

This is the author's version of a work that was accepted for publication in Ecological economics (Ed. Elsevier). Changes resulting from the publishing process, such as peer review, editing, corrections, structural formatting, and other quality control mechanisms may not be reflected in this document. Changes may have been made to this work since it was submitted for publication. A definitive version was subsequently published in Beling, AE, et al. "Discursive synergies for a "great transformation" towards sustainability: pragmatic contributions to a necessary dialogue between human development, degrowth, and Buen Vivir" in Ecological economics (Ed. Elsevier), Available online 11 set. 2017. DOI 10.1016/j.ecolecon.2017.08.025

1 **Discursive synergies for a 'Great Transformation' towards sustainability:**
 2 **pragmatic contributions to a necessary dialogue between Human**
 3 **Development, Degrowth, and *Buen Vivir***

4 *Adrián E. Beling^a, Julien Vanhulst^b, Federico Demaria^c, Violeta Rabi^d, Ana E. Carballo^e & Jérôme Pelenc^f.*

5

6 *a. FLACSO Argentina, Global Studies Programme*

7 *b. Universidad Católica del Maule, Sociology School - FACSE.*

8 *c. Univesitat Àutonomia de Barcelona, ICTA.*

9 *d. **AFFILIATION***

10 *e. University of Melbourne, School of Social and Political Sciences*

11 *f. Universidad Libre de Bruselas, IGEAT-CEDD*

12

13 **Abstract**

14

15 There is a growing awareness that a whole-societal "Great Transformation" of Polanyian
 16 scale is needed to bring global developmental trajectories in line with ecological imperatives.

17 The mainstream Sustainable Development discourse, however, insists in upholding the myth
 18 of compatibility of current, growth-based trajectories with biophysical planetary boundaries.

19 This article explores potentially fertile complementarities among trendy discourses
 20 challenging conventional notions of (un)sustainable development - Human Development,

21 Degrowth, and Buen Vivir -, and outlines pathways for their realization. Human

22 Development presents relative transformative strengths in political terms, while Degrowth

23 holds keys to unlocking unsustainable material-structural entrenchments of contemporary
 24 socio-economic arrangements, and Buen Vivir offers a space of cultural alterity and critique
 25 of the Euro-Atlantic cultural constellation. The weaknesses or blind spots ('Achilles heels')
 26 of each discourse can be compensated through the strengths of the other ones, creating a
 27 dialogical virtuous circle that would open pathways towards a global new "Great
 28 Transformation". As one of the main existing platforms for pluralist, strong-sustainability
 29 discussions, Ecological Economics is in a privileged position to deliberately foster such
 30 strategic discursive dialogue. A pathway toward such dialogue is illuminated through a model
 31 identifying and articulating key discursive docking points.

32

33 **Keywords:** Transformation discourses, Strategic dialogue, Buen Vivir, Degrowth, Human
 34 **Development**

35 **1. Introduction: Ecological Economics and Development**

36 Ecological Economics (hereinafter EE) has been broadly called the "science of sustainability"
 37 (Costanza, 1991). Since the mid-1980s when a society and a journal were founded, EE
 38 scholars have been advocating a necessary dialogue between natural sciences and social
 39 sciences, more precisely, between economics and ecology. Following this multidisciplinary
 40 perspective, the EE community hesitantly engaged the debate on sustainable development
 41 (hereinafter SD)¹ that unfolded since the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987. After

¹ Instead of marking-out a clear concept, the idea of SD has forged a discursive field shaped by different appropriations, each with their own hypotheses about the nature and causes of the socio-environmental crisis and deriving proposals to address the latter (Dryzek, 2005; Hopwood et al., 2005; Lélé, 2013, 1991; Sachs, 1997; Sneddon et al., 2006). In the numerous analyses of the discourse surrounding SD we find different ways of making sense of conflicting interpretations (Vanhuylst and Zaccai, 2016). In line with Hopwood et al. (2005), we draw a distinction between (a) mainstream SD discourses (which understand sustainability as achievable

42 much discussion, the precise meaning of “sustainability” remains contested; however, there
43 is consensus that EE stands for strong sustainability (as opposed to environmental
44 economics, which would admit ‘weak sustainability’ standards) and for the weak
45 comparability of values (Martinez-Alier et al., 1998). In this regard, representatives of EE
46 positioned themselves critically vis-à-vis the Brundtland Commission (see specially
47 Goodland et al., 1992; and Lélé, 1991). Yet, while reflections within EE regarding
48 sustainability have been abundant, the notion of ‘development’ (often taken a synonym of
49 economic growth) remains largely unproblematized, both within the EE community and
50 beyond.

51 A singular exception was the rise of post-development as an intellectual critical current of
52 development in the early 1990s (Escobar, 1995; Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997; Rist, 2002;
53 Sachs, 2010). Post-development scholars were the first to fundamentally question the idea of
54 global convergence towards the socio-economic model of the global North. In their
55 understanding, such model is a mental, cultural and historical construct that has colonized
56 the rest of the world and needs to be deconstructed, opening up, instead, a matrix of
57 alternatives (Latouche, 2009).

58 This critique eventually became one of the intellectual sources of EE, yet it never gained
59 paradigmatic status within the EE scholarly community, let alone in wider political debates.
60 In light of sustained (if not intensifying and/or accelerating) trends in global ecological
61 degradation, coupled with mounting socio-political and socio-economic tensions, there is a

within existing social structures, with incremental, evolutionary reforms, as is the case for the Brundtland proposal or, more recently, the UN Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs); and (b) transformative trends demanding foundational changes in social power structures along with radically different forms of interrelation between humans and their natural environment. (see section 4. Transformation Discourses).

62 growing awareness² that a “new Great Transformation” of contemporary societies and their
 63 development patterns on a Polanyian scale³ in the coming decades is likely inevitable, be it
 64 “by design or by disaster” (Reißig, 2011).

65 It becomes increasingly clear that the mainstream techno-managerialist SD discourse, with
 66 its insistence in upholding the compatibility of current, growth-based trajectories with
 67 biophysical planetary boundaries, has exhausted much of its credibility after three decades
 68 of nearly undisputed worldwide dominance with meagre results, at best (Bäckstrand, 2011;
 69 Dryzek, 2005; Hannigan, 2006; Pelfini, 2005). Therefore, we argue that the post-
 70 developmentalist critique needs to be mainstreamed if EE is to become a veritable force in
 71 promoting a socio-ecological transformation and rising as a powerful alternative to
 72 environmental economics. We will further argue that such mainstreaming is indeed possible

² In this vein, studies of Social Metabolism (often published in EE) have offered detailed and influential analyses on the current trajectories that make necessary a global socioecological transition – for an overview, see Fischer-Kowalski and Haberl (2007). This work has led to a recent UNEP report (2016) questioning alleged global trends towards “dematerialization”.

³ The work of Karl Polanyi has experienced a revival in recent years (Somers and Block, 2014), whereby his *opus magnum* “The Great Transformation” (1944) is widely regarded as the most compelling analytical and metaphorical account of the *scale* of changes lying ahead for modern societies in the 21st century. Moreover, Polanyi’s work emphasizes a further unfamiliar aspect of modern capitalism in contemporary thought, namely: capitalism as a relatively new system of accumulation that was introduced via a great violent transformation. Susan Paulson comments: “[Growth] is perceived as apolitical and impartial; modern markets, in particular, appear as timeless mechanisms through which all humans freely organize livelihoods and establish value. Polanyi (1944) showed they are anything but. The commodification of labor and nature, together with the colonization of human habits and worldviews by market-relations and money-value, are historical exceptions brutally imposed in 18th and 19th century England by efforts to ‘mold human nature’ for industrial growth” (Paulson, 2017, p. 440). The historically unique challenge regarding the upcoming transformation into an ecologically viable society, however, as opposed to unintended and unplanned ‘great transformations’ of the past (i.e. the Neolithic and the industrial revolutions), is advancing a comprehensive re-structuration “for reasons of insight, prudence, and foresight”. The “long breaking-distance” – i.e. the time gap between the moment of generation of causes and the moment of observability of effects – of many global environmental problems (e.g. climate change) requires avoiding the standard historic reaction of changing direction in response to crises and disasters. In order to succeed, the transformation must be anticipated (WBGU, 2011, p. 5)

73 through the synergic articulation of existing discursive forces⁴ within the EE community which
74 challenge conventional notions of (un)sustainable development. The aim of this article is to
75 illuminate pathways towards such synergic articulation, by focusing analytically on three
76 representative ‘transformation discourses’ from within a much broader discursive universe
77 within EE.

78 The article begins by critically assessing the mainstream concept of development and the
79 capacity of the Human Development (hereafter HD) discourse - arguably the most serious
80 attempt at self-criticism coming from within mainstream the development worldview - to
81 effectively facilitate a socio-ecological transformation matching the scale dictated by global
82 ecological imperatives. It then goes on to introduce two emblematic ‘transformation
83 discourses’⁵ springing-off the post-developmental critique in the Global North and South,
84 respectively: Degrowth (hereafter DG) and Buen Vivir (BV). Each one is assessed in their
85 transformative potential and weaknesses, to finally propose an integrative framework for a
86 fertile mutual engagement among the three discourses and outline pathways for their
87 realization towards a “Great Transformation”. As one of the main existing platforms for
88 pluralist, strong-sustainability discussions, EE would arguable be in a unique position to host
89 such inter-discursive dialogue, building on earlier contributions to the journal of Ecological
90 Economics (Kothari et al., 2014; Sneddon et al., 2006).

