an obstacle if we think about post-growth policies” (in Mastini 2018). In the recent years, particularly with the response to the clear failure of the economic model in the financial crisis of 2007-2009, it has become easy to prove that the Union has been dominated by neoliberal politics infatuated by continuous growth, that the response to the crash was strengthening the system rather than looking for alternative solutions, that private interests dictate a number of policies, and that corporate lobbyists are granted influential platforms (Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), 2019). Although in its current state, the European Union appears heavily dominated by pro-growth ideology, its role as a guide of political direction is key and one of most powerful tools it uses for guiding can be more accessible for exploring than expected.
3. Methods and Theoretical Framework

“In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible. (...) Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness.”

– George Orwell in ‘Politics and the English Language’ (1950)

Language is conceivably one of the most important, if not the most important, tool in modern politics. Thus, studying its usage and function is crucial with the raise of new political alternatives. The methods used and developed for this study are based on social science approaches and qualitative study of policy documents. Explained in detail in the following paragraphs, the employed form of textual analysis hopes to address what George Orwell viewed as the essential elements of the modern political language: the euphemisms, the many questionable assumptions and its vague character, which gives the political actors a strong tactical advantage helping them sustain power. To uncover the meanings hidden in that vagueness involves looking at the broader context and studying “which categories are in use and what is taken for granted but not explicitly expressed” (Boréus & Bergström 2017, p. 8). Such difficult task can be approached by focusing on a discourse. Taking from the discourse theory, I will understand the discourse as an important politically constructed phenomenon which has an influence on the political and social processes that take place outside discourses and are substantively shaped by them (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). As Dryzek (2013) further explains, “Discourses construct meanings and relationships, helping define common sense and legitimate knowledge. Each discourse rests on assumptions, judgments, and contentions that provide the basic terms for analysis, debates, agreements, and disagreements... So discourses both enable and constrain communication” (Dryzek, 2013, p. 9). Such form of textual analysis therefore hopes to reveal whether and how the dominant discourse constructs the climate and financial policies of the EU and, further, whether a set of selected, consider as more neutral, can gain a different meaning in that given discursive contexts. Overall, this approach aims contribute to the discussion on post-growth politics within the European Union, as well as to better construct the argumentation and reveal the potential for degrowth.

3.1. Analytical approach

The analysis is divided into two parts. The results from the first part are presented under sections 4.1 and 4.2, whereas the second part can be found under 4.3. The first part answers the first two research questions by trying to discern the dominant discourse in the context of ecological and economic crises in the selected EU documents and the proposals of the opposition. Since the environment is crucial focus for this thesis, I decided to use the simple toolbox for environmental discourse analysis created by John S. Dryzek (2013) which is often present in similar studies of climate policies. With it, I looked for (i) basic entities recognized or constructed; (ii) assumptions about natural relationships; (iii) agents and their motives; (iv) key metaphors and other rhetorical devices (Dryzek 2013, p. 20). Particular focus was paid to the stance on growth and response to crisis. For this purpose, I developed additional questions under the four sections of Dryzek’s discourse analysis in order to help me better answer my research questions. The finalised coding scheme can be seen in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1: Coding system adapted from Dryzek (2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic entities recognized or constructed</th>
<th>What policy actions and proposals are put forward and prioritised and which are marginalised or excluded? How are they argued for?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the underlying assumptions regarding the current situation? How are the financial and climate crisis portrayed and what are the driving causes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions about natural relationships</td>
<td>What relationships appear as natural between different human and non-human entities and how can these relationships be characterised?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is the relation to growth and limits to growth? Are there any contradictions? If so, what are the common ones?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agents and their motives</td>
<td>How are agents portrayed and what appears to be the driving agent of change?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15
I first applied the coding scheme while reading each of the documents in entirety. This approach helped me answer first questions (marked in grey in Table 1) by informing about the type of policy actions proposed, common assumptions, natural relationships taken for granted, identifying the main agents and obtaining the overarching idea of storylines used. In order to answer the next questions (marked in orange in Table 1) and obtain more information about the relation to growth and crises, I looked for words that referred to it directly as well as concepts and phrases known to represent it by referring to the literature review. Finally, in order to better understand my findings and navigate the stance on growth and crises, I compared the results to three discourses previously described by Dryzek (2013) and developed by Ferguson (2019). The three discourses, Ecological Modernisation (EM), Sustainable Development (SD) and Promethean Discourses (PM), are characteristic in the industrialised societies, where commitment to growth is a constitutive element, route to wellbeing and environmental protection, and the overarching goal (Dryzek 2013, p. 14; Ferguson 2019, p. 68). Promethean Discourse implies that growth is always good, technological solutions endless and there are no limits to how much the economy can grow and nature is exploited (Dryzek 2013, p. 52; Ferguson 2019, p. 105). Sustainable Development rests on the assumption that economic growth and ecological sustainability are fully compatible (Dryzek 2013, p. 151). As Ferguson points out, rather than denying the limits to growth, it appears to discursively circumvent them (Ferguson 2019, p.106, italics in original). Finally, Ecological Modernisation, which similarly to SD sees environmental protection and economic growth as going hand in hand, is the discourse most often associated with the environmental politics in the European Union (Dryzek 2013, p. 168; Remling 2018). The key elements of the three discourses employed for the comparison can be found in Appendix 1. To conclude in short, alternating between empirical and theoretical work, the basic coding scheme (Table 1) and the tables created for comparison (Appendix 1), I attempt to dissect the way the discourse is represented and argued for.

The second part of the analysis will focus on the third research question and isolate six concepts in how the identified discourses of transformation tend to be imagined. The idea of the concept-based analysis initially commenced upon collecting the secondary literature which titles such as Degrowth: a vocabulary for a new era or The Development Dictionary and encouragement to “reinvent the words we use in growth-centric societies” (D’Alisa et al. 2015, p. 2) suggested that it is also through the change of language, that the real change may happen. In other words, as Maarten A. Hajer more eloquently put it, “political change may well take place through the emergence of new storylines that re-order understandings” (Hajer 1997: 56). In other words, in this part of analysis I will first select a body of concepts, based upon my final research question and theoretical background. Secondly, I will try to determine their definitions and significance and analyse their context and function in the chosen textual material. Lastly, I intend to find any possible opening spaces that could contest their meanings and open up for well-argued dialogues.

The coding strands for the analysis came from the reading of Matthew Eagleton-Pierce’s book Neoliberalism: The Key Concepts, where the author dissects and decodes 44 words that are embedded in the “troubling conceptual framework” of neoliberalism, which ascribes a contextual ideological character to them (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016: xiv). As Eagleton-Pierce puts it, most of the concepts have dominated the policy debates and everyday language for centuries and often adjusted to “a variety of institutional environments”, displaying a deceptive taken-for-granted quality. However, they can still vary in their conceptual significance. Some, such as ‘market’, ‘freedom’, ‘growth’, ‘competition’, and ‘class’ can be more obvious and important in the given context, while others, such as ‘reform’, ‘responsibility’ or ‘stability’, “frequently carry an appearance of neutrality, yet at a closer reading reveal how certain meanings and material outcomes tend to overshadow others” (Eagleton-Pierce 2016, p. xviii). One intention of this thesis was to select those more neutral concepts. As Eagleton-
Pierce (2016) notices, seemingly neutral concepts tend to be overlooked in discourse analyses despite often proving to be very crucial in contesting the discourse. Another criterion for selecting the concepts was a simple condition that they should appear in all analysed documents. Finally, the decision was guided by the research question in regard to the transformative action and the concepts’ possible function in it. The concepts were thus narrowed down based on initial analysis of about 10% of the studied material and secondary literature on post-growth and degrowth. The six chosen concepts are: vision, change (political, social and economic, not climatic), governance, participation, responsibility, and stability. The first brief analysis has shown that all concepts appear in the six documents in a frequent manner and are imbued with favourable connotations but different context on either side, that is both in the documents of the EU and the documents proposed by the opposition. Such specific selection hopes to reveal what type of transformation the given political actors envisage and present in the documents (vision), how do they think it should be achieved (change), who should be behind it (responsibility, governance, participation) and why it is needed/ for what outcomes (stability).

When it comes to the outline of this analysis part, the result section will simply present how the concepts function in the selected documents and in what contexts. The discussion will then place, compare and discuss the concepts in the neoliberal understanding, presented by Eagleton-Pierce (2016) as well as in the post-growth thought. Based on the secondary reading, I created a table (Appendix 2) with category definitions for discourse of growth and degrowth, where I also included examples after the first revision of the selected material. The favourable nature of the concepts on both sides would hopefully point to the possibility of opening for a dialogue on degrowth politics which will be discussed in the concluding chapters.

### 3.1.1. Selected Material

The documents chosen for the study of the current EU economic and climate action trajectory are three climate strategies and one financial strategy proposed by the European Commission (EC) and adopted by the European Union bodies in the last 10 years. The reason behind choosing these four strategies was their immediate timely relevance as well as their responsive character towards the crises. Strategies are also the preferred form as they set the directions, determine values and priorities, and, as the European Commission (2018) clearly states, function as “a reference framework for activities at EU and at national and regional levels” and are “translated into policy actions”. Thus, it can be contended that they are significant for the study of discourse. The climate strategies reflect the EU’s adoption of the Paris Agreement and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), whereas the economic strategies portray the Union’s financial priorities (United Nations, 2015). The financial strategy Europe2020: A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth is a 32 pages long agenda for growth and jobs issued for a 10-year period by the European Commission on March 3rd, 2010. Often viewed as a response to the financial crisis of 2007-2009, it aims to “overcome the structural weaknesses in Europe's economy, improve its competitiveness and productivity and underpin a sustainable social market economy” (EC 2010). It should be noted that the financial strategy often refers to the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP), a framework for supervision of fiscal policy coordination among all Members States and the two documents are often used simultaneously. The climate strategies and targets, including 2020 climate and energy package (12 pages long); 2030 climate and energy framework (18 pages); and 2050 long-term strategy (25 pages) are key documents of the European Union in regard to climate change and energy transition, presenting the EU’s prime climate and energy goals. In addition to their strategic character, the documents are treated as responses to the financial and climate crises. As it will be also explained in the theory section, the response to crisis was also an important criterium because of the peculiar nature of crisis, which threatens the current political and economic system demanding them to adapt. The interpretation of the response to crises could therefore help to inform how arguments are formed and contribute to commonly accepted knowledge, as well as provide a crucial insight to whether the current system is resilient enough.

When it comes to the study of the opposition actors, the document selected are as follows, DiEM25: Green New Deal for Europe. A summary and EU Greens: Manifesto 2019. The

---
18 Despite the short validity of Europe2020, European Commission has confirmed in their White Papers that it aims to pursue the same strategy.
documents were chosen under similar criteria – reflection of the climate and financial strategies and response to the crises. Both documents are also similar in length (26 and 18 pages). In the analysis, I will look for differences and similarities between the two parties and between both parties and the documents by the European Commission. I will focus primarily on how the opposing to the mainstream proposals are argued for. The reason for choosing these two political actors was that the Greens-European Free Alliance scored the highest among all EU political groups regarding their stand on fighting climate change in the recent ranking by Climate Action Network (CAN Europe, 2019), whereas the Democracy for Europe Movement 2025 proposes similar to degrowth movement social solutions such as The Housing and Jobs Guarantee Program or universal basic dividend, resting strongly on their ideal of building a post-capitalist future (DiEM25, 2019).

3.1.2. Limitation

Due to limited scope of this study, this paper will focus nearly exclusively on climate change as symptomatic of the problem of continuous economic growth and therefore primarily analyse the climate strategies. The financial strategies will mainly be used to better understand the arguments regarding the solutions to climate change. It is important to notice that for the critiques of economic growth, climate change holds a central place as the economic growth is directly connected to the systematic use of coal and other fossil fuels in industrial age Europe, giving “a precondition to the enormous productivity gains that enabled rapid economic growth.” (Welzer 2011: 11). Nonetheless, as critiques highlight (Jackson, 2011; Sachs, 2010), other serious environmental and social consequences have most likely the same underlying cause found in the growth pursuit (Jackson 2011).

The thesis is also limited in terms of the time framework. The critique of growth will be applied primarily to the trends and phenomena that have developed in the neoliberal era, especially since the 1970s and 1980s when neoliberalism began to prevail in the global political discourse (Eagleton-Pierce 2016). Another time limit will relate to the documents chosen – the ones selected were all issued after the global financial crisis of 2007-2009. The reason for it is that the market downturn was a crucial assessment for the socio-political organisation so heavily dependent on economic growth (Jackson 2009).

