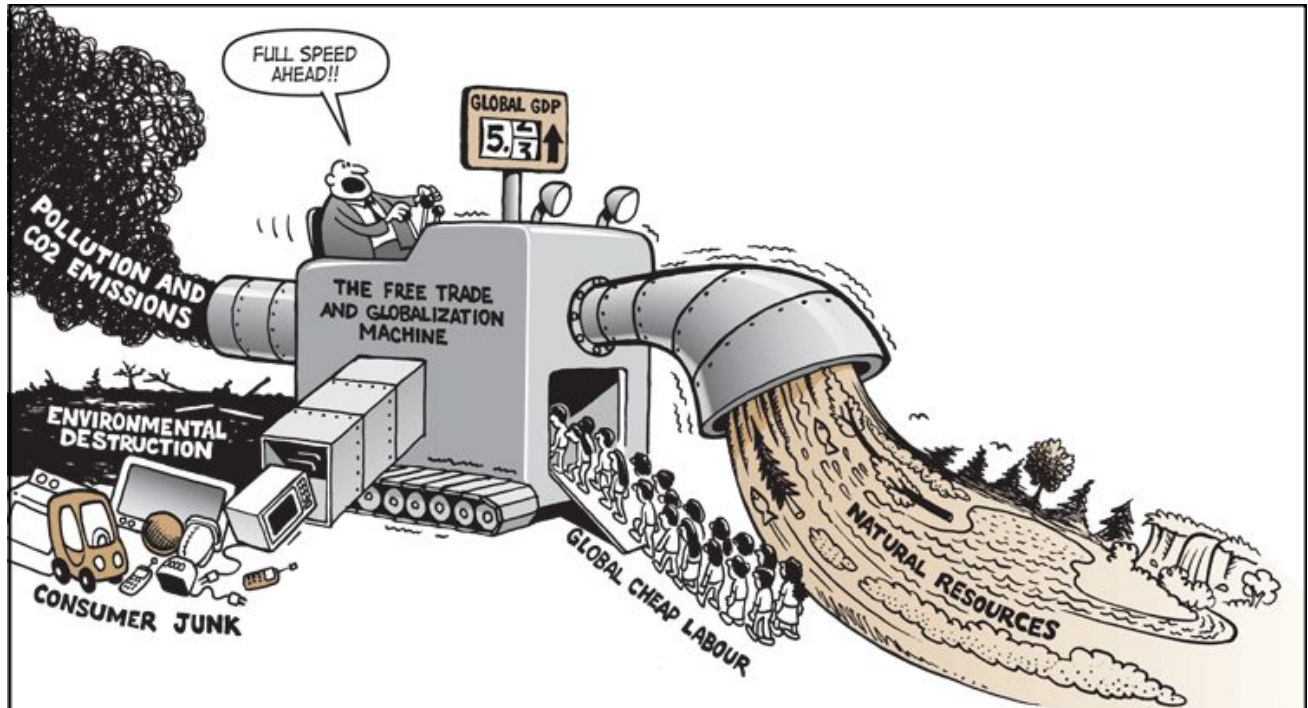


Response to Giorgos Kallis re: the degrowth movement and open borders migration

Rob Harding



Economic Consequences of An Oil Shortage June 28, 2005 | Source [Life After the Oil Crash](#)

I would like to offer a brief commentary on the response of Giorgos Kallis to critiques of his viewpoint, "The Degrowth Alternative", as published on the Great Transition Initiative [website](#). I commend the efforts of Giorgos and others to help the degrowth movement proceed, as Herman Daly [recently described it](#), "beyond the slogan and develop something a little more concrete".

That said, I am concerned about what seems to be an emerging consensus within the degrowth movement regarding support for a policy of 'open borders' concerning the movement of people. This position appears to be antithetical to the concomitant transition away from globalization toward localization that the degrowth movement [purportedly advocates](#) (e.g. controls on trade and capital mobility, which [globalization seeks to minimize](#)). Moreover, the

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steady state economy and degrowth movements have always maintained an appreciation of the increasingly apparent reality that we are [operating in a state of ecological overshoot](#). The open borders position seems to be dismissive of the fact that developed countries like the United States are [already demonstrably overpopulated](#) (i.e. exceeding carrying capacity, as indicated by Ecological Footprint analysis and other metrics), and this existing human overpopulation along with continued population growth is [contributing immensely to ecocide and the sixth mass extinction of biodiversity](#) already under way as well as [threatening the world's food supplies](#). The paramount problem with the open borders position seems to be its prioritization of social justice to the exclusion of [ecojustice](#) -- ultimately, there is no possibility of social justice on a dead planet except for the equality found in dying. Societies must first and foremost live within ecological limits.

First, if degrowth is indeed a “partisan claim” within the paradigm of Liberalism where “the things that typically count as ‘Growth’ (highways, bridges, armies, dams) are bad for ‘us’ degrowthers”, then why does it [appear](#) that the degrowth movement (or some of it) is advocating one of the primary contributors to [Ponzi demography](#) -- mass immigration -- which intensifies the demand for such growth and its attendant infrastructure?

Second, you chose to label the people “who defend the vested interests that feed on growth” as “conservatives”. If by “conservatives” you simply meant ‘people who are averse to change and hold to traditional values and attitudes’, then I concur; however, I think it should be clarified that this includes political liberals and progressives (e.g. Democrats, Greens, Democratic Socialists) just as much as it includes political conservatives (e.g. Republicans) since continued support for [the insane pursuit of endless economic growth on a finite planet](#) remains prevalent and unquestioned across the political spectrum.

Third, your “reasoned case” on immigration was, as [you shared](#) separately, an attempt to argue “why there is no environmental case against immigration”. When promoting a transition to an ecologically sustainable future, presumably with less globalization and more localization, limiting the size of local human populations seems essential. Certainly we need smaller footprints but surely we also need fewer feet. The [spatial distribution and density](#) of human populations are key sustainability considerations for a 'post-growth' world and the unavoidable transition to it, but you and some other degrowthers appear to undervalue these factors and even disregard the diminishing marginal utility of ever-increasing population density. Why is that?

Finally, you noted that “Infinite population growth is impossible within a limited planet or nation, but feedbacks ensure that population will not grow indefinitely”. Wouldn't you

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consider [widespread opposition to continued mass immigration](#) to be one of those feedbacks? For various reasons, scores of people -- [liberals](#), [progressives](#), and [conservatives](#) -- are voicing opposition to immigration-fueled Ponzi demography. Would you argue that from a degrowth perspective, those of us voicing this opposition are somehow misguided? Ecology tells us that population growth is brought to heel by collapse; however, such collapse would cause much human (as well as nonhuman) misery and massive ecosystem damage (i.e. depletion and destruction of 'natural capital'). Thus, humanity should operate to voluntarily control overpopulation through [non-coercive strategies](#) rather than allow nature to take its course whereby human numbers are reduced wantonly and cruelly.

In summary, sensible immigration limits seem to fall in line with the "anachronisms in the arrow of progress" that you described as "good". Therefore, I believe everyone, including the degrowth movement, should embrace such limits as a matter of public policy and accept that they are a part of the fundamental [I = PAT equation](#) we cannot ignore. I welcome your response, Giorgos.

Note: I asked to have this response published on the Great Transition Initiative's [website](#) to maintain continuity in the same forum but my request was denied. I appreciate the opportunity to share it on the MAHB Blog.

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