⁴ ‘Discourse’ is to be understood here as a structured way of symbolically ordering the world. We shall distinguish two dimensions: “discourse as representation” describes ideational contents of a discourse in an abstract manner; while “discourse as practice” looks at the context and material situatedness of discourses. Both dimensions contribute to the understanding of the potential and limits of identified complementarities between the three iconic discourses dealt with in this article.

⁵ Following Arturo Escobar’s (2011) concept of ‘Discourses of Transition’ or ‘Transformation Discourses’ is used here as a shortcut for discourses generally promoting a Great Transformation.

91 **2. Setting the scene: A critical analysis of Development**

92 The notion of development did long enjoy a virtually unquestioned legitimacy since its debut
93 in the political jargon (attributed to US President Truman's inaugural speech in 1949): from
94 Rostow's 'stages of economic growth', through Dependency Theory and Endogenous
95 Development, up to 'sustainable development', all have hailed the idea of development as
96 the promised land of all historical trajectories.

97 Decades after the notion of 'development' spread around the globe, the vast majority of the
98 world keeps struggling to emulate the 'developed countries', while both 'developed' and
99 'developing' ones keep operating at an enormous ecological and social cost. The problem
100 does not lie, as it may, in any given implementation-flaws of essentially adequate development
101 strategies; but rather lies in the concept of development itself. The world experiences
102 widespread "maldevelopment" (Amin, 1990; Tortosa, 2001). This includes those countries
103 regarded as industrialized, i.e. countries whose lifestyle has served as a beacon for 'backward
104 countries', concealing the fact that these are "imperial modes of living" which are inherently
105 non-generalizable (Brand and Wissen, 2011), as became apparent, at the very latest, with the
106 global ecological crisis of resource overconsumption and biosphere degradation. As Susan
107 Paulson argues: "If climate crisis has a silver lining, it may be the power to provoke residents
108 of high-GDP high-emission countries to question the portrayal of their own societies as
109 'developed'" (Paulson, 2017, p. 432).

110 In light of these issues, it seems urgent to decouple the idea of 'development' (or whatever
111 we chose to call some kind of positive human evolution) from unidirectional, mechanistic,
112 and reductionist view of economic growth. Ultimately, the conception of 'progress' itself,
113 which underpins the development-ideology, needs to be re-politicized (Chakrabarty, 2009).

114 However, the question is not only about dissolving entrenched misleading narratives:
115 thinking outside the development-fence requires new narratives.

116 Some EE scholars have indeed opened the debate and included new perspectives, but have
117 done so in a somewhat ambiguous and inconsequential way, avoiding to take a clear-cut
118 position on fundamental debates like the one on the relation between environment and
119 growth. We argue that any promising engagement with the goal of sustainability at this point
120 involves a fundamental questioning of SD (in its mainstream discursive variants) as a plausible
121 and desirable horizon for the global political economy. With this aim, the following section
122 reviews the Human Development (HD) discourse as the most widely covered development-
123 revisionist approach within and outside EE, with the purpose of unveiling both its potential
124 and limitations in the sense of a global ‘great transformation’ towards a type of society which
125 is actually “capable of a future” (WBGU, 2011).

126 **3. Human development**

127 The ideas of HD and more precisely of the Capability Approach (hereafter CA) have been
128 gradually introduced to EE in the mid 2000’s (Ballet et al., 2013; i.a. Lehtonen, 2004; Pelenc
129 and Ballet, 2015; Sneddon et al., 2006). The fundamental question is whether the CA can
130 offer suitable theoretical and ethical foundations (in particular, its idea of justice) for a great
131 transformation towards global sustainability.

132 Ideas of Human Development (HD)⁶ have become strongly associated with the work of the
133 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the publication of their annual

⁶ When we speak of HD we consider only the literature associated with the CA and not the Human Scale Development Theory developed by Manfred Max-Neef (1991). This approach is quite different (for a comparison with the CA see Guillen-Royo, 2015; Pelenc, 2016).

134 reports (United Nations Development Programme, 1990). Offering a novel articulation of
135 the space for individual agency, the HD paradigm enshrined a need for understanding
136 development as being ‘development of the people by the people, for the people’(United
137 Nations Development Programme, 1991, p. 13). The contribution of HD can be understood
138 in two main domains: their consideration of development moved away (a) from a pure
139 economic-based understanding - the one measured in GDP -, and (b) from a purely state-
140 centred understanding, to one where the people become the main agents of development.
141 HD’s shift to people-centred approaches was underpinned by the CA, most notably
142 articulated by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2000; Nussbaum and Sen,
143 1993; Sen, 1999, 1989).

144 HD explicitly seeks to escape the fixation with material goods (as opposed to, for example,
145 the basic human needs-approach⁷) and focusing instead in the expansion of people’s freedom
146 to choose. In the CA, such expansion of freedom is inherently connected to the expansion
147 of agency, i.e., to a process of individual empowerment (Alkire, 2009; Ibrahim and Alkire,
148 2007). Hence, here development is understood as the removal of several forms of
149 ‘unfreedom’ or barriers that prevent the individual from exerting their own agency and choice
150 to transform their own reality. In a nutshell: the CA offers a framework for addressing the
151 multidimensionality of human well-being escaping from narrow definitions based on
152 economic growth, and it gives a central role to freedom of choice and public deliberation in
153 the definition and assessment of well-being.

7 The Basic Needs Approach was strongly criticised by Sen and the HD literature in general for (i) its materialistic fixation, (ii) being too paternalistic and (iii) neglecting to consider opportunities (Deneulin and Shahani, 2009, p. 58; Sen, 1980).

154 Progressively, these ideas have permeated the praxis of development, mainstreaming the idea
155 of a people-centred approach (either politically or economically grounded) as the
156 fundamental means to achieve SD. Yet, simultaneously, the CA has restricted the possibility
157 of engaging in a debate about a more radical transformation of the premises of development
158 altogether. In fact, HD can be seen as a successful exercise of co-optation of some of the
159 critiques to development, analogous to what the concept of ‘sustainable development’ did
160 with the debate on limits to growth. In HD, ideas of development remain tied to Western,
161 liberal democratic frameworks and to market economies (Carballo, 2015; Selwyn, 2014;
162 Walsh, 2010). Even if the successful mainstreaming of the focus on freedom offers a
163 necessary space of reflection, ideas of HD, in and of themselves, offer little space to address
164 the multiple and imbricated complexities and challenges associated with the growing
165 environmental crisis⁸. HD and the CA have also been strongly criticized for their individualist
166 focus and assumptions, which downplay the role of individual embeddedness in cultural
167 norms and inertias, institutional contexts, and material infrastructures. This problem has
168 been partially addressed by some scholars under the heading of ‘collective capability’ (Pelenc
169 et al., 2015), yet it remains a key limitation of the CA.

170 Overall, HD offers the possibility of constructing a more socially-conscious notion of
171 development, where political, environmental, cultural and egalitarian concerns can receive
172 more attention than in conventional economic conceptions. However, it offers very little
173 space to engage in systemic or macro-structural considerations of the limits and challenges
174 associated to the promotion of development. The expansionist imperative of global

8 See Lessmann & Rauschmayer (2013), Carballo (2016), Shrivastava & Khotari (2012), and Martinez-Alier, Temper & Demaria (2015).

175 capitalism, with its systematic production of inequalities and environmental degradation, is
176 not even identified in the CA as an obstacle in the road towards HD (Shrivastava and Kothari,
177 2012).

178 The discourses to be reviewed in the following sections place such systemic considerations
179 at the very centre of their diagnosis and prognosis. With Escobar (2011), we call them
180 transformation or transition discourses because they seek to redefine the political-economic
181 chessboard set by industrial societies (Dryzek, 2005), and transcend the normative horizon
182 of the development discourse thus opening up space for alternative conceptions of
183 prosperity.

184

185 **4. Transformation Discourses**

186 From the perspective of their content, what Escobar calls 'discourses of transformation' are
187 not a novelty of the 21st Century; they are rather part of the long search for and practice of
188 alternative ways of living, forged in the furnace of humanity's struggle for emancipation and
189 enlightenment. What is remarkable about these alternative proposals, however, is that
190 despite the fact that they typically arise from traditionally marginalized groups (often
191 majorities rather than minorities within the population), their critique is not limited to issues
192 of social justice, but are also aimed at denouncing social pathologies. Or, more precisely:
193 their critique of social injustice is rooted in a critique of social pathologies. Indeed, their
194 diagnosis of departure is one of civilizational crisis, and, consequentially, their prescriptions
195 break away (to variable degrees) from the idea of development, which is rooted in modern
196 Western-style civilization. The quest for unlimited growth as equated with progress is
197 generally contested by all transformation discourses, as are Western materialism,

198 anthropocentrism, the destruction of the commons, and blind faith in science and
199 technology.