It should be also acknowledged that the selected material may not be sufficiently extensive for the study, especially that the documents by DiEM25 and the EU Greens are not of the same scale. However, due to the nature of the documents – expressing official priorities in the May elections – both the documents of the European Green Party and the Democracy for Europe 2025 movement are important fundaments for the study of their overall political discourse.

Final limitation of this thesis relates to the concept-based analysis. There are many other concepts which could help answer the questions about transformation and suggest discursive openings. For instance, diversity or community could help to indicate the type of transformation imagined, whereas well-being and not stability could inform about the desired outcome. However, based on the secondary reading and the initial analysis of the documents, they either did not seem as relevant to of Eagleton-Pierce’s neoliberal theory or the post-growth theory: occurred rarely or not at all in the studied material; or met with immediate negative connotations on one side. The chosen concepts have shown to be the most fitting for this thesis but of course there is potential to explore more.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

“Ideologies are -isms which to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise.”

– Hannah Arendt in ‘The Origins of Totalitarianism’, 1951

Looking at the function and power of growth in today’s world, Hannah Arendt words seem to be an adequate depiction of it. Understanding growth as an ideology, an assumption shared also by the post-growth researchers, allows to study it beyond the mere understanding of relationships between economy and state, grasp a more holistic view of its hegemony, and understand the way it is sustained (Ferguson 2019, p. 101).
3.2.1. Critical Framework of Post-growth Theory

As Ferguson (2019, p. 101) argues, the most comprehensive way to study growth ideology is through a critical and a constructivist approach. A critical constructivist approach, as the author explains, focuses on “how ideas, ideology and discourse shape agency, structure, interests and ultimately political practices, thus providing a more holistic account of world affairs” (Ferguson 2019, p. 101). In this context, such level of analysis could provide an explanation for why the industrialised welfare societies are committed to economic growth. Such approach can also reveal how the overarching growth objective is the consequence of “a set of hegemonic ideologies and discourses” and not a mere expression of political preferences (Ferguson 2019, p. 101, emphasis in original). The concept of hegemony will be explained in the following section, but an important point of post-growth theory should be first mentioned here, namely that the commitment to growth has a hegemonic character (Ferguson 2019, p. 102; Kallis 2018, p. 72). Another important element of the post-growth approach is the analysis of the discourses, that is the “linguistic and symbolic expressions of ideology” (Ferguson 2019, p. 103). As Ferguson adds, the ideology of growth is “expressed, acquired, confirmed, reproduced and reconstituted through discourse” (Ferguson 2019, p. 103). Discourses also help to structure the hegemonic character of the ideology. Two important starting points of post-growth framework are: (1) that, in the presence of devastating consequences and imminent limits to growth, growth should be considered illegitimate; (2) that the core of liberalism is morally compatible with post-growth alternative, which means that in order to sustain the core values of human autonomy, liberals should move in the post-growth direction (Ferguson, 2014, p. 5).

Ferguson also presents an important idea for the conceptualisation of this thesis, namely that the post-growth critical theory, aside of being concerned with how to abolish the system, should rather focus on “the more immediate tension within the current hegemony”, as the time under the ecological and social apocalypse is ticking (Ferguson 2019, p. 219). By addressing contradictions and acknowledging signifying, previously excluded, elements and actors within the existing and new discourses, creates breaking points that have the potential to “prefigure hegemonic transformation” (Ferguson 2019, p. 118).

3.2.2. Political Opportunity in Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks

The Prison Notebooks, a collection of essays written by the Italian communist leader and neo-Marxist political theorist Antonio Gramsci19, have often been interpreted as reflections on victory of fascism and the defeat of the Italian left but as Frosini (2017) argues, the essays do not only offer a critique but also “a strategic analysis of opportunities” for political initiatives presented by the European Left (Fabio Frosini, 2017, p. 191).

Gramsci believed in the power of ideas, which he explains in his theory of hegemony. As Bates (1975, p. 351) puts it, the fundamental premise of the hegemony theory is that man is not ruled by force of other men alone but also, and mostly, by ideas. In other words, the real power to Gramsci is vested in ideology. In his study of socioeconomic organization of the capitalist state, Gramsci divided the Marxist superstructures into two spheres: the “political society” and the “civil society” (Bates, 1975, p. 353; Daldal, 2014, p. 154). Gramsci argued that the formation of the spheres occurred during economic expansion of Europe in the second half of the 19th century. Since then the state became more complex and the ruling class could not exercise its power as easily. Therefore, it did something that other dominant classes in the past did not: it expanded and enlarged its realm ideologically so that the

---

19 Antonio Gramsci wrote the Prison Notebooks during his detention in Fascist prison between 1929 and 1935. The essays have at many occasions sparked a special interest and a sense of awe among the academics (Buttigieg 1994, p. 98). Gramsci’s unique reflections offer an incredible critique and inspiration for the left movement. Today Gramscian concepts return to help enrich the critique of the mainstream ideology, often with regards to the environmental movement (Wanner, 2015) (Ciplet et al. 2015).

20 According to Gramsci, the ruling class can exercise its power over society in both spheres, but in different ways. Civil society is a private sphere which consists of educational and religious institutions, trade unions, political parties, and media. It functions through consensus and can be understood as a place where the social and political consciousness, that is ideas, are being formed, consented upon and reproduced. Political society, or simply “the state” includes all institutions that can exercise the power by enacting and enforcing the laws, that is, the government, courts, police, army, etc. Its domination is expressed through force (Bates 1975, p. 353, Buttigieg 1995, p. 5; Daldal 2014: 156). The functions and the relation between the two spheres are extremely important. The civil society is viewed as a place where freedom can be exercised and enjoyed, whereas the role of the political society, which can often pose a threat to freedom, is to ensure the civil society can fulfil its role (Buttigieg 1995, p. 6). Such interpretation of socioeconomic organization seems to be malleable but also very resilient.
subordinate classes would not only follow their grail but also accept it as almost natural, which was achieved, for example, by development and re-interpretation of certain normative social concepts (Dadal 2014, p. 156). Kallis (2018, p. 137) also highlights Gramsci’s critical understanding of “common sense”, which the Italian intellectual refers to in plural form. As Kallis explains, there are two types of Gramscian common senses. On one hand, hegemonic common senses can be used to dominate and harm other common senses. On the other, the dormant common senses “can always be mobilised to reinterpret and change social reality” (Kallis 2018, p. 138).

Gramscian concept of hegemony itself, Bates explains (1975, p. 352), simply means cultural, moral, ideological and political “leadership based on the consent of the led” tied closely to the idea of Marxist ‘invisible power’. Understood correctly can provide a great potential. Misunderstood or even abused results in a situation where to lead transforms into to dominate and ends in a “passive revolution” where the state coerces their ideas without the actual consensus of the class creating a dictatorship without hegemony. As Bates explains it, for Gramsci, “the failure of the Liberal State to create genuine hegemony meant simply that it failed to become truly liberal” (Bates 1975, p. 354). This perspective can help to reveal the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which the discourse and connected themes are placed and how the ideology came to control the political actions. In other words, Gramsci’s theory is important because it provides an understanding of power as ideology and constitutes both an explanation of the success of authoritarianism as well as offers an opportunity for the progression of the opposing movement by preventing it from becoming too hegemonic.

Another reason for which the Prison Notebooks were found useful for this study is Gramscian understanding of crisis. Crisis, or “organic crisis” as Gramsci referred to it, was to him an important historical event – Gramsci saw it as an opportunity. “Organic crisis” was a manifestation of a crisis of hegemony, in which the people “cease to believe the words of the national leaders and begin to abandon the traditional parties.” (Bates 1975, p. 364). It is also a very crucial moment for the opposition movement because the meeting of two ideologies might lead to dangerous results. Epitomized in Gramsci’s words (1989, p. 57), “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” In order to avoid the pitfalls of a hegemonic crisis, the revolutionary leaders must understand their weighty social responsibility (Bates 1975, p. 364).
4. Results

As it has been mentioned above, the results chapter is divided into two parts: discourse analysis (4.1 & 4.2) and concept-based analysis (4.3). Each part begins with a summary of the main findings which includes answers to the research questions. The summary is then followed by detailed results including quotes and direct references to the selected documents. The first part (4.1 & 4.2) answers the first two research questions about the EU stance on crises and growth and it is divided into two sections. Section 4.1 presents the results obtained from the documents by the European Commission. It is divided into four subsections, according to the coding scheme based on Dryzek (2013) and presented in the methods chapters. Each subsection then answers the questions in the coding scheme – emphasised, as in Table 1, in orange and grey for easier navigation of the findings from EU strategies. Section 4.2 reveals the findings obtained from the study of the opposition documents, DiEM25 (in section 4.2.1) and EU Greens (in 4.2.2). This section follows the same structure guided by the coding scheme, although it should be noted that the subsections are not divided into separate units but simply separated in four paragraphs. Colour emphasis is also used. Finally, the second part of the results chapter (4.3), the concept-based analysis is divided into six subsections, according to the chosen concepts. Each subsection presents findings obtained from (1) EC’s climate strategy; (2) EC’s financial strategy; (3) the opposition, placed against the concept table in Annex 2. It is followed by a short summary regarding the potential for being an opportunity window. The interpretation and meaning of the findings will be further discussed in the next chapter where the results will be compared to the discourses of growth previously depicted by Dryzek and Ferguson (referring to Annex 1), neoliberal and degrowth understanding of the concepts (in reference to Annex 2) as well as Gramscian theory.

As mentioned in the limitations section, it should be acknowledged that the selected material for the study of the opposition is not as extensive as the one of the European Commission. Basic entities, overall character, natural relationships, agents and metaphors as well as reference to concepts could be nonetheless mostly identified and seem to provide a sufficient answer regarding the opposition’s stance in relation to the crises and economic growth as well as a good basis for the concept-based analysis.

4.1. The dominant discourse of the European Union

It appears that the stance towards the economic growth and crises can be best understood through the discourses persistent in all the documents of the European Commission, which guides the proposed solutions and frame the role of human and non-human actors within the transition. The discourses present consist of many of the same elements previously identified by Dryzek and Ferguson (Appendix 1 & 2), where a neoliberal and capitalist economic model is taken for granted and the strategies strongly rely on relentless growth assumptions. Further, the stance towards growth is defensive and merely positive, thus ideological. Growth is constitutive; it is the ultimate goal and its maintenance is portrayed as a crucial element in the transition towards carbon free economy. Proposed solutions revolve around growth, whereas agents’ involvement is rendered crucial as long as it serves the economy. At the same time, ecological crisis is generally undermined. Additionally, both financial and climate crises are seen as an opportunity for even more growth, further sustaining the ideology.

4.1.1. Basic entities organised or constructed

The relation to the economy in the EU climate strategies can be already found in the opening paragraphs of all documents. The opening appears to play an important role in the overall scheme by setting a defining tone to the whole document and determining the Union’s priorities. In the 2020 Climate and Energy Package, the document first starts by acclaiming the EU’s recent achievement in making a European economy “a model for sustainable development in the 21st century” (European Commission, 2008, p. 2). Secondly, it portrays climate change as both a serious threat to the economic prosperity of Europe – the loss measured in GDP – as well as an opportunity to modernise the economy, “orientating it towards a future where technology and society will be attuned to new needs and where innovation will create new opportunities to feed growth and jobs.” (EC 2008, p. 2). In the documents, there is no mention of human or environmental losses known to be a crucial consequence of climatic changes. The 2030
Climate & Energy framework begins similarly, with a eulogy to the EU’s crucial role in global climate action and achievements in lowering the emissions so far, directly followed by the defence of a growing economy and no mention of threats to nature and human life. The European Commission acclaims that the EU achievements “are all the more significant given that the European economy has grown by around 45% in real terms since 1990.” (European Commission, 2014, p. 2). The defensive character might have been the result of the financial crisis and the aftermath that took place between adoption of the two strategies. Further, the positive correlation between climate action and economic growth as well as a belief in the neoliberal and capitalist economy is taken for granted and persists throughout the 2030 Framework with a call on strengthening it, “there is a need to continue to drive progress towards a low-carbon economy which ensures competitive and affordable energy for all consumers, creates new opportunities for growth and jobs”; “A much stronger focus should be given to the structuring and deployment of new (or recapitalisation of existing) financial instruments, which will foster investor confidence so that public finance can be used to leverage private capital more effectively.” (EC 2014, p. 3; EC 2014, p. 16). Finally, in the 2050 Climate Strategy, there is a shift in the opening paragraph which might suggest the overarching importance of the document as well as the recent development in international climate science and politics. Climate change and its consequences are treated with much more seriousness, whilst climate action is rendered essential for the survival of the planet (European Commission, 2018, p. 2). However, the link between the productivity and prosperity of Europe’s economy and the struggle against environmental destruction quickly follows and remains strong while being considered beneficial by its very nature.

