



Principles for organizations striving for sustainable degrowth: Framework development and application to four B Corps



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ABSTRACT

Economic growth is generally seen as a central economic and political goal. The critique of this view has increased recently. In this context post-growth concepts, such as sustainable degrowth, emerged as an alternative paradigm focusing on ensuring human wellbeing within planetary boundaries. Since business activity is a key driving force behind economic growth, the role of corporate organizations in a transition towards a post-growth society is a particularly challenging question. It is still unclear, for instance, what business models for organizations approaching degrowth could look like. Therefore, our study aims to contribute to understanding guiding principles for organizations approaching degrowth. In this exploratory work, we use a two-step approach: First, based on a systematic literature review, we derive principles for a conceptual framework composed of business-relevant claims in the degrowth discourse in order to assemble and synergize fragmented findings. The resulting conceptual framework serves to describe and assess organizations with respect to their approximation to degrowth. Second, we apply the framework to four organizations certified as B Corps based on qualitative content analysis of interviews with corporate representatives and additional company data. Overall, our findings show that B Corps rather successfully implement numerous degrowth-approaching principles in their organization within our current economic system, while none of the organizations is seen as fully degrowth-conform. With our analysis we uncover significant tensions regarding growth-orientation and identify further needs for empirical and conceptual research.

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1. Introduction

Multiple crises in the economic, social and environmental systems question the desirability of further economic growth (Fedrigo and Hontelez, 2010). The faith in technology and the belief that innovation and efficiency will allow unlimited economic growth without exceeding environmental boundaries is criticized in the degrowth community (Kerschner et al., 2018). Instead, degrowth scholars propose “equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human wellbeing and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level, in the short and long term” (Schneider et al., 2010b: 512). A transition towards a degrowth

society and a sustainable future would require cultural and political changes (Heikkurinen et al., 2019; Vandeventer et al., 2019). Additionally, changes in the ways corporate organizations operate are necessary, as business activity is the key driving force behind economic growth. The role of corporate organizations in such a transition as well as the question how organizations approaching degrowth and their respective business models could look like are still unclear (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018; Khmara and Kronenberg, 2018; Reichel and Seeberg, 2011).

Khmara and Kronenberg (2018) provide a first attempt to describe what degrowth can add to the discourse on business models for sustainability and vice versa. In their study, they derive criteria to assess whether a company follows the degrowth paradigm within the current capitalistic system. Our study aims to further elaborate and complement these initial criteria with a literature-based framework development and application. With this yet exploratory framework, we seek to contribute to the

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emerging degrowth discourse by providing a synthesis of guiding principles that could serve as foundations for organizations approaching degrowth and pave the way towards developing and critically discussing degrowth-conform sustainable business models. With the application of our framework to four organizations certified as B Corps based on qualitative content analysis, we explore their practical implementation. Thus, we provide an analysis of the extent to which degrowth-approximation can already be found in particularly sustainability-oriented corporate organizations within the contemporary capitalist economy. By discussing the application of our framework, we seek to disclose tensions between the claims of degrowth scholars regarding degrowth-approximation of organizations and the observation of today's implementation within the context of B Corps.

Our article is structured as follows. In Section 2 we provide background information and definitions of key concepts. In Section 3, we present the methodology and our research design for the three steps of our study: systematic-literature research, framework development and framework application. This is followed by Section 4, the results of our framework development and the description of all framework principles. In Section 5, we present the results of our framework application, followed by a discussion of both framework development and application in Section 6. Section 7 contains concluding remarks with regards to contributions, limitations and further needs for research.