200 While utopian projects are often regarded as typically localized experiments with alternative
201 forms of collective organization (e.g. eco-villages and other intentional communities), the
202 distinctive feature of transformation discourses is, in turn, their aspiration of bending
203 developmental trajectories worldwide. Such global aspirations are put forward, for example,
204 by feminisms and eco-feminism, some indigenous and peasants' movements (e.g. La Via
205 Campesina), by the proposal of post-development, by the defense of sentient beings and the
206 'rights of nature', by the growing global discourses and movements for Environmental Justice,
207 Post-extractivism, Social Economy, Degrowth, the Commons, Convivialism, Food
208 sovereignty, the Latin-American Buen vivir, and also by a weaker movement for eco-
209 Marxism and, eco-socialism⁹, among others. Furthermore, some of these discourses have
210 undergone political experimentation: Eco-Swaraj in India, Bhutan's 'Gross National
211 Happiness' and radical eco-centered politics in food production, or else the 'rights of nature'
212 in Ecuador, Bolivia, India, and Australia, among other examples.

213 To be sure, despite their global aspirations, these are still situated discourses, born as
214 proposals for fundamental change in (g)localized settings. In a context of post-political
215 (Swyngedouw, 2011) and post-democratic (Blühdorn, 2011; Crouch, 2004; Rancière, 2007;

⁹ It goes without saying that not all of the discourses listed here stand on equal footing regarding the scope of their respective transformative implications: the fundamental critique of the growth-dependence of capitalist economies, for example, has farther-reaching implications in terms of a whole-societal transformation than, say, the demand for food sovereignty, which is centered on the gaining control over food production and distribution back from footloose agribusiness-corporations and restoring it to peasants. Yet all listed discourses tend to converge in their fundamental critique of contemporary industrialist and capitalist societies. And most of these discourses do find resonance within the EE literature: post-extractivism, for example, fits perfectly well with the abundant literature in EE on ecologically unequal trade while eco-feminist economics has had special issues in the journal.

216 Ritzi, 2014) global governance, transformation discourses intend to re-politicize the debate
217 on the much-needed socio-ecological transformation, affirming dissidence with the currently
218 dominant representations of the world and offering alternative ones.

219 Yet, the proponents of these discourses seem to build their proposals in a somewhat
220 autarchic way without considering each other's struggles and their potential for synergic
221 common cause towards what they variably refer to as "system change", "paradigm shift" or
222 else "civilizational shift". Scholars and activists alike (Brand, 2015; D'Alisa et al., 2014;
223 Escobar, 2015; Kothari et al., 2014; Narberhaus and Sheppard, 2015; Sneddon et al., 2006)
224 are increasingly advocating a strategic dialogue among transition discourses as key for a
225 "Great Transformation" towards sustainability.

226 The following sections introduce Degrowth (DG) and Buen Vivir (BV) as two emblematic
227 transformation discourses - the former from the global North and the latter from the South
228 -, which catalyze many of the views and critiques of other critical discourses represented in
229 the EE literature: for example, key insights from agroecology, eco-feminism, convivialism,
230 etc. are part and parcel of DG; while post-extractivism, indigenous worldviews, etc. are
231 implicit in BV. Furthermore, DG and BV - thus our argument to be developed - are
232 particularly suitable candidates for a promising strategic dialogue with the more established
233 HD.

234 4.1. Degrowth

235 Although the term 'degrowth' had been coined by André Gorz in 1972, this discourse
236 experienced a strong revival about 10 years ago, when European social movements adopted
237 it as a "missile word" to challenge the inherent ecological and social unsustainability of a

238 growth-obsessed political economy and a correspondingly growth-dependent global
239 economy (Latouche, 2009).

240 DG “challenges the hegemony of growth and calls for a democratically led redistributive
241 downscaling of production and consumption [...] as a means to achieve environmental
242 sustainability, social justice and well-being” (Demaria et al., 2013, p. 209). Hence from the
243 outset, DG not only challenges economic approaches to development: it actually pits
244 economic growth and development against each other, thus re-politicizing the otherwise
245 ideological notion of development (Asara et al., 2015).

246 To promote a “downscaling of production and consumption” is not to be conflated with
247 steering growth-dependent economies into economic slowdown, which would cause
248 recession, unemployment, inequality, leading to austerity-politics and the violation of
249 environmental agreements (Alexander and Rutherford, 2014). What DG promotes, instead,
250 is the creation of a different societal structure, transforming current institutions and rules,
251 promoting a different balance of material and non-material forms of prosperity: time
252 prosperity, ‘relational goods’ (friendship, neighborliness, etc.), non-capitalistic, community-
253 based forms of production, exchange, and consumption, among other things, regain
254 centrality in social and individual life vis-à-vis today’s unfettered material consumerism. In
255 this sense, DG can be better understood as ‘atheism’ in relation to the ‘dogma’ of economic
256 growth. In fact, it is aimed at taking distance from the growth imaginary and decolonizing
257 society of its influence (D’Alisa et al., 2014; Latouche, 2009).

258 Although relatively new as a scholarly concept – some authors have declared 2008, the year
259 of the first international degrowth conference, as its academic birth date (Schneider et al.,

260 2010) –, the DG discourse has been informed by multiple intellectual sources¹⁰, which can
261 be synthesized in two main strands (Latouche, 2009): the culturalist strand, including both
262 the critique to development as ideology and to utilitarianism (Castoriadis, 1999; Escobar,
263 2015; Hamilton, 2003; Illich, 1973; Leff, 2008; Martinez-Alier, 1994; Polanyi, 1944; Rist,
264 2002; Robbins, 2004) and the ecological strand (Daly and Townsend, 1993; Georgescu-
265 Roegen, 1971; Meadows et al., 1972), including both the disciplines of EE and Political
266 Ecology.

267 Overall, the body of literature that addresses the economic, social and ecological limits to
268 growth argues that, first, the universalization of Western affluence-standards is ecologically
269 unsustainable; second, that it has historically been proven unfeasible; and, third, that where
270 it has been achieved, it has not even led to happiness (Alexander and Rutherford, 2014).

271 DG is not just a critique of the growth-obsession and -dependence of the global economy,
272 and the acknowledgement of physical and social limits to growth; it also involves a pro-active,
273 transformative aim of moving towards a model of (post-)development that can dispense with
274 a structural growth-imperative¹¹. To do this, a systemic political, institutional and cultural shift
275 is required. In the post-growth world “expansion will no longer be a necessity, and economic
276 rationality and goals of efficiency and maximization will not dominate all other social
277 rationalities and goals” (Kallis, 2011, p. 875). The desirable end-state of DG can be
278 synthesized as a society that prioritizes the maintenance of the ecological integrity of the
279 planet, on the one hand, and embraces the sufficiency-principle as its lifestyle to lessen

¹⁰ For a broader and deeper classification of the intellectual sources that nourishes DG, see Demaria et al. (2013).

¹¹ For a synthetic and transparent explanation of the mechanisms at the root of modern economies’ dependence on economic growth, see Jackson (2009).

280 inequalities and increase well-being, on the other (Alexander and Rutherford, 2014;
281 Schneidewind and Zahrnt, 2014).

282 4.2. **Buen Vivir**

283 The BV discourse has often been defined as a dialogical alternative to development. It arises
284 in a particular historical-political juncture at the interface of the local – where decades-long
285 indigenous struggles for cultural and material recognition, eventually converged with the
286 disenchantment of the masses with the neoliberal order at the dawn of the century (Altmann,
287 2015) – and the global, where the capacity of the development paradigm to offer satisfactory
288 responses to the grave social, environmental, and economic challenges of our time had been
289 losing ground over the last twenty years, and could no longer be taken for granted (Vanhulst
290 and Beling, 2014, p. 61). In other words, BV can be said to have emerged from a historically
291 fortuitous glocal convergence of multiple struggles at various scales, which influenced larger
292 cultural and political restructuring (Beling and Vanhulst, 2016).

293 Beyond the idea of interdependence between society and its natural environment
294 (crystallized here in the concept of Pachamama or “mother Earth”), in BV, ontological and
295 epistemological plurality is constitutive of culture. BV thus implies a fundamental rupture
296 with Eurocentric universalism (as well as the dichotomies therefrom derived, such as nature-
297 society dualism) (Vanhulst and Beling, 2014). Beyond the normative orientations BV offers,
298 however, what makes this retro-progressive utopia so mesmerizing is the impact it has had
299 on the macro-cultural and political spheres of some Latin American countries, above all
300 Bolivia and Ecuador, where BV has attained constitutional status as the basis of their “social
301 contract”.

302 As has been shown in detail elsewhere (Vanhulst, 2015; Vanhulst and Beling, 2014), while
303 BV became anchored in the socio-cognitive and cultural landscape and in certain socio-
304 political practices in the Andean-Amazonian region, its content has been diversified, forking
305 into a range of more or less (di)similar discourses respectively re-articulated by the successive
306 groups that have adopted and adapted it. Hence, one should rather speak of Buenos vivires,
307 in the plural (Cubillo-Guevara et al., 2014; Loera Gonzalez, 2015; Vanhulst, 2015). In fact,
308 a consensus-definition of BV is not available. This undefinition is probably also key to its
309 magnetism and strength. Eduardo Gudynas (2011) thus speaks of BV as a work-in-progress,
310 to be understood as a dialogical platform rather than as a clear and precise concept.

311 Yet a systematization of commonalities and differences among the diverse BV-discourses is
312 possible. Three main strands can be identified: an indigenist, a socialist and an academic one
313 (Cubillo-Guevara et al., 2014; Vanhulst, 2015; Vanhulst and Beling, 2014, 2013). From this
314 heterogeneous set, we can distinguish four common constitutive elements of BV: (a) the idea
315 of harmony with nature (including its abiotic components); (b) vindication of the principles
316 and values of marginalized/subordinated peoples; (c) the State as guarantor of the satisfaction
317 of basic needs (such as education, health, food and water), social justice and equality; and (d)
318 democracy. There are also two cross-cutting lines: BV as a critical paradigm of Eurocentric
319 (anthropocentric, capitalist, economistic and universalistic) modernity, and as a new
320 intercultural political project.