Another important economic assumption present in the EU climate strategy is the universalization of the common economic vision. The concept of vision and the sort of vision that the Union presents will be discussed in the second part of the analysis, but it is important to recognise it here as a basic entity around which the discourse is organised. Its objective, which at first glance seems to be unifying the Member States, is used to promote growth, ensure market integration and avoid loss of competitiveness. The trend can be reflected in the following exemplary arguments: “This is an agenda for all Member States, taking into account different needs, different starting points and national specificities so as to promote growth for all.” (EC 2010, p. 8); “Strengthening regional cooperation between Member States to help them meet common energy and climate challenges more cost-effectively while furthering market integration and preventing market distortion.” (EC 2014, p. 3); “A common approach between the EU and the Member States would be crucial to avoid relocation risks and loss of competitiveness.” (EC 2018, p. 18).

When it comes to the proposals and policy actions, the overarching goal appears to be a 40% reduction in domestic emissions by 2030 and 90-100% reduction by 2050 is summoned as absolutely necessary (EC 2014, p. 5; EC 2018, p. 8). This goal, however, shares its podium with another one – maintaining the current economic model. In fact, in order for the EU to reduce its emissions, “open markets, a globalised world and multilateralism are a precondition” (EC 2018, p. 21). This precondition additionally ensures that the EU will “be able to benefit from the clean energy transition domestically and also globally”. The Commission also assumes that the approach is pan-European, meaning that every Country Member needs to be on board (EC 2018, p. 6). The prerequisite is accompanied by a promise that promoting market solutions will result in positive environmental outcomes, and at the same time modernisation and growth. The priority of “securing a prosperous Europe in times of change” and ensuring that the climate policies are also “a major driver for growth and jobs in Europe” (EC 2014, p. 3) is visible all throughout the 2020 Climate document and strengthened in the following strategies. The main proposal is the continuation of the European Emission Trading Scheme (ETS), which allows industrial plant which emit over 10 000 tonnes of CO2 to trade their carbon allowances, either by selling them if they cut their own emissions, or by buying them if they do not have sufficient allowances to cover their emissions (EC 2008, p. 5). The Commission ensures that the ETS “has proved [to be] a pioneering instrument to find a market-based solution to incentivise cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.” (EC 2008, p. 5). The EU continues to promote the mechanism in the 2030 Framework, despite admitting that it is not effective enough in cutting the emissions and driving low-carbon investments due to unexplained “new national policies that undermine the level playing field the ETS was meant to create” (EC 2014, p. 2). Other strategies involve investments in greener sources of energy, including renewables, biofuels and use of liquified natural gas (LNG) that the Union sees as a temporary green alternative; decoupling of GDP and energy growth (“between 1990 and 2016, energy use was reduced
by almost 2%, greenhouse gas emissions by 22% while GDP grew by 54%,” (EC 2018, p. 4); as well as other, often ambiguously defined, “different technologies and actions which foster the move towards a net-zero greenhouse gas economy” (EC 2018, p. 6-7). Based on the previous work, the 2050 Strategy developed eight scenarios of transition. In the first five scenarios, which include solutions proposed in the previous strategies, electricity consumption, as the Commission highlights itself, is set to increase21 (EC 2018, p. 7). In order to achieve complete carbon neutrality by 2050, the Commission developed three more scenarios, all of which rely heavily on carbon capture and storage (CCS) technologies, 15% nuclear energy and improved efficiency (EC 2018, p. 7 & 9). When it comes to the heaviest transport sectors, shipping and aviation, although the EU acknowledges that currently there is no renewable alternative, it does not propose any concrete solutions to the problem, except for short-term “behavioural changes by individuals and companies”, such as video conferencing, and a promise that the future will bring the right technologies (EC 2018, p. 11).

It could be said that in the documents of the European Commission climate change is treated with deserved seriousness, although only most so in the 2050 climate strategy (EC 2018, pp. 2-3). The word “crisis”, however, is never used in relation to climate change and the rapid environmental degradation. Additionally, although the EU claims to “have been at the forefront of addressing the root causes of climate change” (EC 2018, p. 4), the primary root causes, such as economic growth, rapid industrialisation and human activity which transcended ecological limits over the past 50 years, highlighted by the degrowth community but also leading climate scientists, are not properly explained or mentioned at all. The fact that human activities have caused much of the observed increase in Earth's temperatures (NASA 2019) is only mentioned two times in all the selected EU documents; the 2030 framework even casts a slight shadow of doubt about it which is reflected in the careful sentence structuring, “there has been further confirmation of the likely impact of human influence on climate change” (EC 2014, p. 3); whereas the 2050 strategy only briefly acknowledges it (EC 2018, p. 2). Industrial development and economic growth are either completely neglected as the driving cause or put into a positive light; “The clean energy transition has spurred the modernisation of the European economy, driven sustainable economic growth and brought strong societal and environmental benefits for European citizens.” (EC 2018, p. 4; EC 2018, p. 12). Thus, greenhouse gas emissions appear to have simply been a cause of a misuse (but never overuse) of natural resources, inadequate technology and poor efficiency, all of which can be fixed almost effortlessly with technological solutions, clever human problem-solving, market mechanisms, and relatively simple behavioural changes (EC 2008, pp. 4 & 8; EC 2014, p.3; EC 2018, p. 16). Unlike in the degrowth community (Jackson 2010; Kallis 2012), the causes of financial crisis and climate change are not viewed together. Moreover, climate change is not only seen as a challenge that can be easily defeated but also as an economic opportunity for great financial benefits both on an individual and transnational scale (EC 2008, p.2; EC 2014; EC 2018). The minimisation of costs and efforts visible in the 2020 and 2030 climate policies is not, however, as evident in the 2050 strategy. It is also in the latter document that economic transformation is first mentioned. In the document, the transformation is understood mostly as a shift to a circular economy and right consumer choices. Additionally, reducing overall energy usage appears rarely in the documents. In fact, consumption reduction is only clearly mentioned in the 2050 Strategy, and similarly to production, it is not understood by decrease in general overuse but rather by replacing fossil fuel sources with renewables and implementing energy efficiency measures, such as “efficiency digitalisation and home automation, labelling and setting standards” (EC 2018, p 8). The transformation is portrayed as system-oriented, simple and economically beneficial (EC 2018, p. 6). Nonetheless, bringing the topic of economic transformation into the discussion can constitute a signal for either opening the discourse or strengthening it, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

4.1.2. Assumptions about natural relationships

The most apparent natural relationship in the documents seems to be the relationship between economic growth and the EU’s social and political trajectory. Apart from being portrayed as natural, it is also characterised as positive. In the climate strategies, economic growth and development are only presented in favourable connotations, such as “growth and jobs” (EC 2008; EC 2014; EC 2018), “growth and new

21 Despite that, the Commission still acclaims that it can be possible to achieve an “80% net greenhouse emissions reductions by 2050” in the five pathways (EC 2018, p. 7)
opportunities” (EC 2014), growth and research and technological innovations (EC 2014; EC 2018) or
growth and “strong societal and environmental benefits” (EC 2018). In the financial strategy, economic
growth is mentioned over 80 times in favourable connotations indicating a strong presence of the growth
model preference (EC 2018). Whereas the connections between economic growth, prosperity of
European citizens, technological development and environmental protection are taken for granted, the
EU relationship with the nature and in human affairs either fade into the background or appear
hierarchical. The EU seems to prioritise competitiveness over cooperation in human affairs, whereas the
role of nature as an agent in itself is silenced. In all climate strategies (EC 2008; EC 2014; EC 2018),
the words “competitiveness”, “competitive” and “competitor” appear 81 times in positive connotations,
whereas the words “cooperation”, “cooperative” and “to cooperate” only appear 12 times, signalling
that the natural relationships between people are rather guided by competitiveness than cooperation.
Nature or natural environment, on the other hand, is instrumentalised, which can be seen for example in
the understanding of the environmental degradation – any losses in nature purely mean losses for human
utility (EC 2018, p. 2). In addition, the word “nature” is only used once in all the climate document and
even in such case, has a very defined function of a carbon sink, (EC 2018, p. 14). It is also crucial to
point out that planetary limits are not acknowledged or even mentioned in any of the documents.

It therefore rather appears that the human and nature relationships are characterised by contradictions.
This can be traced at the end of the 2050 Strategy, where the Commission summarises their priorities,
“fully consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals”, which will guide Europe for the transition
to climate neutrality (EC 2018, p. 23). For instance, there appears to be a contradiction between the
ecological and socioeconomic systems. On one hand, the strategy aims to promote a sustainable bio-
economy while preserving and restoring ecosystems (EC 2018, p. 24). On the other, it wishes to “align
important growth-enhancing and supporting policies” with all climate action and energy policies (EC
2018, P. 24). There also seems to be a contradiction between the role of the citizens, from one side,
empowering them and recognising their role, and from the other, dictating their position in the transition,
which is mostly based on right consumer choices and training in necessary skills (EC 2018. P. 24).

### 4.1.3. Primary agents and their motives

There are multiple agents within the mainstream European Union document. All of them have varying
roles but they unite under a common goal of the dominant discourse, serving and maintaining the
ideology. The four primary agents identified, the European Union, national governments, European
citizens, and the business sector, are assigned specified functions of varied significance.

The European Union takes up a key position in the climate strategies. It is continuously presented as a
global leader in the transformation towards carbon neutral economy and it is praised for its up to date
achievements (EC 2008, p. 2; EC 2014; EC 2018, p. 4 & 24). As a global leader “for low carbon
technologies, [and] other major and fast-growing economies” (EC 2014, p. 17), it appears to use this
position to demonstrate the rightful conditions for the energy transition not only to its members but also
to the rest of the world, assuring that a transition without economic sacrifices “is both possible and
beneficial beyond the fight against climate change” (EC 2018, p. 4). The EU’s function also rests on
establishing the coherence between the Country Members and other agents involved, making sure that
all envisage the same type of transition. The role of the national governments is to ensure the
implementation of objectives discussed, the maximisation of all resources for action, public acceptance,
and smooth cooperation between the Member States. Furthermore, the states need to guide investors
towards clean energy, raise sustainable finance and to direct it to green innovation efforts in the most
productive way (EC 2008; EC 2014; EC 2018, p. 17). It is important to highlight that their function is
defined as representative of the EU strategy and that the deemphasis of their traditional role as a
sovereign unit appears to be used to the Union’s advantage (EC 2008; EC 2014; EC 2018). “The
involvement of the state in the energy transition and their freedom to act within the framework seems to
have decreased with the following documents. In the 2020 Energy Package, Member States are granted
the freedom to determine and promote their own strategies and lower-efficient energy mix, although its
role as a protector of the prosperous European economy is strictly defined. In the 2030 Framework it
states that members can legitimately promote reduction policies and increase of renewable energy usage,
but they need to “strike the right balance between generous support for well-targeted aid for
environmental protection and preserving competition.” (EC 2014, p.10). The 2050 Strategy aims to
investigate further how the states can contribute “to the modernisation of our economy and improve the quality of life of Europeans, protect the environment, and provide for jobs and growth.” (EC 2018, p. 6).

European citizens are usually referred to as consumers (EC 2008; EC 2014; 2018, pp. 6-8). In the 2050 Strategy their role is strictly defined, successful transition depends on citizens who can embrace change, get engaged and see the benefits, making right consumer choices (EC 2018, p. 22). When it comes to the relation to the civil society, non-governmental and non-business actors are only mentioned in the 2050 Climate Strategy (EC 2018, p. 6) but it appears that their, and all other actors, involvement is significant, as the European Commission aims to take an open and inclusive debate “on the necessary deep economic transformation and the profound societal change” encouraging the citizens to participate in Citizens Dialogues (EC 2018, p. 25). The private sector, including businesses, corporations, industrial and financial organisation, is assigned an important position in the climate strategies, as the transition is to provide “new opportunities, new technologies which Europe is well placed to exploit and new business openings for manufacturers and suppliers.” (EC 2008, p. 12). The words “industry” and “industrial” are referred to, often in positive terms, 106 times in all documents, whereas, for an exemplary comparison, the words “people”, “society”, “biodiversity” and “nature” are altogether mentioned 27 times. The business sector is also provided with favourable conditions for development and their role is continually strengthened with the following documents (EC 2008, p. 12; EC 2014; p. 4; EC 2018, p. 17). The green industry is of particular importance as it provides many jobs and therefore offers an opportunity for modernisation and “particular growth potential” (EC 2008, p. 4; EC 2014, p. 2; EC 2018, p. 19). By the same token, it also appears that the climate strategies serve the interests of the business sector, rather than prioritise the citizens’ wellbeing. The Commission does acknowledge that the changes in the labour market due to technological changes or population aging are to occur and seems to understand that those challenges will have “the potential to increase social and regional disparities”, “hamper the decarbonisation efforts” and even lead to “energy poverty” (EC 2018, p. 20). However, the proposed solutions only vaguely include political measures in an unexplained manner (EC 2018, p. 21). It rather seems like most pressure, expressed in behavioural changes, professional reskilling and upskilling, is put onto people to adapt to these changes; “People will not only need specific professional skills but also ‘key competences’ from fields such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics skills. Investing in reskilling and upskilling of our population is essential so that we do not leave anybody behind.” (EC 2018, p. 20). It also seems like the societal and economic transformation rests on the overarching objective of the protection of the business industry and neoliberal economy (EC 2018, p. 5). It is ultimately the “deep modernisation process” that has to ensure “a fair and socially acceptable transition for all in the spirit of inclusiveness and solidarity.” (EC 2018, p. 20).