321 Thus BV seek to re-politicize the collective reflection about the socio-economic and
322 ecological drifts of the currently prevailing development paradigm and its capacity to
323 successfully address the socio-ecological sustainability imperative. Similarly to DG and to the
324 discourse of limits of the 1970s (Dryzek, 2005), BV advocates a radical reorientation of the

325 paradigm of endless growth. However, BV rejects the ‘promethean’ backbone of the
 326 discourse on limits to growth, which remains captive to the playbook of industrialism
 327 (particularly with regard to the undisputed supremacy awarded to economic, bureaucratic,
 328 and scientific elites). From the perspective of BV, what is needed is, instead, overcoming the
 329 structures of industrial society and conceiving of new ways of relating to the natural
 330 environment - all this through the democratization of all spheres of social life..

331

332 The indigenous dimension of BV operates as an inspiration drawn from the aborigine
 333 cultural imaginaries of the Andean and Amazonian world, which are rooted in traditional
 334 ethical foundations, values, and beliefs vis-à-vis nature that industrial civilization has tended
 335 to erase. The emergence of BV thus reinforces the multiple voices (eco-socialist, eco-
 336 feminist, anti-capitalist, convivialist, environmental justice, etc.) denouncing the ethnocentric
 337 and anthropocentric limitations of Western-style conceptions of development and progress,
 338 which still heavily gravitate in the SD discourse.

339

340 Table 1 below synthesizes the ideational content of the three discourses reviewed above.

341

342 **Table 1. Main features of the three different discourses analysed**

343

	HD	DG	BV
Origin of the discourse	-1990s, -International level (Global North but with rapid spread in Global South through UNDP)	-1970s, revival in 2000s, -Western Europe	- Early 2000s, combining modern and ancient worldviews -South America
Main message	People-centred development	Infinite growth on a finite planet is impossible and undesirable	Living well rather than living ‘better’.
Main goal	conditions and expanding capabilities that allow people to flourish	Challenge the hegemony of growth and propose alternatives to it	Living well in harmony with other humans and the rest of nature

Means and actors conveying the discourse	UN and other international development agencies	Grassroots alternatives, oppositional activism and academia (e.g. international conferences)	Andean communities and governments, grassroots movements and academia
Ontology	-Dualism Nature/culture -Individualism (wellbeing defined at the individual level)	-Dualism/ anthropocentrism, even if there is a call to change human-nature relationship -Individual and collective level are regarded as complementary	-Holism (humans are not distinguished and separated from the rest of nature in the Western sense) -Predominance of the collective level (community)
Perspective on growth and development	Focus on HD instead of solely on GDP growth (growth can be a means but not an end)	Growth is the problem and the idea of growth-driven development should be overcome	Growth is the problem and positioning with regard to development is ambiguous (ranging from total rejection as ideologically laden to more conciliatory attempts)
Natural environment	The natural environment should be preserved as a means of guaranteeing present and future human freedoms	Acknowledgment of limits of the biosphere; decrease in production and consumption; voluntary simplicity	Intrinsic value and Rights of Nature; spiritual relationship with nature
Culture	Even if this discourse maintains the idea of development as a goal, the importance of cultural diversity is acknowledged	Acknowledgement that the definition of a good life is culturally diverse. Ecological sustainability and social equity as as lowest-common-denominator cultural goals.	- Culture as a key force driving history. Acknowledgment of cultural diversity, multiculturalism; Importance of a spirituality; Importance of indigenous knowledge
State	Nation-state and social welfare but also individual and community empowerment	Nation-state and social welfare but with more democracy; community experiences that might prefigure a post-growth society.	Multi-cultural and Plurinational state, Centrality of the community level
Market	Market as a means to human flourishing, not as an end	Markets as one means of socio-economic organization among others (commons, reciprocity, etc.) Advocate a de-commodification of the world	Stronger emphasis on de-commodification of the world; solidarity economy
Governance	Deliberative governance	Diversity of positions: from parliamentary democracy up to bottom-up governance.	Participatory and bottom-up governance

Source: own elaboration

344

345

346

347 5. Discursive cross-pollination and synergic engagement among discourses

348 Having reviewed the three discourses HD, BV, and DG, this section seeks to assess the

349 knowledge-gain and socio-political leverage that each discourse offers, on the one hand, and

350 their blind spots and weaknesses (or ‘Achilles heels’), on the other. This will help pave the

351 way towards understanding what can (and what cannot) be expected from each of the

352 discourses as a contribution towards a “Great Transformation”, and how they could
353 potentially fertilize and be articulated with each other.

354 **5.1. Buen Vivir: heralding the cultural transformation**

355 BV can be considered as the worldwide first large-scale experiment of discursive articulation
356 of modern and non-modern ontologies (also at the level of the institutional-material sphere).
357 Indeed, BV is the expression of a cultural shift of epic proportions, which results in a fruitful
358 paradox: the indigenous cultural heritage, which was (and often still is) seen as mutually
359 exclusive with the development paradigm, is now re-framed as key to the renewal of the latter
360 (Carballo, 2015). In this sense, BV highlights the limitations of (Eurocentric) modern
361 ontology: linearity, individualism, anthropocentrism, expansionism, instrumental rationality,
362 etc.; and set up the principles of circularity, relationality, biocentrism, holism, and an
363 “environmental rationality” (Leff, 2004).

364 However, the success of BV as a government program can be safely considered to be limited,
365 at best. This should not come as a surprise: the structural dependence of the Ecuadorean
366 economy on a (neo-)extractivist matrix puts a systemic cap onto the ability of governments
367 and social movements to effectively challenge the omnipotence of markets in the neoliberal
368 global economy (Vanhulst, 2015). Proposals and technically feasible measures towards
369 overcoming such dependence are not in short supply, yet the structural political
370 preconditions for implementing them are not in place: “The implementation of realistic and
371 rational proposals has little chance of being adopted and still less chance of succeeding unless
372 [the social imaginary is fundamentally subverted through] the fertile utopia of a convivial and
373 autonomous society” (Latouche, 2009, p. 66). It is thus in this realm of radical cultural
374 subversion that the strength of BV has to be located.

375 Yet in this vein, a further question inevitably arises: can this Andean retro-progressive utopia
376 potentially inspire change also in the West? Is there any room for cultural resonance for the
377 eco-convivial imaginary of BV in the European worldview? Indeed, framing BV as an
378 idiosyncratic, ethno-centred phenomenon would make it of little relevance to debates about
379 how to bend the global developmental trajectory. Nevertheless, such framing would obscure
380 a large part of the explanation of how BV emerged, in the first place: as existing scholarly
381 engagement with the genesis of BV shows¹², this discursive innovation did require the
382 ideational input from and the agency of both indigenous actors and Western actors (e.g.
383 development and environmental international agencies, such as GIZ, Pachamama Alliance;
384 Acción Ecológica; as well as intellectuals and politicians).

385 In other words, the domestic political and cultural movement shaping BV through the living
386 resonance of indigenous civilizations of the Andes and the Amazon was met by a global
387 movement of political contestation over the prevailing global development model, seeking
388 to establish links of territorial legitimacy by docking to longstanding local struggles (Beling
389 and Vanhulst, 2016). Thus, BV constitutes a prime example of glocal discursive articulation
390 in search for post-growth and post-colonialist utopias. This process of ‘glocalization’
391 constitutes the backdrop against which the discursive repertoire of BV developed;
392 furthermore, it offers valuable lessons when viewed from a genealogical perspective, as a
393 structural re-balancing of political forces disruptive of “politics as usual” (De La Cadena,
394 2010).

12 See, for example, Altmann (2015) and Espinosa (2015).

395 BV thus appears as both a product and a strong source of cultural transformative waves,
396 matching long marginalized voices from the global South with a global momentum for a
397 discursive shift. This has been and continues to be its main performativity as a social
398 movement and as a political project. In its ambition regarding programmatic deliverables,
399 however, the Ecuadorean and Bolivian experiments with BV simultaneously showcase the
400 limitations of a political revolution without an effective transformation of the material base.

401 **5.2. Degrowth: envisioning the material-structural transformation**

402 If the fundamental transformation of culture is the core business of BV, the transformation
403 of the material base is that of the DG discourse.

404 Indeed, while DG contains many counter-cultural docking points that resonate with BV (e.g.
405 the decolonization of the imaginary), the focus here is on the transformation of material
406 structures as a condition of possibility for a broader societal transformation. Basing on the
407 fundamental insight that infinite growth is unviable in a finite planet (which draws on the
408 intellectual tradition of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, Kenneth Boulding, and Herman Daly,
409 all prominent figures of ecological economics), growth-critics have developed an in-depth
410 understanding of the mechanisms locking contemporary capitalist economies into a growth-
411 path. Consequentially, they have elaborated a number of technical-programmatic measures
412 of varied ideological inspiration¹³, which, if implemented, could dissolve the structural
413 dilemma of decision-makers between short-term economic stability and long-term
414 environmental sustainability (Jackson, 2009).

¹³ Compare, for example, Demaria, Schneider, Sekulova, & Martinez-Alier (2013), Jackson (2009); Latouche (2009); Miegel(2011).

415 Analogously to BV, however, DG requires cultural preconditions to be fulfilled before it can
416 be translated into an effective political program. There is a danger that premature
417 institutionalization of the DG programme in the form of a political party would lead into the
418 trap of mere ‘politicking’, i.e. political actors becoming divorced from social realities and
419 being trapped in the political game (Latouche, 2009).

420 The growth-critical community is a heterogeneous group with its own internal diversity
421 (D’Alisa et al., 2014; Schmelzer, 2015), whose composition varies according to particular
422 spatial settings: liberal-reformists, subsistence-based, capitalism-critical¹⁴, and feminist strands
423 can be identified within the discursive spectrum, and, in some places, even a conservative
424 strand, represented, for example, by Meinhard Miegel in Germany or Alain de Benoist in
425 France. All of these positions illuminate important shortcomings of growth-based societies
426 and economies, and all prioritize particular transformative agents, instruments and points of
427 intervention.

428 We argue that it is in particular the liberal-reformist strand, that is a social reformist,
429 ecologically-driven critique of economic growth (partly supported by established
430 organizations in the environmental and development sectors), that holds more promise of
431 spearheading dialogue with mainstream economic critique, thus opening the door to a
432 broader acceptance for more fundamental questioning. While ecologically uncompromising
433 and socially emancipatory, this approach remains institutionally conservative, as it seeks to
434 transform existing structures that are essential to a liberal world-order, rather than dispensing

¹⁴ Worthwhile mentioning within the capitalist-critical strand is the search for an alliance between the Degrowth movement and the movement for Climate Justice: <https://www.degrowth.de/en/2017/02/no-degrowth-without-climate-justice/>

435 with them altogether (Schmelzer, 2015). Basic guidelines for a political economy here are
436 the reduction of energy- and resource-consumption in accordance to science-informed
437 sustainability goals, hence forcefully dropping GDP growth as a valid criterion to guide
438 political action. The distinctive demand from this strand of thought, however, refers to the
439 restructuration of growth-dependent and growth-driving institutions and infrastructures such
440 as pension systems, health care, education, work, fiscal structures (with eco-taxes playing an
441 important role), let alone financial markets. In this approach, GDP-contraction is not viewed
442 as a goal in itself, but rather as a likely outcome of abandoning the growth-orientation of
443 political economy in compliance with ecological imperatives.

444 The controversy about decoupling GDP growth from ecological degradation is thus
445 circumvented, rather than resolved. Indeed: questioning the growth-orientation on ecological
446 and social grounds shift the terrain of the debate away from technological speculations
447 towards issues of risk of ecological destabilization, on the one hand, and convenience/
448 desirability, on the other, drawing on the historically unfulfilled promises of decoupling
449 growth from ecological degradation and coupling it (back) with wellbeing and happiness. To
450 that extent, there is an evident affinity with the Sen/Nussbaum-inspired discourse of HD,
451 and, for that matter, also with BV - insofar the state works as an instance of
452 institutionalization in all cases - and with other counter-hegemonic struggles in the South.
453 Indeed, while many anti-systemic movements and intellectuals from the global South do
454 share the negative assessment of a growth-oriented politics¹⁵, they would not straightforwardly
455 endorse the prescription of a contraction in economic output as solution (Brand, 2015).

¹⁵ Indeed, radical transformative concepts such as post-extractivism (Acosta, 2014) and post-development (Escobar, 1995; Esteva, 2009; Sachs, 2010; Ziai, 2012) stem from the global south, yet they articulate a critical and utopian narrative in terms of post-colonialism and post-capitalism, rather than DG

456 In the following section, we argue that – if strategically articulated, this convergence might lay
457 the foundation for a political transformation, as their aims of redefining progress and
458 transforming society are complementary (Escobar, 2015). In the case of the Global South,
459 the main challenge is not downscaling the production and consumption – as is the case in
460 the industrialized world –, but developing a model that does not rely on the economic growth
461 for the attainment of ecological and social goals.

462 **5.3. Human Development: sketching out the political transformation**

463 While doubtlessly less innovative from a cultural perspective than BV and DG, and lacking
464 any in-depth analysis of the endemic inbuilt unsustainability in Western-style, globalized
465 economies, the CA of Sen/Nussbaum does hold, in turn, deeper resonance with established
466 political views, both in international as well as in national and local political circles.

467 Viewed from a perspective of strategic dialogue, its academic and political respectability
468 deliver the key resource of access to mainstream discursive arenas. From the perspective of
469 its transformative potential, HD holds promise insofar change agents informed by BV and
470 DG manage to tap into the transformative “surplus of meaning” (Muraca, 2014) of core
471 liberal values such as freedom, autonomy, individuality, emancipation on which HD builds.
472 Indeed, ecological sustainability doesn’t need to be framed as constraining freedom, for
473 example, but rather as preserving it for future generations and restoring it to the disfranchised
474 in today’s world – be these materially deprived populations in the global South or the
475 alienated individuals of the rich countries in the north –, as the CA suggests. Feminist scholar

(Brand, 2015), although a dialogue among both perspectives – at least in the academic sphere – is incipient (see for example Acosta, 2014; Brand, 2015; Escobar, 2015; Monni and Pallottino, 2015; Wichterich, 2013).

476 Uta von Winterfeld (2011), for example, has interestingly advanced such a positive framing
477 through the concept of “right to sufficiency”: in a world where consumption has become the
478 central means of social differentiation, both identity-building and social acceptance become
479 increasingly associated with part-taking in the consumerist frenzy. Those voluntarily pursuing
480 materially frugal (i.e. ecologically sustainable) lifestyles are systematically exposed to lack of
481 societal recognition, that is: they suffer from a form of social discrimination. She therefore
482 advocates affirmative action in favour of sufficient lifestyles invoking liberal values of equality
483 and freedom, with the slogan “nobody should be forcefully made to wanting to have ever
484 more”.

485 In addition, the dominant notion of freedom as a lack of constraints from the environment
486 (‘negative freedom’) should be de-emphasized in favour of an understanding of freedom as
487 potential for intervening onto this very environment (‘positive freedom’), which is enshrined
488 in the notion of ‘capabilities’ and in the overall focus of strengthening people’s agency. This
489 reconceptualization of discourses of development could surely benefit from discursive cross-
490 pollination with DG and BV. Provided this work of re-elaboration proves successful, HD
491 could hold the political key to help replace a growth-oriented politics by an approach centred
492 on (contingent and politically defined) human needs, democratization and pluralization of
493 the economy and dematerialization of lifestyles.

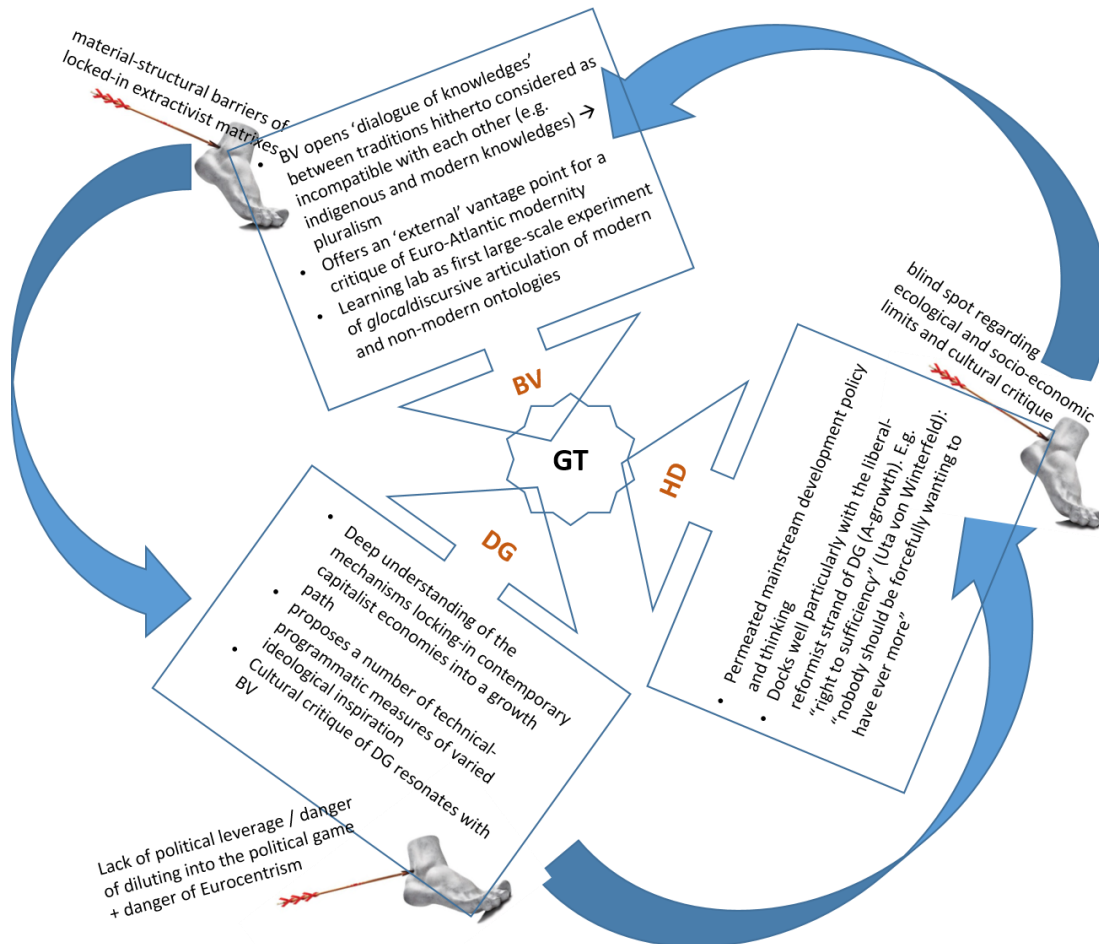
494 In conclusion, the three discourses analysed complement and need each other if a “Great
495 transformation” to sustainability is to succeed: BV providing the reservoir of the boldest
496 cultural innovation; DG offering detailed analysis about technically up-scalable forms of
497 macro- and micro- socio-economic organization; and HD the potential docking points with
498 mainstream cultural and political values and discourse.