4.1.4. Key metaphors and rhetorical devices

Upon reading the documents of the European Commission in their entirety, a common storyline appears to be forming. The storyline of being on the board of the same boat steered by one leading captain. The reassuring storyline of transition without heavy sacrifices but awaiting benefits, where “net-zero emissions can go hand in hand with prosperity, having other economies follow its successful example.” (EC 2018, p. 23). The storyline of climate change that can still be in most part prevented with technological innovations as long as the current economic model is maintained and strengthened model (EC 2008; EC 2014; EC 2018, p. 23). It is because in the current system, it seems like everything (natural capital, technology) and everyone (consumers, European citizens, displaced farmers) is malleable, adaptable and adjustable even in such difficult times (EC 2014; EC 2018). Even the idea that the future generations will cooperate, be better equipped and desire to work with the proposed solutions is taken for granted and incorporated into the current transition, “such trends will facilitate the transition” (EC 2018, p. 19). Finally, the powerful character of Europe itself – standing strong and united, growing and developing together for almost 75 years while protecting European values – appears to serve and sustain the powerful discourse of economic vision.


4.2. The opposition’s stance

Based on the results, it can be said that Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25) reflects an indirect anti-growth stance in the European New Deal. The indirect nature of the stance relates to the fact that the criticism towards growth is not immediate and instantly evident in the document, whereas limits to growth are not acknowledged at all. However, through the open expression of anti-capitalist sentiment, a subtle critique of current EU growth imperative, proposed solutions such as universal basic dividend, and willingness to explore post-growth alternatives in the future, DiEM25 has a potential to become an actor within the post-growth debate. When it comes to the stance towards the crises, the financial crisis and its aftermath is treated with seriousness, whereas the ecological crisis, although acknowledged, is not referred to in forewarning manner and nature appears subordinate to human. Nonetheless, similarly to post-growth theory, DiEM25 connects the causes and proposed solutions between the economic and ecological crises. At the same time, the matter of crises takes a crucial standpoint in the European Green Party’s New Deal for Europe (European Green Party, 2019). Both economic, social and ecological crises are treated with immense importance and the party’s principles and policies are to serve as immediate solution to the crises. Additionally, for the EU Greens, social equality and environmental protection are the party’s central concerns and nature is granted rights on its own. As far as the stance towards growth is concerned, EGP’s view appears to be ambiguous. On one hand, the party criticises the anaemic and unequitable economic growth that led the EU to the current crises and seeks solutions such as housing and income security; on the other, it does not acknowledge limits to growth and promotes an increase of equitable growth portraying it as a part of the solution.

4.2.1. Fierce critique by DiEM25

The assumption that Europe is currently facing a social and economic crisis appears to be one of the prevailing basic entities present in the European New Deal. The crisis, described in the document as crisis of “authoritarianism” and “nationalist international insurgency”, reflects the 2007-2009 financial crash, the failed EU response to it and its social consequences (DiEM25 2018, p. 4). As DiEM25 argues, the “bureaucrats in Brussels” introduced protectionist and authoritarian policies protecting banks and businesses, instead of the European citizens, which consequently led to raising nationalism and civil distrust (DiEM25 2018, pp. 4-7). The second important assumption, also related to the crisis, is the backbone of the current situation. According to DiEM25, it is the capitalist system that dictates the EU’s current political discourse which proves to be not only harmful but also unsustainable. The party “is convinced capitalism is impossible to civilise in the long term, primarily due to its inimicable capacity to undermine itself through technological innovation that engenders excess capacity, inequality and insufficient aggregate demand for goods and services.” (DiEM25 2018, p. 25). DiEM25 places itself in a clear opposition to the capitalist trajectory, calling current Europe “neoliberal, authoritarian, incompetent, [and] unappetising”, while trying to propose an alternative economic organisation (DiEM25 2018, p. 6). DiEM25 does, however, believe that Europe should and, in fact, must be saved, because the “nationalist alternative” would not only further endanger the Union but also “the wider world” (DiEM25 2018, pp. 5-6). As the party puts it, “The world needs a unified Europe committed to authentic democracy, to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, to social protections, to saving the planet, and to the on-going expansion of human freedoms.” (DiEM25 2018, p. 6). When it comes to the solutions proposed, DiEM25 wants to begin with “constructive disobedience”, that is moderate policy proposals which would disobey “the edicts of the clueless establishment” at every level (DiEM25 2018, p. 6, italics in original). It suggests immediate institutional reforms putting an end to the economic crisis, such as strict bank regulation to end private banks’ monopoly, alongside long-term policies, such as “green investment-led recovery” and social investment programmes with universal basic dividend funded from the returns of the capital. Such approach would gradually lead Europe towards a deep systemic transformation to a “post-capitalist”, “authentically liberal and open”, and truly democratic future (DiEM25 2018, p. 11). The party appears to put the well-being of the European citizens, also those marginalised, in the centre of their proposals. However, as far as climate crisis is concerned, slightly less is devoted to the issue. Importantly, DiEM25 does acknowledge immense importance of the problem and appears to recognise and connect the causes and proposed solutions the socio-economic crisis (DiEM25 2018, p. 17). In comparison to the EU, DiEM25 does not portray the crisis as opportunity to boost growth and competitiveness, but as chance to turn the wealth that accumulates in Europe “into
investments in a real, green, sustainable, innovative economy” leading to “the rise of productivity in green sectors everywhere” (DiEM25 2018, p. 10).

It is indicative that the most important natural relationships present in the document are the relationships between people at various levels. The current state relationships, as DiEM25 seem to understand it, are characterised by a hierarchy between the leaders and the led, where the former does not take the latter’s need into account (DiEM25 2018). DiEM25 appears to envisage human affairs to instead be based on cooperation and compassion and guided by well-functioning democratic processes, at the economic and political level (DiEM25 2018, p. 6). While protecting the environment is one of the party’s priorities, nature appears to exist for the benefit of the human rather than as a value on its own (DiEM25 2018, pp. 13-14). On the other hand, uncontrolled technological progress dependent on market mechanisms is warned against (DiEM25 2018, p. 10 & 20). In terms of the relation to growth, the limits to growth are not directly acknowledged in the document, however the critique of the EU growth-led economy and growth-based green transition can be found there, for instance by pointing to German economy that revolves around only “modicum of growth” or referring to it as “Ponzi growth” (DiEM25 2018, pp. 13&25). Additionally, a reference to “the foundation of the Green Transition to Prosperity Without Growth” is mentioned which suggests post-growth policy aspirations (DiEM25 2018, p. 8).

In comparison to the current organisation of the EU, there appears to be a shift in thinking about the primary agents. National governments are to be granted more freedom, especially when dealing with the financial crisis and immigration, in adjustment to their economic capabilities (DiEM25 2018, p. 12). The EU’s role is to provide space for multilateral agreements, ensure the social fairness and to “coordinate fiscal, monetary and social policy so as to optimise the economic and social outcomes across Europe.” (DiEM25 2018, p. 20). The top-down approach is to be complemented by a bottom-up initiative (DiEM25 2018, p. 14). European citizens and civil society play a crucial role and their involvement is to gradually increase leading to eventual democratisation of the economic sphere (banks, corporations, fiscal institutions) at all levels: local, national, pan-European (DiEM25 2018, p. 22 & 25). As DiEM25 puts it, “the public sector must lead the way, creating the conditions for investment by all types of economic organisations to ‘crowd-in’ behind the public programs.” (DiEM25 2018, p. 13).

Although it is not directly specified in the document, DiEM25 appears to assume a leadership role. This can be, for instance, argued by the fact that the party often (over 50 times) uses their name, “DiEM25 proposes”, “DiEM25 envisages”, etc., which gives an idea that the transition is somewhat preconditioned and restricted.

The document is also full of metaphors particularly in relation to the system critique of the capitalist system. For instance, the reliance on technological innovations is said to lead to uncontrollable “Automation and the Rise of the Machines”, which “[promises] to deliver the next crisis even before Europe manages to resolve the current one.” (DiEM25 2018, p. 25). DiEM25 also uses metaphors when describing the current status and leadership in the Union, such as “Nationalists Internationalists”, “federation-lite”, “Austerity Union”, while describing themselves and other fervent progressive opposition actors as “the transnational Progressive International” (DiEM25 2018, p. 6).

4.2.2. Nature central at the EU Greens

European Green Party begins their candidacy manifesto by revealing their values of sustainability, democracy, prosperity, and solidarity. Each value is said to guide the party’s core principles and key policies, offering “immediate solutions to Europe’s social, economic, and ecological crises.” (EGP 2019, p. 1). Thus, it appears that EGP finds the EU in the current of a multilevel crisis. Another assumption is that Europe used to be strong and united, but it fell under authoritarian reforms, focus on financial profits and the only choices the Europeans have are “between apathy and anger, between technocracy and autocracy, between those who defend the European Union as it exists today and those who wish to destroy it forever” (EGP 2019, p. 1). It can, however, revive, according to the party, and the New Deal provides the alternative. Calling their candidacy “European Spring” might additionally suggest that the party wishes that the EU to recover its lost values, such as peace and solidarity, from the winter post-crisis period and blossom again through a focus on those fundamental values and natural environment. This storyline of rediscovering values is also used to enforce more specific policies, such as ending all sales of weapons and dual-use products (EGP 2019 p.12). EU Greens seem to be standing strong on their values of equality and equity (gender, economic and global). It appears, however, that when it
comes to these values, EGP seem to operate within the same framework. For instance, when it comes to gender equality, the party promotes higher participation in politics, equal pay, protection of reproductive rights and stricter measures on domestic violence, but it does not mention house chores as an economic activity (EGP 2019, p. 13). When it comes to the proposals, nature and environment are one of the core priorities for the EU Greens. According to the party, protection of the planet against the climate change should be also an immediate priority of the EU. Adequate fulfilment of the Paris Agreement, rapid transition to green energy, higher reduction ambitions are among their key demands (EGP 2019, p. 6). The demands could be achieved by phasing out fossil fuel subsidies, fighting industrial lobbyists, pan-European carbon tax based on Human Development Index, acknowledging and addressing the difference between financial and infrastructural capabilities of municipalities, and most importantly, by creation of “a Green Investment-led Recovery Programme of €500 billion to be invested annually in Green Energy, Transport & Transition (GETT)” (EGP 2019, p. 6). GETT would be financed by “Green investment bonds issued by Europe’s public investment bank institutions and backed by an alliance of Europe’s Central Banks” and from the carbon tax (EGP 2019, p. 6). Closely linked to and granted by the Green Investment Programme are social reforms such as the Job Guarantee Programme, "which will deliver new opportunities across the continent to rebuild Europe’s infrastructure and contribute to community-based sustainability projects” (EGP 2019, p.3); European Workers’ Compact with minimum wage legislation and 35-hour workweek; and Universal Citizens’ Dividend (EGP 2019, pp.3-4). Similarly to DiEM25, the party also proposes a multilateral agreement of housing security for all European citizens (EGP 2019, p. 9). There is a focus on equal access, reflected for instance in treating education as a common good (EGP 2019, p. 5).

Whereas protecting nature appears to be of its own value and can create a more resistant and resilient Europe, technological innovations as solution to climate change are not frequently mentioned in the document. Rather, technology seems to have a different purpose assigned. According to the party, it could be used to build digital commons for more transparency, gradual political democratisation and to expose lobbyism (EGP 2019, p. 15). EGP also wants to ensure that technological innovation serve the public good, not private gain (EGP 2019, p. 16). When it comes to the relation to economic growth and limits to growth, the EGP standpoint can be found somewhere in between the mainstream EU understanding and the critique mentioned by DiEM25. EU Greens do not seem to promote growth as dogmatically as the European Commission, nor view it as an opportunity in and a cure for the climate crisis (EGP 2019). However, the party seems to propose a reformed version of it, namely “equitable growth”, while criticising the “anaemic economic growth” that led the EU into the financial crisis (EGP 2019, p. 9&13). Promoting an increase of equitable growth is allied with the decrease of the risk of crisis (EGP 2019, p. 13). At the same time, limits to growth are not mentioned in the document.

When it comes to the key actors, it appears that the involvement of the EU citizens is crucial for the EU Greens. There is a strong drive for democratisation of the European Union institutions visible throughout the document. It is for instance reflected in EGP’s plans to develop a new democratic constitution, inaugurated with a European Constituent Assembly and a democratic constitution for Europe guided by the citizens’ voice (EGP 2019, p. 2). The citizens should have a say in the economic sphere, especially the EU budget and spending (EGP 2019, p. 7). EGP itself seems to be portrayed not as much as the leader of the people but rather a facilitator, a provider of basic goods (water, food, housing and energy) and a representative of the citizens voices (EGP 2019, pp. 4&13). In their view, national governments have a somewhat limited representative role, restricted to cooperation on multilateral agreements, ensuring transparency and coherence in political and economic activities (EGP 2019, p. 3&10). EU Greens appear particularly critical of the economic institutions. For instance, they refer to the banks as “zombies”, “whose bad habits drove the European continent into crisis, but who never paid the price” (EGP 2019 p. 10), suggesting that they are less inclined to represent their interests and even treat them as potential threat. This is also the only direct metaphor found in the document. EGP aims to fight the monopoly of big business by banning lobbyism and tax heavens, regulating trading policy, or enabling a higher possibility of environmental litigation against the polluting industries, instead of allowing corporations to sue national governments (EGP 2019, pp. 7&11). Lastly, the party appears to also include global actors. Global justice issue and the movement is treated with a particular importance and its interests should be regarded (EGP 2019, pp. 10&13).
4.3. Thematic Analysis

When focusing on concepts less imbued with political ideology, it has been found that in the EU climate and financial strategies, most of the concepts, especially *vision*, *responsibility*, and *governance* were used in order to sustain and justify the growth ideology. However, there appeared to be some opportunity windows within others, such as *participation*, and well as in relation to more general phenomena, such as a shift in conceptualisation in the 2050 Strategy or EU’s desire to be the transition leader. Interesting findings also appeared from the study of the opposition documents, such as DiEM25’s strong incentive to lead the transition – these results might provide important recommendations for the opposition parties on how the ideology of growth and neoliberalism could be argued against within the Brussel’s headquarters. The detailed results are presented below, while their meaning will be discussed further in the next chapter.

4.3.1. Vision

The vision for the future Europe is already clearly outlined in the 2020 Climate Package. According to that vision, the 2050 Europe will “look very different”, which will be most visible in the way energy is supplied and “the world around us” respected. The vision is said to be an inspiration and desired condition of the Europeans today. It recognises the alternatives, brings new technologies, businesses and opportunities “which Europe is well placed to exploit”, and eventually presents the Europeans with ways of running their daily lives, ensuring that they can continue “on the path of growth and jobs while leading global efforts to tackle climate change” (EC 2008, p. 12). The 2030 Climate Framework does not directly refer to the vision, but it could be observed that it does nonetheless subtly enforce it and makes its character more hegemonic, by ensuring that “a new European governance” will guide the implementation of competitive, secure and sustainable energy plans among all actors within the EU (EC 2014, p. 18), therefore it appears to be establishing a strong leadership similar to neoliberal discourse (Eagleton-Pierce 2016, p. 186). In 2050 Climate Strategy, that vision becomes pivotal and it is now included in the title. The document confirms the vision outlined in the 2020 Package, of a socially-fair, cost efficient and enhancing “the competitiveness of EU economy and industry on global markets, securing high quality jobs and sustainable growth in Europe, while providing synergies with other environmental challenges” (EC 2018, pp. 3& 5). The financial strategy presents a 2020 vision that helps Europe come out of the financial crisis stronger and better than ever before. The vision rests on three “mutually reinforcing priorities”: smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (EC 2010, p. 3). It is also only possible if it complies with one condition. The condition that everyone, EU committees, national parliaments and local and regional authorities, social partners, stakeholders and civil society, is on board and acts together, “as a Union”, in delivering the vision which is again compatible with the neoliberal and growth discourse (EC 2010, pp. 3&4; Eagleton-Pierce 2016, p. 185).

The opposition presents different stances on vision. The concept of vision in DiEM25 document is used to criticise the elitism of the European Union, which is visible, for example, in the reaction to the financial crisis (DiEM25 2018, p. 25). On the other hand, DiEM25’s own vision of Europe, which is to occur in about 20 years, is outlined only once in the document. It rests on the creation and maintenance of “an open, continental, federal pan-European democracy in which free men and women can live, work and prosper together, as they choose.” The vision also puts forward one condition, which is stability – once Europe is stabilised by modest policies, then a real democracy can be built at a transnational European level (DiEM25 2018, p. 8). For the EGP, vision seems to be an important concept. It is referred to a few times already in the introduction and appears several times throughout the document, setting the party's goals and principles (EGP 2019, p. 1). Their long-term vision of a sustainable way of life is built appears to be most devoted to respecting the nature and democratisation. As the party claims, the New Deal promotes a model of development that “is committed to establishing local systems of production and supply, and to preserving our natural world, cultural heritage, social progress, and public services” (EGP 2019, p. 1).

Based on the analysis of the strategies, it can be said that at first *vision* hardly appears as a concept that could offer an opportunity for post-growth discussion. Imbued with neoliberal ideology and almost inextricable from economic growth, it seems to represent the discourse of growth and neoliberalism (Annex 2) and appears too precarious to argue against. However, when looking at the opposition’s
understanding of the concept, an interesting point prevails, namely a long-term nature of the concept. This long-termism visible especially in the EU Green’s political manifesto, perhaps opens a wider space, filled with both uncertainties of the future and undiscovered alternatives.

4.3.2. Change

In the first two climate strategies, the concept of change is not granted much attention and significance. It also appears to be considered as adjustment of minimum economic effort and minimum cost, “the costs can be kept to under 0.5% of GDP a year by 2020” (EC 2008, p. 10). It can also occur as a result of implemented framework which encourages “consumers to take up innovative products and services and appropriate financial instruments” to ensure that all can benefit from the changes (EC 2014, p. 14). There is, however, a strong shift towards the concept change in the 2050 Strategy. It appears as one of the most important concepts, mentioned over 20 times all throughout the document. The change resulting from global warming, future demography structures and job automation is acknowledged, whereas the need to change in face of all that is regarded as absolutely necessary, required by everyone, as well as “possible and opportune.” (EC 2018, p.5). European citizens appear to play a crucial role in the change, “as consumers and as citizens” (EC 2018, p.6). They are required to take care of the most vulnerable in the changes to come but their role is depicted as individual and behavioural, rather than political and collective, and occurring usually in an economic context (EC 2018, pp. 8, 11 & 22). The Commission also sets conditions for change in the document – its success depends on international cooperation, or rather on the rest of the world following the type of changes the EU sets out (EC 2018, p.21). The changes which “can go hand in hand with prosperity” will have “other economies follow its successful example” (EC 2018, p.23). At the same time, despite the absolute need for global change, it appears that the EU aims to prioritise, protect and boost “its own prospects for economic and social development” (EC 2018, p. 21). The financial strategy often refers to change not as a political or economic process from the above but rather as a stimulus that will occur during the implementation of the recommended policies, that all businesses and the European citizens are expected to follow (EC 2010, p. 14). The type of changes resulting are supposed to be further unspecified “changes in consumption and production patterns” (EC 2010, p. 14). Finally, in order to help people “anticipate and manage change” resulting, for instance, from modernising labour market, inclusive growth is necessary (EC 2010, p. 16).

In DiEM25’s European New Deal, the concept of change only appears two times in relation to short-term and long-term policy proposals. In the short-term, the changes refer to immediate “recalibrating existing institutions” without the need to implement multilateral agreements or treaties, on order to quickly pull out Europe drowning in the financial crisis (DiEM25 2018, p.23). The long-term policy proposals are “the ones that require deep institutional changes within nation-states and across Europe and the EU” – they are supposed to bring more democracy and social security in the post-capitalist future (DiEM25 2018, p.24). For the European Green Party, change is also expressed on two levels. First, it appears in relation to administrative top-down changes, change of documents, treaties, legislations, for example, like a change in of the Stability and Growth Pact (EGP 2019, p.7). Second describes change as a process of transition, that is democratic and desired by all Europeans, and in which EGP would act as a facilitator (EGP 2019, p.1). EU Greens recognise that such change can only come by citizens, social movements and civil society, organising to demand it (EGP 2019, p.13).

It seems that change does not offer much space for a discussion on economic transition within the European Union. The European Commission hardly sees change as a social or political process that would engage a wide spectrum of agents, defending the economic status quo. The concept appears to be imbued with the neoliberal ideology where it is used as a tool for motivation, control and social confusion (Eagleton-Pierce 2016, p. 17). Further, although the opposition mentions the concept in terms of a necessary deep and important process that requires multilevel top-down and bottom-up approaches, the character and implementation of it is not much discussed which appears rather inconsistent with the discourse of degrowth where change is regarded crucial (Annex 2).

4.3.3. Responsibility

The concept of responsibility is only briefly referred to in the climate strategies of the EU. The 2020 Package only mentions it in the context of emission reduction, and in relation to the Paris Agreement
The 2030 Climate & Energy Framework does not mention it at all. In the 2050 Climate Strategy, the concept of responsibility rarely occurs in the context of EU’s responsibility for pollution of “10% of global GHGs emissions”, according to the Commission. The strategies only mention current and not historical, and domestic and not consumption-based emission, thus the EU, as it is further mentioned, is “one of the major economies with the lowest per capita emissions” in comparison to other large economies of the United States, China or India (EC 2018, pp. 2-4). The EU is portrayed as an extremely successful actor, taking its responsibility to act seriously with their achievements in decoupling (EC 2018, p. 4). Put into such perspective, the responsibility of Europe for global pollution is highly undermined, whereas the progress in cutting the emission appears significant. Additionally, the concept of responsibility appears often in the context of the industry sectors duties or in relation to “corporate responsibility initiatives” (EC 2018, p. 22). In the Europe 2020 financial strategy, the concept of responsibility rarely occurs in economic or political concept and in relation to responsibility for the crisis caused. There is no mention of the bank industries’ responsibility for having sparked the crisis, neither is mention of political responsibility from above. Responsibility only appears context of mobilizing the individual and is usually mentioned alongside “participation” (EC 2010, p. 15). Responsibility and participation only appeared to be valued when rendered beneficial for the growing economy. Responsibility additionally falls on the individual and the collective is only mentioned in terms of corporate social responsibility (CSR), which is “a key element in ensuring long term employee and consumer trust.” (EC 2010, p. 15). In terms of global responsibility and participation, there is a focus on ensuring the partnership with developing states in order to promote growth and eradicate poverty (EC 2010, p. 22).

As far as the opposition stance towards responsibility is considered, DiEM25 only mentions it once in their document in regard to pan-European responsibility in the face of climate change, “DiEM25’ New Deal conceives of the necessary investment into people’s communities like the Green movement conceives of climate change: a joint responsibility of peoples whose fortunes are intertwined.” (DiEM25 2018, p.6). Unlike for DiEM25, responsibility appears more often in the European Green Party’s document but only briefly in relation to climate change and in relation to the international principle, when proposing a pan-European carbon tax based on the level of a country’s development and emissions, “Setting such a carbon price would fall in line with the Climate Convention’s principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities.” (EGP 2019, p.6). It more often relates to financial responsibility of institutions (p. 9), responsibility to save, welcome and introduce migrants to Europe, (p. 11), as well as responsibility to act in European solidarity ensuring “social security level of citizens, combating inequalities and dignified work conditions” protecting it “against exploitation, tax evasion, and dumping of all kinds.” (EGP 2019, p.12)

The concept of responsibility is either avoided or disregarded in the documents of the European Commission – a tactic that appears to help the Commission hide the responsibility for their actions regarding crises. Responsibility also only appears to be valuable when beneficial for the economy and it is mostly referred to as individual responsibility and not collective or state. Like under neoliberalism, responsibility is attributed to individual and when collective, it is only mentioned in terms of CSR (Eagleton-Pierce 2016, p. 157; Annex 2). The opposition puts responsibility in a wider global context and regards it as joint which places it closer to the discourse of degrowth, however it does not seem to attribute much importance to it which makes it rather a difficult standpoint for discussion.