499

500

501

Figure 1. Synthesis of the main features and weaknesses of the three discourses



502

503

504

Source: own elaboration

505 6. Further pragmatic considerations towards a fruitful dialogue between BV, DG, and HD

506 The three discourses under consideration carry diverse symbolic and material markers which

507 stem from their respective socio-cultural contexts of emergence: they are to be seen as

508 situated discursive productions. The obstacles that transformative discourses face are not to

509 be located mainly in a lack of conceptual or analytical clarity, but rather in the particularities

510 of diverse geo-historical contexts and contingent moments, with their varying political and
511 socio-cultural connectivity points (Brand, 2015).

512 In this regard, the greatest disparity can be safely said to separate BV, on the one hand, and
513 DG and HD, on the other. Indeed: BV is heavily influenced by the specific socio-historical
514 heritage of the Latin-American region – and the Andean-Amazonian countries, more
515 specifically –, as well as by their geopolitical and geo-economic situations in the
516 (semi)periphery of the globalized capitalist economy. Historical experience of direct and
517 structural oppression, exclusion, or subordination has left a strong cultural imprint leading
518 to an unwavering discursive foregrounding of power relations and imbalances, more than is
519 the case with most growth-critical approaches, and even more so vis-à-vis HD.

520 From a southern vantage point, capitalism is framed not only as a system of production and
521 consumption, but first and foremost as a system of power and domination (not least over
522 nature) (Brand, 2015, p. 29). Furthermore, five hundred years of colonial experience in Latin
523 America have left ‘open veins’ also in issues of cultural identity, with the reassertion of native
524 cultures and traditions constituting a main discursive vector in BV, as well as the stronger
525 emphasis on territorial struggles as a (meta-)physical space for collective organization, self-
526 determination, identity, and belonging. To varying degrees and qualities, this applies not only
527 to indigenous communities (or nations), but to peasants and suburban slum-dwellers, as well.
528 Such focus on territory is absent from the two northern discourses. In addition, this discursive
529 strand is comparatively more collectivistic and less anthropocentric than the two Northern
530 ones (Escobar, 2015).

531 At the same time, however, the development ideology is deeply anchored in the political
532 identity of Latin American countries, whereby questioning growth would be counter-

533 commonsensical and find little resonance in larger public debates. Much of the critical and
534 combative energy in social movements and intellectuals comes from frustration derived from
535 maldevelopment (*Svampa and Viale, 2014; Tortosa, 2001*), characterized by alienation,
536 social inequity and ecological unsustainability; i.e., frustration with the unfulfilled promises
537 of development, rather than with the idea of development itself.

538 Furthermore, and largely as a result of the position of the sub-continent in the scheme of
539 international division of labour, transformative processes in Latin America are focused on
540 production and distribution, rather than on consumption. The already mentioned structural
541 dependency of Latin American economies on the export of raw materials tightly constrains
542 the room for manoeuvre (although that which is actually available can hardly be said to have
543 been already exhausted).

544 The two above described discursive trends in Latin America trigger various and partly
545 contradictory demands and claims. Such contradictions are, in turn, reflected in the policy
546 landscape of the respective countries: territorial and identity issues are the hallmark of rural
547 peasant and indigenous communities, while a more classical left-distributive approach rather
548 characterizes the urban working-class and partly also bourgeois liberal milieus making out
549 the expanding consumer class. The former are discursively represented mainly by
550 indigenous and critical intellectuals, while the latter finds expression prevalently in pragmatist
551 political spheres (Vanhulst and Beling, 2014).

552 Yet the expansion of the middle class in Latin American so-called “emergent countries”
553 (most spectacularly, but not exclusively, Brazil), as well as in other countries of the Southern
554 hemisphere, is causing the expansion of imported, Western-style consumption patterns,

555 somewhat blurring the line between North and South¹⁶, and thus – relevantly for our
556 argument – bringing issues and problems informing the three discourses ever closer towards
557 convergence.

558 Yet although it is widely acknowledged that the material conditions of life in the Global South
559 need to be improved, many traditions of thought such as post-colonialism, have argued that
560 growth is part of the problem, rather than the solution to the social and ecological issues.
561 Likewise, it is important to keep in mind that, recalling both postcolonial and Dependency
562 Theory, the prevailing conditions in the Global South and North are mutually determining,
563 as two sides of the same coin. Because of this, it is relevant “to resist falling into the trap,
564 from northern perspectives, of thinking that while the North needs ‘degrowth’, the South
565 needs ‘development’. Conversely, from southern perspectives, it is important to avoid the
566 fallacy that degrowth is “ok for the North”, but that the South needs rapid growth, whether
567 to catch up with rich countries, satisfy the needs of the poor, or reduce inequalities” (Escobar,
568 2015, p. 456).

569 The rejection of the growth-imperative in the North would imply a reconfiguration of
570 international trade that may drive a shift in the productive matrix of the South, which is
571 mainly primary and highly dependent on exports to the North. In geopolitical terms, the
572 denial of the developmentalist discourse of international aid can create an opportunity for
573 moving away from a view of globalization as the universalization of Western-style modernity

16 The inter- and intra-societal heterogenization of socio-economic markers has blurred territorial fault lines separating the “Global South” from the “Global North”, which thus become more of socio-economic than of geographic categories.

574 and, in consequence, the rise of alternatives of/to development towards a plural economy in
575 a plural world - a pluriverse (*Escobar, 2015; Gudynas, 2011*).

576

577 **7. Conclusion**

578 In the introduction to this article we provocatively argued that while the EE community has
579 been relatively receptive to development-heterodox transformation discourses, it has hitherto
580 failed to systematically foster a fruitful debate and cross-fertilization among them. Alongside
581 this dialogical research- and intervention-line advocated by leading authors in the discussion
582 on a global social-ecological transformation (i.a. *Acosta, 2014; Brand, 2015; Escobar, 2015*),
583 we have sought to show promising ideational and pragmatic avenues to advance
584 conversations, complementarities, and alliances among three discursive strongholds within
585 the EE literature (though by no means the only ones worthwhile exploring in terms of
586 dialogic-transformational potential). At the same time, with its transdisciplinary, cross-
587 territorial base, and its critical tradition of weaker, utilitarianistic conceptions of sustainability, as
588 well as its sourcing from post-development thought, we have sought to make the case for the
589 EE community embracing the role of becoming a privileged platform for such discursive
590 synergies between HD, DG, and BV to unfold.

591

592 The goal of this article was creating a ‘discursive bridge’ between the global mainstream
593 (represented here by HD), on the one hand, and two radical transformation discourses in
594 the tradition of post-development, on the other - each standing as representative for the
595 south (BV) and from the north (DG) -; showing concrete possible forms of ideational and
596 pragmatic articulation. The lowest common denominator between DG and BV is to be
597 found in the systemic interconnections and interdependencies of the globalized capitalist

598 economy, as well as social and cultural structures underpinning it. Hence, debates around
600 BV and DG should be brought into convergence towards this common, systemic root of the
601 issues both seek to address, re-framing them as two sides of the same coin (Acosta, 2014;
602 Brand, 2015) and the possible ways to tackle them from such systemic perspective. Mutual
603 support and understanding of complex and interdependent feedback loops would thus
604 potentially enhance the efficacy of the respective local struggles (on which both discourses
605 draw their legitimacy and the support-base needed to expand their influence) significantly.

606 Taking into consideration the key situational and contextual markers of the discourses
607 analysed here, some promising complementary features between BV and DG to enrich their
608 respective understandings of the systemic interconnections would be, for example, amending
609 BV's focus on the centrality of territory with DG's focus on global relationships and
610 exchanges; the focus on production of the former with the focus on consumption of the
611 latter, or else the focus on systemic interdependences (prominent in HD and DG) with that
612 on power and domination (implicit in BV).

613 At the level of cultural values, HD's broadly defined aims also allow room for cross-
614 fertilization with DG and BV. The "surplus of meaning" of established liberal values (chiefly,
615 'freedom') offers the most promising locus for a cross-fertilizing dialogue among the three
616 discourses. The anti-utilitarian, celebrative ethos of BV resonates with the aspiration to
617 freedom, and so do the (self-)sufficient, time-wealthy, and less individualistic lifestyles
618 conveyed by DG. Out of the heterogenous DG strands, it is therefore the liberal-reformist
619 strand (which is institutionally conservative yet ecologically uncompromising and socially
620 emancipatory) that presents the clearest natural affinities for a dialogue with HD. We have
621 further argued that, as a well-established discourse geared towards human flourishing, HD

621 holds potential for spearheading a shift in political climate towards a Great Transformation.
622 Indeed, HD offers important keys as how to frame the issue in order to make it socially and
623 politically acceptable: it's all about enlarging the capabilities of current and future generations
624 to live fulfilling lives - provided, of course, that there is a future for humanity on this planet,
625 in the first place, which cannot be taken for granted any longer without fundamental
626 transformations of the scale and scope envisaged in DG and BV.