4.3.4. Governance

In the climate strategies, the concept of governance is absent from the 2020 Package, only to frequently appear in the 2030 Framework. There, governance only exists in relation to a process from above, used to ensure the delivery of climate goals and energy objectives (EC 2014, pp. 7 & 17-18). It is seemingly a product of successful European cooperation with the Member States giving an idea that every member is on board (EC 2014, p. 5 & 12). However, if the cooperation is not successful, the governance structure will need to strengthen and be set in legislation the EU (EC 2014, p. 13). The concept of governance also appears in the global context, where “globalisation of energy flows and the increased variety of international actors” creates an opportunity to develop a rule-based energy governance worldwide, based on competitive, secure and sustainable energy (EC 2014, p. 18). At last, in the 2050 Strategy the concept is only written with a capital “g” in reference to the Governance of Energy Union, which means that
cooperative approach either proved to be already ineffective or the EU simply decided to strengthen the governing role (EC 2018). In the financial strategy, governance appears in a purely economic context, as a process implemented from above, and is rendered very powerful, “we have powerful tools to hand in the shape of new economic governance, supported by the internal market, our budget, our trade and external economic policy and the disciplines and support of economic and monetary union.” (EC 2010, p. 1). A “stronger economic governance” from the European Union is required in order for all Member States to deliver desired results (EC 2010, p. 4). Financial institutions are also required to take up a governing role, “to address the weaknesses identified during the financial crisis” (EC 2010, p. 23). Additionally, such stronger governance is a condition for change (EC 2010, p. 25).

In DiEM25’s document governance only appears in relation to financial institution that DiEM25 aspires to make more democratic, indicating that such governance should be collective (DiEM25 2018, p. 11). European Green Party uses the concept to increase the transparency and openness of the European institutions. For example, a Pan-European Governance Registry, which aims to provide a “unified and comprehensive account of EU institutional decision-making and special interests”, would make the financial interests of all Members of European Parliament as well as EU officials and their relationships with lobbyists, also to expose the latter (EGP 2019, p. 2). Additionally, the proposed Open-Sourced Governance aims to make all records, parliamentary hearings and sessions digitised and available to look all citizens (EGP 2019, p. 15).

In the understanding of European Commission, governance appears to fall towards the discource of neoliberalism and growth, where the concept is used as a manner of control (Eagleton-Pierce 2016, p. 93; Annex 2). The opposition does, however, introduce important points regarding governance presenting it as crucially collective and multidimensional, i.e. across public and political spheres.

4.3.5. Participation

In the climate strategies, the concept of participation is used in varying contexts. In the first two strategies, there seem to be only one kind of unquestionable participation, which relates to proposed solution mechanisms. In the 2020 Package, the industrial plants are obliged to participate in the ETS (EC 2008, p. 6), whereas the Framework 2030 demands from all Country Members a participation in relation to the international aviation organisations, with aim of creating “a global market-based-mechanism in the aviation sector” (EC 2015, p. 14). The 2050 Strategy slightly (participation mentioned only two times) expands on the concept. The crucial involvement of the European citizens in the transition is highlighted (EC 2018, p. 15). There is even a suggestion of creating platform for Citizen Dialogues where EU residents could discuss, together with national governments, businesses, non-governmental organisations, cities and communities, the Union’s “fair contribution” in achieving “the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement in the long-term”, and to decide on the main “building blocks to achieve this transformation” (EC 2018, p. 25). The financial strategy appears to only mention and promote participation under the condition that it can be economically beneficial, that is when it leads to the increase of growth and social cohesion (EC 2010, p. 21); for instance, “An agenda for new skills and jobs” aims to modernise labour markets and empower people by developing their skills throughout the lifecycle with a view to increase labour participation and better match labour supply and demand, including through labour mobility (EC 2010, p.4). Moreover Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) appears to be the main means of delivering the participation and ensuring growth (EC 2010, p. 16). Participation is also mentioned in relation to the EU economic activity, within the Union and outside. It is global growth that provides opportunities for more participation and it appears that everyone must be on board and participate in the market economy in order to foster it, “All instruments of external economic policy need to be deployed to foster European growth through our participation in open and fair markets world-wide.” (EC 2010, p. 16). It appears rather clear in this context that participation is explicitly linked to growth.

DiEM25 only refers to the participation in relation to the process of democratising financial institutions and corporations, where “local, regional and national communities” would participate in the boards of directors (DiEM25 2018, p.22). EU Greens, on the other hand, regards participation as a crucial tool in order to account the EU contribution to climate and environmental budget (EGP 2019, pp. 6-7). Public participation is also a desired outcome of a radical transformation of “the delivery of public goods”, where the citizens get to have a say about the distribution (EGP 2019, p. 15).
Although participation is not of crucial importance for DiEM25, it is a key tool for the EU Greens and most importantly it appears to be broadened in the 2050 Climate Strategy by the European Commission, where the concept falls outside of the ideological understanding and more towards a degrowth approach where it can lead towards a dialogue between divergent interests (Annex 2).

4.3.6. Stability

The concept of stability appears as an important precondition for the functioning of the European Union, whereas climate change is said to pose a serious threat to it (EC 2014; EC 2018). There is also a gradual increase of the significance of stability noticeable, from being absent in the 2020 Package, to being mentioned a few times in the 2030 Climate & Energy Framework, especially in relation to “market stability” and a need to protect it and make it more resilient against changes (EC 2014, p. 8), to, eventually, making it a political issue in the 2050 Climate Strategy. There, the concept appears in a different context comparing to the other documents. First, “instability” caused by climate change is acknowledged (EC 2018, p. 2). Secondly, there appears a need for “regulatory stability” which will bring prosperity and sustainability in the European economy, and “achieve full implementation of this framework.” (EC 2018, p.5). Additionally, stability also occurs in relation to the climate – “stabilising the climate in this century” seems like a crucial goal and a chance for the EU to be one of the first to come to the forefront of global action and “lead the way worldwide” (EC 2018, p. 22). The financial strategy attaches cardinal importance to the concept of stability, right behind the importance of delivering growth. Stability is found in the title and it is mentioned 24 times all throughout the documents. Stability is also often allied with the concept of “convergence” in policy recommendations – to stabilise means also to agglomerate. Furthermore, a mutual and positive relationship between growth and stability is continuously taken for granted. First, stability seems to stimulate and sustain growth, and it is being portrayed as a precondition for it (EC 2010, p.2). Secondly, restoration of financial pre-crisis stability is a measure indicating the full exit from the crisis and possible end of the recovery plan (EC 2010, p. 23). Finally, the relation is reversed where growth is a precondition for stability. Full financial stability can be announced as achieved once a continues GDP growth is again “firmly established” (EC 2010, p.23).

In the documents of opposition, stability is attached a different, although in both important, level of significance. In the EGP’s deal, stability appears several times. The document criticises the understanding of stability in the EU’s Stability and Growth Pact, accusing it of the “harsh constraints on EU spending” it contributed to (EGP 2019, p. 7). It acknowledges the importance of stability, the need to maintain it but in a reformed way. For example, when referring to the EU’s financial institution, European Stability Mechanism (ESM), EGP aims to make it more democratic and expand “its ability to act in a timely and decisive manner in combating any factor of economic instability” (EGP 2019, p. 9). Stability as such is understood as something positive and desirable. To cite a few examples: under the Housing Security for All policy proposals “stabilising communities” appears as an important premise (EGP 2019, p. 9); when discussed in economic dimension, it is used to justify the creation of a proposed European Treasury "that would complement the European Central Bank and offer a stabilising effect in times of crisis" (EGP 2019, p. 2); lastly, in relation to employment and the proposed job guarantee program where "stable is desired" (EGP 2019, p. 3). Although it is discussed in relation to economy, housing, and employment, stability does not appear in the context of environmental crisis. DiEM25 attaches far more significance to the concept of stability. Understood as both economic and political, it appears 23 times all throughout the document, in reference to economy, society, politics, housing, employment, as well as in response to crisis. Stability, together with national sovereignty, is a prioritised goal assumed to be desired by all Europeans, implementation of their plan will “stabilise” and “civilise” Europe (DiEM25 2018, pp. 7&9). Further, it is portrayed as an outcome of the deal, such as universal basic dividend which will contribute to “stabilising society and reinvigorating the notion of shared prosperity” (DiEM25 2018, p. 21); or the Anti-Poverty Program which aims to “rebuild the stable, well-supported communities” after the hardship during the financial crisis (DiEM25 2018, p. 14). Stability appears as a crucial step and precondition in building a more democratic and prosperous Europe (DiEM25 2018, pp. 8&25). DiEM25 claims that under the current political and economic system, Europe lacks proper economic and social stability (DiEM25 2018, p.17). It criticises the neoliberal understanding of stability which tries to establish "a federation-lite with yet more powers to the bureaucrats of Brussels" (DiEM25 2018, p. 7). In the party’s understanding, on the other hand, stability
seems to be more of a process, rather than something implemented from above and occurs at all levels, “a rebalancing that is conducive to economic stabilisation, societal recovery and democratisation” (DiEM25 2018, p. 25). Similarly to the EU Greens, DiEM25 does not discuss stability in reference to environmental crisis.

Stability is a highly important concept for both sides. Just like in the discourse of growth, it is an important precondition for growth (Ferguson 2019; Annex 2) and just like under neoliberalism, it is used to present normative values and order, and a way to sustain the ideology. Here, the opposition also falls closer towards the neoliberal and growth discourse as it presents the stability as a desired state for all Europeans (Annex 2). It is difficult to say whether stability offers a window of opportunity but the importance that both parties devote to it is an interesting point for discussion, which will be presented in the next chapter.
5. Discussion

This chapter aim is to first interpret the results and compare them to the secondary literature on discourses and growth ideology in order to uncover their meanings. Secondly, the chapter will discuss opportunities and recommendations that stemmed from the main findings.

5.1. Meeting of the discourses under common growth commitment

When it comes to the documents of the European Commission, the findings presented in the previous chapter revealed how the ideology of growth and the view on crisis informs the economic trajectory and environmental solutions in the European Union. The results consisted of several analogies to Dryzek’s discourses, as well as neoliberal ideology and elements of growth hegemony discussed by Ferguson. The climate strategies seem to resemble the discourse of Ecological Modernisation (EM) most clearly, however elements of Sustainable Development (SD), such as cooperation between states, and Promethean Discourse in relation to the ecological limits can also be traced. The meaning of these analogies is further discussed below. Additionally, it was found that the European Commission promoted a number of strategies that the critiques of growth warned against. When it comes to the opposition parties, the stance on economic growth and crises, although often appearing to be in strong opposition from the mainstream, at times appeared to operate within the status-quo frameworks (EGP) diverted from the degrowth prerequisites (DiEM25). Thus, the following analysis will hopefully enrich the discussion on how to possibly adjust the opposition arguments in order to break the devastating ideology.

In the EU climate strategies, one of the points of comparison to Dryzek’s and Ferguson’s discourses is the assumption that capitalist economy and growth are essential elements of the response to crises. This is similar to the EM discourse, where “the existence of the capitalist political economy is taken for granted” (Dryzek 2013, p. 174), as well as to the growth discourse described by Ferguson (2019) and Kallis (2018), which highlights the idea that endless economic expansion can go hand in hand with environmental protection. It also appears to be of “common sense” for every State Member to adhere to the unified economic vision and achieve all promised benefits and those that do not follow will pay significant costs. Such adherence to a market system and a belief in the common good can be found in the neoliberal ideology (Eagleton-Pierce 2016, p. 97). Additionally, in Gramscian understanding, this hegemonic “common sense” dominates other “common senses” and therefore results in the ideology (Kallis 2018, p. 138). This leads to a situation where any opposing arguments could be easily argued against or even discarded. Thus, the universalisation of the vision builds a thick wall around the European Union that can stop any waves of alternatives from coming. Another point is the practical effortlessness of transition appears to form a sense of reassurance, which, also characterises both SD and EM discourses. It serves the purpose of comforting the residents of prosperous states, ensuring them that no difficult choices and painful changes need to be made between economic growth, which is stable to their wellbeing, and climate protection (Dryzek 2013, p. 175). All the citizens of the European Union need to do is to make the right but simple choices that are also economically beneficial – a clever win-win solution.

The assumptions about favourable relations between economic growth and environmental protection mean that all policy actions should rest on the market-based solutions and that the neoliberal approach to problem solving is taken for granted but the proposed solutions provide additional points for discussion. Firstly, it should be highlighted that the reduction targets for domestic EU emissions proposed by the Commission are not sufficient for wealthy nations in order to stay below two degrees threshold and allow lower-income countries to develop. According to Anderson (2012, p. 35), “Annex 1 countries need to reach emission reductions of the order of about 40 per cent by 2015, 70 per cent by 2020, and over 90 per cent by 2030”. This reduction measure also only accounts for the domestic emissions, and not ones based on consumption. It appears therefore clear that the Union is not on the right track. Secondly, a heavy reliance on technological solutions is presented as positive and seen as beneficial for the economy, whilst any side effects are invisible for the reader. For instance, there is no mention of the fact that CCS is often regarded as not yet fully reliable and developed, especially on such
large scale (Anderson 2012). Additionally, some solutions can be even hazardous or at least questionable, such as nuclear energy or liquified natural gas (LNG). The latter is presented in the EU as a good alternative for heating and transport. In the climate strategies, the Commission does not, however, acknowledge that gas is a fossil fuel, which in addition to emitting huge amounts of CO2, also emits potent methane, whilst its fracking can be dangerous for human life and negatively impact the earth surface. Reliance on LNG, despite its temporary character, also uses necessary financial fund and locks Europe in another fossil dependency (gastivists.org 2019). The fervent belief in technological solutions places the EU Climate Strategies at the centre of the growth discourse. The pattern is only reinforced when it comes to economic transformation. Circular economy, which the Commission paints in radical colours, is regarded by the degrowth community as another status-quo model of growth (Hobson & Lynch 2016; Corvellec 2018). Decoupling, rendered in the documents as a victorious tactic, has never actually proven to be a successful strategy (Hickel & Kallis 2019; Ward et al. 2016). Behavioural changes, which are given profound significance, resemble the reassurance of simplicity and individualistic approach of neoliberalism which denies a need for an important political action, diminishing the agency of the states, and radically undermining the gravity of the situation (Eagleton-Pierce 2016).

At the first glance, it also seems like everyone is equally engaged which could be seen as a positive pattern but at a closer look, the type of engagement seems to be locked within the walls of neoliberal ideology. This can be reflected in the idea of solutions defined from above, by the European Commission, that all country members and European citizens must adhere to. Such occurrence can be seen as “a technocratic/ corporatist style of policy making monopolised by scientific, economic, and political elites” which is core to the discourse of Ecological Modernisation (Dryzek 2013, p. 177). The leadership of the European Union can be characterised by the desire to present itself as the greenest and cleanest actor on the global environmental arena, which is also a characteristic element of the Ecological Modernisation discourse (Dryzek 2013, p. 165). At the same time, diminishing the role of the state can be compared to its function present by Dryzek in the discourse of Ecological Modernisation, where the state, motivated by public good defined in economic terms, is supposed to ensure “restructuring of the capitalist political economy along more environmentally defensible lines” (Dryzek 2013, p. 174). Although cooperation and partnership are often mentioned in EU strategies, it is also competition that appears to dictate considerable part of human affairs, whilst subordination characterises the relation to nature. The strategies therefore oscillate between the discourse of EM and SD (Dryzek 2013, p. 158). For the discussion on post-growth economy, it is important to highlight the EU’s understanding of limits. As Dryzek (2013) highlights, both Sustainable Development and Ecological Modernisation push limits to growth into the background. There, the ecological limits are respected but economic growth can nonetheless proceed indefinitely (Dryzek 2013, p. 157). However, the EU does not even acknowledge ecological limits in their climate strategies which, in this sense, places it within the Promethean discourse (Ferguson 2019). The EU does however, like in SD and EM, style the unlimited economic growth in “green growth” and “sustainable development” pursuit which helps to sustain its own discourse (Dryzek 2013).

As far as the opposition parties and their stance towards crises and economic growth are concerned, it appears important to first place them in the opposing spectrum. Both EGP and DiEM25 insists on diverting from the mainstream trajectory and a number of solutions proposed aim at important structural changes where people and nature is moved to the front, however when it comes to growth, the core and ideological element of the EU strategies, the stance is not as clear. None of the parties directly expressed the willingness to equitably downscale the production or consumption, which is key for the degrowth transition. Such occurrence appeared to have different reasons for the two parties. The EU Greens might either appear hesitant and insecure as to how a post-growth Europe could look or still believes in growth. For DiEM25, this could be a way to place themselves in the ecomarxist spectrum, where growth, although troublesome, is not the centre of interest – capital accumulation is (Mayert 2018). Although they often go hand in hand, the difference between the two might have an important significance when it comes to the argumentation and policy design.
5.1.1. Consequences of growth-affair

Sustaining the discourses based on economic growth will not only lead to lack of proper implementation of the Paris Agreement, but it can in fact severely threaten the existence of ecosystems and thus the very survival of the humanity. Based on the secondary literature and the results, this paper summoned four most severe potential consequences: (1) depoliticization of citizens and climate crisis, (2) instrumentalization of people, nature, and crisis, (3) underestimation of crises, (4) universalisation of harmful economic vision.

Multileveled depoliticization can be compared to the arguments made by Remling (2018) and Machin (2019). The scholars observed that depoliticization was not only visible in the EU documents they studied but also rendered as a positive phenomenon. The “don’t worry, the market will solve it for you” manner present in the strategies, where the role of the European citizens is restricted to making good consumer choices leads to the deprivation of their political agency and important engagement in the climate action (Kallis 2018). Once good consumer choices are made, the citizens are allowed to continue their business-as-usual habits of consuming. However, if the *Limits to Growth* were to be revived, it appears that all type of unnecessary mass consumption of natural resources must be reduced, in order for other people and future generation to be able to sustain their own basic needs (Ferguson 2019, p. 13; UN 2015). The choice that the European citizens does not therefore seem as free but rather resembles Polanyi’s argument about deliberate plan to gradually disempower people from their political abilities (in Sachs *et al.* 2010, p. 147). Moreover, depoliticization of citizens and climate crisis enables market mechanism to continue operating. As Remling (2018, p. 478) concludes, the effects of the discourse and the ultimate depoliticization “effectively protects the status quo and allows Europe’s socio-economic development to continue largely unaffected.” An important argument in criticism of depoliticization can be lastly epitomised in Gramsci’s words, “There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*” (Gramsci 1989, p. 140). For the intellectual, it was crucial to acknowledge that every man “participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct”, therefore he or she contributes equally to sustaining “a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought” (p. 141). The leaders have to therefore ensure the possibility for it to happen, if a truthful transformation was to occur.

It appears that both nature and, to a certain extent, citizens are instrumentalized by being treated as a capital that can be adjusted to the economic vision and assigned a role. An orderly, peaceful and highly adaptable future society is taken for granted. The instrumentalization also happens in relation to climate crisis, which is reflected in the link between the economic prosperity of Europe and climate action. Climate crisis is treated similarly to the discourse of EM, as an economic opportunity, a potential for modernising the society and a chance to further rationalise relationships with nature (Dryzek 2013, pp. 176-179).

It can also be said that the climate crisis is underestimated in the EU strategies. This can be reflected in the market solutions, which can occur almost effortlessly. For instance, when it comes to reducing consumption, the EU expanding on SDG 12 on “sustainable consumption and production pattern”, where reduction is only referred to as reduction of waste and losses and not to reduction in consumption levels, completely disregards important solutions proposed not only by degrowth community but also many scientists (UN 2015). Additionally, the sense of effortlessness results in a situation where climate change appears to be somewhat incidental which can have a serious influence on the type of changes necessary to stay below 1.5 degrees and also belittles the importance and urgency action (Anderson 2012). It appears clear that language is important and that is the ideology of neoliberalism and hegemony of growth and the ultimate commitment to it prevents the necessary solutions.

As it was analysed in the previous chapter, the EU often universalised their economic vision, not only among the Country Members but also worldwide. Dryzek argued that such a tactic, characteristic for instance for Ecological Modernisation discourse, results in agency restrictions and granting power to the privileged developed nations who can use it “to consolidate their economic advantages” (Dryzek 2013, pp. 177). It is additionally established that the economic trajectory has to be desired by all people, a feature typical to neoliberalism (Eagleton-Pierce 2016). The EU appears to build a Noah’s Ark, which can only be boarded by those who agree with the strategies presented. Those who do not, will be left out.
to drown. Such hegemonic supremacy can be discussed in Gramscian idea of the hegemonic character of European culture towards the rest of the world that Europe continued to implement, resulting in harmful action and a misunderstanding of proper leadership (Gramsci 1989). The Noah’s Ark immediately appears less attractive when we realise that the mission is not to save the planet but to drive it into further disaster.

5.2. Changing the storyline

Based on all the above findings, it seems like it might be impossible to change the dominant growth story and that its ending has already been determined. The focus on concepts that were initially rendered as less imbued with ideology revealed that although many of these concepts are connected to growth and neoliberal ideology, there might be some openings for the discussion on alternative post-growth politics, or, at last, some recommendation for the opposition. Additionally, paying attention to more neutral but yet important concepts could prevent them from becoming ambiguous, politically contested, and result in exposing malleable properties that create confusion among the recipients (Dryzek 2013, p. 149).

5.2.1. Desired leadership

“After every disaster, it is necessary first of all to enquire into the responsibility of the leaders, in the most literal sense” – Antonio Gramsci, Selections from Prison Notebooks

The advantage of owning an “everyone on board” premise, that the European Union often used in the documents, is a very powerful and successful asset for the EU. As it was discussed in the previous section, currently it seems to serve the purpose of sustaining and strengthening the ideology of growth. Upon studying concepts of governance, responsibility and participation which captures those behind the transition towards carbon-neutral economy and how the transition could actually occur, the concepts often appeared to already serve the neoliberal ideology. This was the case especially when referring to the concept of governance both in the documents of the European Commission but also of DiEM25, which appeared to portray itself as an omniscient leader of the transition (Appendix 2). Such behaviour of the opposition actor might remind the alarming phenomenon that Gramsci warned against – where the leader instead of leading, begins to dominate, resulting in disastrous consequences (Bates 1975, p. 352). As Eagleton-Pierce describes, the concept of governance became somewhat of a paradox, which, one hand, appears “to open a dialogue with the wider experience of politics or ‘the political’”, but on the other, “sometimes within the same moment, the word could also create effects that may actually confuse or obfuscate how forms of power are exercised” (Eagleton-Pierce 2016, p. 95). In the documents of the European Commission, governance is in fact strengthened with the following strategies, however, there is also an important shift in the EU documents in the 2050 Strategy is more open towards regarding those behind the transition, namely participation, where increasing citizens participation in discussing the occurrence of transition is mentioned as an important element. Additionally, the importance the EU places on their aspiration to become the climate leader could be, if joined with increased participation, used to introduce alternatives. When placing the concept of governance with participation, the effect is similar for the opposition parties, where strengthening the latter could lead to improvement of governance and therefore lead to the necessary leadership for the climate transition – a tool promoted by the degrowth community. If the current EC vision entrenched with growth could be decoupled from its wrongful associations and if people were rightfully considered, the EU’s ideal of leadership could be used in the positive Gramscian sense.

5.2.2. Reflection on stability

“Disorder is inherent in stability. Civilized man doesn't understand stability. He's confused it with rigidity. Our political and economic and social leaders drool about stability constantly. It's their favourite word, next to ‘power’, (...). Stabilization to them means order, uniformity, control. And that's a half-witted and potentially genocidal misconception. No matter how thoroughly they control a system, disorder invariably leaks into it. (...). True stability results when presumed order and presumed disorder
In the financial strategies of the EU, stability and growth appeared as mutually dependent, whereas in climate strategies, climate stabilisation could be ensured by market mechanisms and more growth. However, as Ferguson argues, the assumption that economic growth “enhances political stability in liberal democracies” is often mistakenly taken for granted (Ferguson 2019, p. 68). The correlation between growth and stability gives an idea that growth in itself is a liberal value but, as Ferguson (p. 68) points out, even traditional liberal thinkers did not necessarily claim so. For instance, Mill called for a ‘stationary state’ where “no one is poor, no one desires to be richer, nor has any reason to fear being thrust back by the efforts of others to push themselves forward” (Mill 2004: 189; Ferguson 2019, p. 70). Thus, the idea of inherent co-dependence between economic growth and stability is inconsistent. As Ferguson (Ferguson 2019, p. 60) further argues, the idea that liberal values such as peace, prosperity and stability as dependent upon growth is not justifiable enough. However, the desire of EU to ensure stability could certainly be seen as a platform for discussion.