627 **Acknowledgements**

628 We are grateful to Joan Martinez-Alier for his uncompromising yet constructive critique of
629 our text. We are also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their supportive and useful
630 feedback.

631 Adrian E. Beling acknowledges the financial support of Paul+Maria Kremer Foundation
632 Julien Vanhulst acknowledges financial support from Fondecyt Project N°1160186
633 (CONICYT - Chile)

634 Federico Demaria acknowledges the support of the Spanish government through the project
635 CSO2014-54513-R SINALECO.

636 **References**

- 637 Acosta, A., 2014. Poscrecimiento y posextractivismo: dos caras de una misma transformación
638 cultural, in: Pos-Crecimiento y Buen Vivir. Propuestas Globales Para La Construcción de
639 Sociedades Equitativas y Sustentables. FES-ILDIS, Quito, Ecuador.
- 640 Alexander, S., Rutherford, J., 2014. The Deep Green Alternative: Debating Strategies of
641 Transition (No. 14a). Simplicity Institute.
- 642 Alkire, S., 2009. Concepts and Measures of Agency, in: Basu, K., Kanbur, R. (Eds.), Arguments for
643 a Better World: Essays in Honor of Amartya Sen. Oxford University Press, Oxford and
644 New York, pp. 455–474.
- 645 Altmann, P., 2015. Studying discourse innovations: the case of the indigenous movement in
646 Ecuador. *Hist. Soc. Res.* 40, 161–184. doi:10.12759/hsr.40.2015.3.161-184
- 647 Amin, S., 1990. *Maldevelopment: Anatomy of a Global Failure*. United Nations University Press.
- 648 Asara, V., Otero, I., Demaria, F., Corbera, E., 2015. Socially sustainable degrowth as a social–
649 ecological transformation: repoliticizing sustainability. *Sustain. Sci.* doi:10.1007/s11625-
650 015-0321-9
- 651 Bäckstrand, K., 2011. The democratic legitimacy of global governance after Copenhagen, in:
652 Dryzek, J.S., Norgaard, R.B., Schlosberg, D. (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Climate Change
653 and Society*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, U.K.; New York, pp. 669–684.
- 654 Ballet, J., Koffi, J.-M., Pelenc, J., 2013. Environment, justice and the capability approach. *Ecol.
655 Econ.*, *New Climate Economics* 85, 28–34. doi:10.1016/j.ecolecon.2012.10.010
- 656 Beling, A.E., Vanhulst, J., 2016. Aportes para una genealogía glocal del Buen Vivir. *Doss. Econ. Sin
657 Front.* 23, 12–17.
- 658 Blühdorn, I., 2011. The sustainability of democracy On limits to growth, the post–democratic
659 turn and reactionary democrats. *Eurozine*.
- 660 Brand, U., 2015. Degrowth und Post-Extraktivismus: Zwei Seiten einer Medaille? (No. 5/2015),
661 Working Paper der DFG KollegforscherInnengruppe Postwachstumsgesellschaften. Jena.
- 662 Brand, U., Wissen, M., 2011. Sozial-ökologische Krise und imperiale Lebensweise. Zu Krise und
663 Kontinuität kapitalistischer Naturverhältnisse, in: Demirovic, A., u.a. (Eds.), *Vielfachkrise.
664 Im Finanzmarktdominierten Kapitalismus*. pp. 79–94.
- 665 Carballo, A.E., 2016. *Empowering Development: Capabilities and Latin American Critical
666 Traditions*. University of Westminster, UK.
- 667 Carballo, A.E., 2015. Re-Reading Amartya Sen from the Andes: Exploring the Ethical
668 Contributions of Indigenous Philosophies.
- 669 Castoriadis, C., 1999. *L'institution imaginaire de la société*. Seuil, Paris.
- 670 Chakrabarty, D., 2009. The climate of history: Four theses. *Crit. Inq.* 35.
- 671 Costanza, R., 1991. *Ecological Economics: The Science and Management of Sustainability*.
672 Columbia University Press, New York.
- 673 Crouch, C., 2004. *Post-democracy, Themes for the 21st century*. Polity, Malden, MA.
- 674 Cubillo-Guevara, A.P., Hidalgo-Capitán, A.L., Domínguez-Gómez, J.A., 2014. El pensamiento
675 sobre el Buen Vivir. Entre el indigenismo, el socialismo y el postdesarrollismo. *Rev. CLAD
676 Reforma Democr.* 27–58.
- 677 D'Alisa, G., Demaria, F., Kallis, G., 2014. *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*. Routledge.
- 678 Daly, H.E., Townsend, K.N. (Eds.), 1993. *Valuing the Earth: Economics, Ecology, Ethics*. The MIT
679 Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- 680 De La Cadena, M., 2010. Indigenous cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond
681 “Politics.” *Cult. Anthropol.* 25, 334–370. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01061.x

- 682 Demaria, F., Schneider, F., Sekulova, F., Martinez-Alier, J., 2013. What is Degrowth? From an
 683 Activist Slogan to a Social Movement. *Environ. Values* 22, 191–215.
 684 doi:10.3197/096327113X13581561725194
- 685 Deneulin, S., Shahani, L. (Eds.), 2009. *An Introduction to the Human Development and Capability*
 686 *Approach: Freedom and Agency*. IDRC.
- 687 Dryzek, J.S., 2005. *The politics of the earth: environmental discourses*. Oxford University Press.
- 688 Escobar, A., 2015. Degrowth, postdevelopment, and transitions: a preliminary conversation.
 689 *Sustain. Sci.* doi:10.1007/s11625-015-0297-5
- 690 Escobar, A., 2011. Sustainability: Design for the pluriverse. *Development* 54, 137–140.
- 691 Escobar, A., 1995. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*.
 692 Princeton University Press.
- 693 Espinosa, C., 2015. Interpretive Affinities: The Constitutionalization of Rights of Nature, Pacha
 694 Mama, in Ecuador. *J. Environ. Policy Plan.* 0, 1–19. doi:10.1080/1523908X.2015.1116379
- 695 Esteva, G., 2009. Más allá del desarrollo la buena vida. *Cuad. Trab. Sobre El Desarro.* 7–18.
- 696 Fischer-Kowalski, M., Haberl, H., 2007. *Socioecological Transitions and Global Change:
 697 Trajectories of Social Metabolism and Land Use*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- 698 Georgescu-Roegen, N., 1971. *The entropy law and the economic process*. Harvard University
 699 Press.
- 700 Goodland, R.J.A., Daly, H., El Serafy, S., von Droste, B. (Eds.), 1992. *Environmentally Sustainable
 701 Economic Development: Building on Brundtland*, Environmental Working Paper. The
 702 World Bank, Paris.
- 703 Gudynas, E., 2011. Buen Vivir: Germinando alternativas al desarrollo. *América Lat. En Mov.* 462,
 704 1–20.
- 705 Guillen-Royo, M., 2015. *Sustainability and Wellbeing: Human Scale Development in Practice*.
 706 Routledge, London.
- 707 Hamilton, C., 2003. *Growth Fetish*. Allen & Unwin.
- 708 Hannigan, J., 2006. *Environmental sociology*, 2nd ed. ed. Routledge, New York.
- 709 Hopwood, B., Mellor, M., O'Brien, G., 2005. Sustainable development: mapping different
 710 approaches. *Sustain. Dev.* 13, 38–52. doi:10.1002/sd.244
- 711 Ibrahim, S., Alkire, S., 2007. Agency and Empowerment: A proposal for internationally
 712 comparable indicators (No. Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative), OPHI
 713 Working Paper.
- 714 Illich, I., 1973. *Tools for conviviality*. Harper & Row, New York.
- 715 Jackson, T., 2009. *Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet*. Earthscan.
- 716 Kallis, G., 2011. In defence of degrowth. *Ecol. Econ.* 70, 873–880.
 717 doi:10.1016/j.ecolecon.2010.12.007
- 718 Kothari, A., Demaria, F., Acosta, A., 2014. Buen Vivir, Degrowth and Ecological Swaraj:
 719 Alternatives to sustainable development and the Green Economy. *Development* 57,
 720 362–375. doi:10.1057/dev.2015.24
- 721 Latouche, S., 2009. *Farewell to Growth*. Polity Press, Cambridge/Malden.
- 722 Leff, E., 2008. Decrecimiento o desconstrucción de la economía: Hacia un mundo sustentable.
 723 *POLIS Rev. Latinoam.* 7, 81–90.
- 724 Leff, E., 2004. Racionalidad ambiental: la reapropiación social de la naturaleza. *Siglo XXI*.
- 725 Lehtonen, M., 2004. The environmental-social interface of sustainable development:
 726 capabilities, social capital, institutions. *Ecol. Econ.* 49, 199–214.
- 727 Lélé, S.M., 2013. Rethinking sustainable development. *Curr. Hist.* 112, 311–316.
- 728 Lélé, S.M., 1991. Sustainable development: A critical review. *World Dev.* 19, 607–621.