Both the EU and the opposition parties consider stability to be a necessary precondition for socio-economic transition and at the same time a desired outcome of it, taking for granted that stability is a desired state of all Europeans. Instability that resulted from financial crises appears necessary and relatively easy to eradicate in the documents of the EU Greens and DiEM25. However, such simple assumption could result in two serious issues and could be a point for further discussion. Firstly, the indisputable desire could make the ideology unquestionable. This argument refers to Gramsci’s (1989) idea of “passive revolution”, where the leader conveys their desires without the previous consensus of the class, leading to dictatorship. This consequently results in mal-interpretation and distorted versions of it, such as was the interpretation of Marxism in Eastern Europe and Latin America in the 20th century, which led eventual development of two polar-opposite camps which, despite the Cold War end almost 30 years ago, are still strongly embedded in today’s political narrative and prevent any alternatives from entering the international arena. Secondly, neither stability nor instability was mentioned in relation to the climate crises in any of the documents. However, with effects of climate change already disastrous with the current levels of CO2 in the atmosphere, instability might no longer be possible to avoid. Thus, perhaps instead of trying to bring stability in crisis, the instability caused by climate change should be immediately acknowledged in order to enable the society to better adapt. The crises situation most likely requires a new understanding of stability where the system “expects the unexpected, is prepared to be disrupted, waits to be transformed”, as Tom Robbins perfectly captured it.

“are balanced. A truly stable system expects the unexpected, is prepared to be disrupted, waits to be transformed.”

– Tom Robbins, Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, 1976
6. Conclusion

“Discourses are powerful, but they are not impenetrable.”


The overarching aim was to understand how the dominant ideology shapes climate policies in the European Union contribute to the quest for a post-growth debate in the wealthiest industrialised countries at a large international scale, by looking at European Union which proves to be the right example. Through applying discourse analysis approach to the study of the key European Union documents from two opposing blocks: the European Commission and the alternative parties, the European Green Party and the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25), it was found that economic growth guides the climate proposals of the European Commission, whereas DiEM25 heavily distances itself from it and EU Greens is ambiguous.

The second part of the analysis, which focused on concepts less imbued with political ideology revealed some opening spaces, although it could be said that prospects for change appeared somewhat limited. In the EU strategies, most of the concepts were already imbued with growth and neoliberal ideology, thus challenging to argue against, whereas the opposition parties often failed to provide ideas of how to understand them differently. Nonetheless, two of the concepts, participation and stability, appeared to provide some sort of indication for possible discussion openings. Although understood with many differences (consumerisation of citizens versus democratisation of structures), participation was a crucial element in all the policies. Establishing the importance of participation is a crucial starting point for redesigning the economic trajectory that could restore agency of the European citizens and their active role in change. One chance to improve the leadership could be through a fiercer promotion of deliberate democracies. European civil society often proves to be a unified and well-organised one with more platforms to voice the opinions. Thus, the opposition parties could definitely benefit from a stronger cooperation with those, while at the same time pressuring the European Union to fulfils its promises for an inclusive transition that are included in the climate strategies. Similarly, stability also appeared as a concept of an immense significance for all the parties, often at the same level as growth, but of a less ideological dimension. Worth exploring, especially for the opposition, would be a possibility of replacing the premise of growth with the premise of stability as well as redefining the concept of stability in the instable times of climate crises.

Future research could additionally look into the values of liberal states which the European Union claims to protect in the name of free economy, at the same time deliberately depriving its citizens from the truthful chance to decide upon their vision of political trajectory in such turbulent times of crises. Where this thesis falls short could be enhanced by a further research into the opposition parties and other actors in the climate transition in order to study their cooperation and responses to the proposals.

Finally, the thesis has hopefully contributed to strengthening the belief that the necessary actions to introduce alternative movement does not need to wait for the right moment, that it can be possible to already focus on “the more immediate tensions within the current hegemony” (Ferguson 2019, p. 219) and that it is worth remembering that “ours is now a world of very difficult futures, and the sooner we acknowledge this, the sooner we can seriously address the challenges we face” (Anderson 2012, p. 35).
7. Acknowledgements

The acknowledgement section of my thesis plays a particular importance for me. The truth really is that I could not have done it without the people I below mention.

I start by a thank you to the people I have never actually met but whose work I have used, and probably abused, in this thesis. Under the Google Scholar search bar, it says “stand on the shoulders of giants”. Ignoring the fact that the saying is taken by the digital giant, I think that the words serve as an important lesson about humility and about what we owe to other people.

As for the people I had the great privilege to meet, first of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Kristina Boréus for her generous support, insightful comments, immense knowledge as well as incredible understanding and sensitivity with regards to my condition, without having to give me any special treatment. Although I have struggled to believe that my thesis could be any good, she continued to remind me that it was at least very interesting. I would like to thank Mikael Malmaeus, my subject reviewer, for his useful feedback, excitement, understanding and kindness – although we only said ‘hello’ in person, his emails always made me feel calmer and more confident about my work. Many thanks to our thesis counsellor and my country fellow Małgorzata Blicharska who, in her extreme business, always managed to find time to respond to my emails and talk to me about my problems. She was also right to tell me that thesis writing was a learning process and at last I have become much more experienced. Thank you to my opponent, Mattias, for his useful feedback and for being able to share the hardships experienced at the last thesis turn.

Thank you to my closest ones. To my best friends in Uppsala, who provided laughter, entertainment, endless discussions during which I often learnt more than ever in books or a classroom. They often forced themselves upon me to make sure I feel like I am not alone, for that I’m utterly grateful. Thank you to my best friends far away, whom I ignored awfully in the process but who nevertheless been incredibly forgiving and supportive. Thinking about them was often the reason why I could go on. Thank you to my partner for supporting me in my times of crises. Thank you for always being there for me and bringing me back to reality. Thank you to my family who endured the ignorance, adjusted to my caprices and understood my feelings. It must have costed them great pain to see me struggle but they have not gotten angry or given up at once. Finally, a special thank you to my one-year-old nephew who probably doesn’t realise yet what “thank you” means. Nonetheless, thank you for giving me the much-needed hope.
8. References


The Guardian (2019) ‘It’s our time to rise up’: youth climate strikes held in 100 countries. Available


Appendixes

Appendix 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse analysis</th>
<th>Sustainable Development</th>
<th>Ecological Modernisation</th>
<th>Promethean Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic entities recognised of constructed</td>
<td>o Nestied and networked social ecological systems  o Capitalist Economy  o Ambiguity concerning existence of limits</td>
<td>o Complex systems  o Nature as waste treatment plan  o Capitalist Economy  o The state</td>
<td>o Nature as only brute matter  o Markets  o Prices  o Energy  o Technology  o People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions about natural relationships</td>
<td>o Cooperation  o Nature subordinate  o Economic growth, environmental protection, distributive justice and long-term sustainability go together</td>
<td>o Partnership encompassing government, business, environmentalists, scientists  o Subordination of nature  o Environmental protection and economic prosperity go together</td>
<td>o Hierarchy of humans over everything else  o Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agents and their motives</td>
<td>o Many agents at different levels, transnational and local, as well as the state; motivated by the public good</td>
<td>o Partners; motivated by public good</td>
<td>o Everyone; motivated by material self-interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key metaphors and other rhetorical devices</td>
<td>o Organic Growth  o Nature as natural capital  o Connection to progress  o Reassurance</td>
<td>o Tiny households  o Connection to progress  o Reassurance</td>
<td>o Mechanistic  o Trends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Dryzek (2013, pp. 147 – 184)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discursive resources of the growth hegemony</th>
<th>Promethean discourse</th>
<th>Sustainable development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growth constitutive or derivative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutive – the commitment to growth is a fundamental principle</td>
<td>Constitutive – the belief that growth and the environment can be reconciled is fundamental</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradictions and antagonisms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradiction between socioeconomic and ecological systems</td>
<td>Sustainable development has not lessened global environmental problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-growth discursive resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Increased awareness of humanity’s vulnerability to ecological risks  o Environmental and ecological security</td>
<td>Transformations of sustainable development such as green growth, green economy, environmental and ecological security</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Ferguson (2019, p.120)
## Appendix 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPT</th>
<th>CATEGORY DEFINITION (CRITERION OF SELECTION)</th>
<th>EXAMPLES AFTER 1ST REVISION (10–50% MATERIAL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHANGE</td>
<td>DISCOURSE OF GROWTH: Rapid, frenetic, often inevitable, with no boundaries; omnipresent, normative (everyone on board &amp; must adopt); political keyword that “can be plotted and strategized” and used as a tool for motivation, control and social confusion</td>
<td>“beneficial role of a change in consumer choices that are less carbon intensive” (EC 2018: 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DEGROWTH: Crucial; Understood as external (inevitable) as well internal (caused by the people); positive – provides a chance for socio-political reorganization and a trigger for economic transformation; should be participatory and not applied; multidimensional – happens across many levels of society structures but also in mindsets;</td>
<td>“DIEM25’s long-term policy proposals are the ones that require deep institutional changes within nation-states and across Europe and the EU” (DIEM25 2018: 25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOVERNANCE</td>
<td>DISCOURSE OF GROWTH: Form/manner of control (territorial, institutional, economic) from above; gives an idea for being open for dialogue but often confuses instead; today often appears with the term “global” and indicates universality of neoliberal values; within similar context can be sometimes understood as “leadership”</td>
<td>“The new Governance of the Energy Union integrates this need by foreseeing the involvement of stakeholders in the preparation of the national energy and climate plans” (EC 2018: 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DEGROWTH: Indicates alternative (to the national government) form of governing that can occur within and by the state but also without and beyond; can be expressed in deliberate democracy models to understand and transformed derived preferences;</td>
<td>“Institutional change, longer term, will have to focus on this governance more than anything else” (DIEM25 2018: 95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPATION (ALSO, PARTNERSHIP)</td>
<td>DISCOURSE OF GROWTH: Complex term, thus many questions can arise when trying to specify; emphasis on self-mobilization, individual ability to adapt, is often required; often circulates around such words as ‘complementarity,’ ‘synergy,’ and ‘trust’ which reinforce the neoliberal theme; a highly malleable keyword in development policy often used to hide quite opposite hierarchical tendencies</td>
<td>“Policies to promote gender equality will be needed to increase (labour force participation thus adding to growth and social cohesion.” (EC 2010, p. 21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DEGROWTH: Valuable because can lead to a dialogue between divergent interests; engagement of the bottom-up movements is crucial for the politics; cooperation over competition; should be voluntary based on a truthful willingness to engage in change; in the global spectrum, new ideas of state sovereignty are considered;</td>
<td>“We support the right of workers to organize in trade unions as well as collective bargaining, social dialogue and worker participation.” (EU Greens 2019).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESPONSIBILITY</td>
<td>DISCOURSE OF GROWTH: Capacity to fulfill duties or obligations informed by dominant discourses; Usually appears in association with ‘individual’ or ‘personal’ and forms a desirable human condition that creates cultural connection without truly addressing class, race, gender and geographical diversity; in this context forms of (individualized) collective responsibility/action can be found in corporate social responsibility (CSR) – conceptually allied with such notions as accountability, stakeholderism and performance, and responses to global (financial) crisis whereas the responsibility of political and business elites is frequently denied</td>
<td>“At the national level, Member States will need to promote shared collective (defined above as CSR) and individual responsibility in combating poverty and social exclusion” (EC 2010, p. 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>DEGRESSION</td>
<td>DISCOURSE OF GROWTH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Responsibility mostly lies on politicians and industries but also people in privileged financial situations; responsibilities of developed nations towards developing countries is rendered important but by solving the cause and not treating the symptons; comparing to neoliberal association between ‘governance’ and ‘leadership’, in degrowth context, it is responsibility that is more conceptually aligned with ‘leadership’ – alternative bodies should be created to lead;</td>
<td>Stability is desired, instability is to be avoided; paired with political, often in the electoral jargon, and financial, esp. since the 2007-9 crisis; associated with order, resistance and predictability; normative pursuit of balance and certainty; in this context, an ambiguous and often paradoxical term esp. regarding volatile character of the economic system; often prioritized when coincided with justice and democracy. Assuring stability is dependent on economic growth but stability is also important precondition for growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“(...) a joint responsibility of peoples whose fortunes are intertwined.” (DEM125)</td>
<td>“Overcoming these challenges in the euro area is of paramount importance, and urgent, in order to secure stability and sustained and employment creating growth.” (EC 2016: 24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DEGRESSION</td>
<td>DISCOURSE OF GROWTH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to see the alternative outside the mainstream and a positive way to adapt to a difficult situation; complex but feasible; participatory although sometimes assumingly unanimous in the message conveyed</td>
<td>“The purpose of this strategic vision not to set targets, but to create a vision and sense of direction, plan for it, and inspire as well as enable stakeholders, researchers, entrepreneurs and citizens alike to develop new and innovative industries, businesses and associated jobs.” (EC 2018: 23)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