- 729 Lessmann, O., Rauschmayer, F., 2013. Re-conceptualizing Sustainable Development on the Basis
730 of the Capability Approach: A Model and Its Difficulties. *J. Hum. Dev. Capab.* 14, 95–114.
731 doi:10.1080/19452829.2012.747487
- 732 Loera Gonzalez, J.J., 2015. Los buenos vivires; tensión entre dos fuerzas.
- 733 Martínez-Alier, J., 1994. De la economía ecológica al ecologismo popular. Icaria Editorial.
- 734 Martínez-Alier, J., Munda, G., O’Neill, J., 1998. Weak comparability of values as a foundation for
735 ecological economics. *Ecol. Econ.* 26, 277–286. doi:10.1016/S0921-8009(97)00120-1
- 736 Martínez-Alier, J., Temper, L., Demaria, F., 2015. Social Metabolism and Environmental Conflicts
737 in India, in: Nilanjan, G., Mukhopadhyay, P., Shah, A., Panda, M. (Eds.), *Nature, Economy
738 and Society*. Springer India, New Delhi, pp. 19–49.
- 739 Max-neef, M., 1991. *Human Scale Development: conception, application and further reflections*.
740 Apex Press, New York.
- 741 Max-neef, M., 1982. *From the Outside Looking in: Experiences in “Barefoot Economics.”* Dag
742 Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala.
- 743 Meadows, D.H., Meadows, D.L., Randers, J., Behrens, W.W., 1972. *The limits to growth: a report
744 for the Club of Rome’s project on the predicament of mankind*. Universe Books.
- 745 Miegel, M., 2011. *Exit: Wohlstand ohne Wachstum*. List.
- 746 Monni, S., Pallottino, M., 2015. A New Agenda for International Development Cooperation:
747 Lessons learnt from the Buen Vivir experience. *Development* 58, 49–57.
748 doi:10.1057/dev.2015.41
- 749 Muraca, B., 2014. *Gut leben: eine Gesellschaft jenseits des Wachstums*. Wagenbach.
- 750 Narberhaus, M., Sheppard, A., 2015. *Re-imagining Activism: A practical guide for the Great
751 Transition*. Smart CSOs LAB.
- 752 Nussbaum, M., 2000. *Women and Human Development: the Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge
753 University Press, Cambridge.
- 754 Nussbaum, M., Sen, A., 1993. *The Quality of Life*. Oxford University Press.
755 doi:10.1093/0198287976.001.0001
- 756 Paulson, S., 2017. Degrowth: culture, power and change. *J. Polit. Ecol.* 24, 425–666.
- 757 Pelenc, J., 2016. Combining Capabilities and Fundamental Human Needs: A Case Study with
758 Vulnerable Teenagers in France. *Soc. Indic. Res.* 1–28. doi:10.1007/s11205-016-1399-x
- 759 Pelenc, J., Ballet, J., 2015. Strong sustainability, critical natural capital and the capability
760 approach. *Ecol. Econ.* 112, 36–44. doi:10.1016/j.ecolecon.2015.02.006
- 761 Pelenc, J., Bazile, D., Ceruti, C., 2015. Collective capability and collective agency for
762 sustainability: A case study. *Ecol. Econ.* 118, 226–239.
763 doi:10.1016/j.ecolecon.2015.07.001
- 764 Pelfini, A., 2005. *Kollektive Lernprozesse und Institutionenbildung : die deutsche Klimapolitik auf
765 dem Weg zur ökologischen Modernisierung*. Weissensee, Berlin.
- 766 Polanyi, K., 1944. *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time*.
767 Beacon Press.
- 768 Rahnama, M., Bawtree, V. (Eds.), 1997. *The Post-Development Reader*. Zed Books.
- 769 Rancière, J., 2007. *Hatred of Democracy*. Verso, London & New York.
- 770 Reißig, R., 2011. Die neue „Große Transformation“. Der Übergang zu einem sozialökologischen
771 und solidarischen Entwicklungspfad. *Vorgänge Z. Für Bürgerrechte Gesellschaftspolitik*
772 79–88.
- 773 Rist, G., 2002. *The history of development: from western origins to global faith*. Zed Books.
- 774 Ritz, C., 2014. Neoliberal hegemony and the post-democratization of the public sphere. *IC –
775 Rev. Científica Inf. Comun.* 11, 167–187.

- 776 Robbins, P., 2004. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, 1 edition. ed. Blackwell Publishing,
777 Malden, MA.
- 778 Sachs, W. (Ed.), 2010. *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, Second
779 Edition, Second Edition, New Edition. ed. Zed Books.
- 780 Sachs, W., 1997. Sustainable development, in: Redclift, M.R., Woodgate, G. (Eds.), *The*
781 *International Handbook of Environmental Sociology*. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 71–
782 82.
- 783 Schmelzer, M., 2015. *Gutes Leben Statt Wachstum: Degrowth, Klimagerechtigkeit, Subsistenz –*
784 *Eine Einführung in Die Begriffe Und Ansätze Der Postwachstumsbewegung. Weniger*
785 *Wird Mehr Postwachstumsatlas Atlas Glob. Monde Dipl. Koll.*
786 *Postwachstumsgesellschaften Friedrich Schiller- Univ. Jena.*
- 787 Schneider, F., Kallis, G., Martinez-Alier, J., 2010. Crisis or opportunity? Economic degrowth for
788 social equity and ecological sustainability. Introduction to this special issue. *J. Clean*
789 *Prod., Growth, Recession or Degrowth for Sustainability and Equity?* 18, 511–518.
790 doi:10.1016/j.jclepro.2010.01.014
- 791 Schneidewind, U., Zahrnt, A., 2014. *The Politics of Sufficiency. Making it easier to live the good*
792 *life.* oekom verlag, München.
- 793 Selwyn, B., 2014. *The Global Development Crisis.* Polity Press, Cambridge.
- 794 Sen, A., 1999. *Development as Freedom.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- 795 Sen, A., 1989. Development as Capability Expansion. *J. Dev. Plan.* 19, 41–58.
- 796 Sen, A., 1980. “Equality of What?” Tanner Lecture on Human Values, in: Sterling McMurrin (Ed.),
797 *Tanner Lectures on Human Values I.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 197–
798 220.
- 799 Shrivastava, A., Kothari, A., 2012. *Churning the earth: the making of global India.* Penguin, New
800 Delhi ; New York.
- 801 Sneddon, C., Howarth, R.B., Norgaard, R.B., 2006. Sustainable development in a post-Brundtland
802 world. *Ecol. Econ.* 57, 253–268. doi:10.1016/j.ecolecon.2005.04.013
- 803 Somers, M., Block, F., 2014. *The Return of Karl Polanyi.* Dissent Spring 2014.
- 804 Svampa, M., Viale, E., 2014. *Maldesarrollo. La Argentina del extractivismo y el despojo.* Katz
805 Editores.
- 806 Swyngedouw, E., 2011. Depoliticized Environments: The End of Nature, Climate Change and the
807 Post-Political Condition. *R. Inst. Philos. Suppl.* 69, 253–274.
808 doi:10.1017/S1358246111000300
- 809 Tortosa, J.M., 2001. *El juego global: maldesarrollo y pobreza en el sistema mundial.* Icaria
810 Editorial.
- 811 United Nations Development Programme, 1991. *Human Development Report 1991.* Oxford
812 University Press, New York.
- 813 United Nations Development Programme, 1990. *Human Development Report 1990.* Oxford
814 University Press, New York.
- 815 United Nations Environment Programme, 2016. *Global Material Flows and Resource*
816 *Productivity. An Assessment Study of the UNEP International Resource Panel.* UNEP,
817 Paris.
- 818 Vanhulst, J., 2015. El laberinto de los discursos del Buen vivir: entre Sumak Kawsay y Socialismo
819 del siglo XXI. *Polis Rev. Latinoam.* 14, 233–261.
- 820 Vanhulst, J., Beling, A.E., 2014. Buen vivir: Emergent discourse within or beyond sustainable
821 development? *Ecol. Econ.* 101, 54–63. doi:10.1016/j.ecolecon.2014.02.017
- 822 Vanhulst, J., Beling, A.E., 2013. Buen vivir et développement durable: rupture ou continuité ?
823 *Ecol. Polit.* 1/2013.

- 824 Vanhulst, J., Zaccai, E., 2016. Sustainability in latin America: An analysis of the academic
825 discursive field. *Environ. Dev.* 20, 68–82. doi:10.1016/j.envdev.2016.10.005
- 826 Walsh, C., 2010. Development as Buen Vivir: Institutional arrangements and (de)colonial
827 entanglements. *Development* 53, 15–21. doi:10.1057/dev.2009.93
- 828 WBGU, 2011. *World in transition : a social contract for sustainability.* Deutschland.
829 Wissenschaftlicher Beirat Globale Umweltveränderungen, Berlin.
- 830 Wichterich, C., 2013. Occupy Development – Towards a caring economy. *Development* 56, 346–
831 349. doi:10.1057/dev.2014.12
- 832 Winterfeld, U. von, 2011. Vom Recht auf Suffizienz, in: Rätz, W. (Ed.), *Ausgewachsen!*
833 *Ökologische Gerechtigkeit. Soziale Rechte. Gutes Leben.* VSA Verlag, Hamburg, pp. 57–
834 65.
- 835 Ziai, A., 2012. Post-Development: Fundamentalkritik der „Entwicklung“ *Geogr.*
836 *Helvetica* 67, 133–138. doi:10.5194/gh-67-133-2012
- 837