2. Background, research gap and research question

2.1. Degrowth

The critique of economic growth and its repercussions is at least as old as the publication of "The limits to Growth" (Meadows, 1974) and became a widely-used argument in both public and academic debates. The English term degrowth was first used and brought into an international setting during the 'First International Conference on Economic Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity', held in Paris in April 2008 (Schneider, 2010; Schneider et al., 2010). In the last decade, the concept of degrowth has been discussed as criticism of the steadily growing (global) economy, which is coupled with growth in energy and material throughput (Jackson, 2009; Kallis et al., 2012; Schneider et al., 2010): "It is a critique of life-styles based on the mantras of working more, earning more, selling more and buying more" (Demaria et al., 2013: 197). On the supply-side the concept strives for "downsizing economic throughput as measured by material and energy flows" (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010: 1743). Thus, degrowth is in opposition to ideas such as green growth (e.g., see Capasso et al., 2019), which aims at combining economic growth with ecological considerations (Sandberg et al., 2019). It is not about continued negative growth, however, but about a sustainable downscaling (Latouche, 2010). When the 'right size' of the economy is reached by degrowth, a steady state economy with constant throughput should be maintained (Farley, 2015). In principle, it aims to secure a socially and ecologically sustainable future (Schneider et al., 2010) and strives for more meaning in life and the satisfaction of basic human needs (Demaria et al., 2013). On the demand-side, this is often associated with the idea of sufficiency, which means "moderating end-user consumption" (Bocken and Short, 2016: 42) or, in other words, reducing both over- and underconsumption. So, in the end, sufficiency is about 'enough' and 'qualitative' consumption. Consequently, degrowth aims at reducing global injustices on the demand-side, in terms of consumption and wellbeing, as well as on the supply-side arguing that wealthier countries would have to bear the heavier burdens of degrowth and cut-down their material throughput drastically (Asara et al., 2015).

2.2. Degrowth and business

Degrowth is not just an economic concept, however, as cultural and political changes are regarded as equally necessary for a sustainable economy and future (Kallis, 2011). Such changes also need to include business activities, since organizations aiming at maximizing financial returns on production are key drivers of economic growth (Johanisova et al., 2013). Degrowth is in fact used both as a slogan for social movements (Petridis et al., 2015) and as a business model (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018; Khmara and Kronenberg, 2018). Just as Sahakian and Dunand (2015) concede for the social and solidarity economy, the question whether degrowth should be regarded as complementary to the capitalist market economy or as transforming the economy as a whole is a matter of debate. This includes the questions to what extent degrowth can be realized within capitalist societies and therewith whether 'business models' and 'degrowth' are compatible concepts at all. On the one hand, there are corporate organizations that are clearly actors of the capitalist market economy while not striving for or even consciously refraining from business growth. On the other hand, degrowth is to be achieved on the economy level. Thus, also an increase in 'degrowth-approaching' businesses can, *ceteris paribus*, ultimately lead to unsustainable economic growth on the macro-level. Critical scholars argue that there are growth imperatives that are immanent in capitalist economies and cultures and claim that degrowth could only be achieved in post-capitalist societies (Euler, 2019; Exner, 2014). Others see the role of capitalist economic structures and profit-oriented organizations less skeptical (Richters and Siemoneit, 2017). In the end, a decrease in overall business-activities can lead to downsizing the economy at large without the respective business models being degrowth-approaching at all. A degrowth society would include an institutional and regulatory framework different from today's, shaping the incentives for corporate organizations according to this objective. Whether or not there would be profit-oriented and value generating businesses in a 'perfect degrowth world' is debatable. For the time of transformation, we follow the notion that analyzing "any significant alteration of the dominant economic logic involves, or maybe even necessarily starts from, the application of new business models [...] seeking to promote more sustainable ideas" (Boons et al., 2013: 6; see also Jackson, 2009). Consequently, in this paper, we focus on the possibility of organizations approaching degrowth within the current capitalist system.

2.3. Sustainable business models and alternative organizations

For studying how organizations can approach degrowth, both the architecture of value creation (the business model) and the contextual framing (the type of organization) are focal points. The concept of business models is commonly used in order to outline and understand how an organization works (Baden-Fuller and Morgan, 2010; Osterwalder et al., 2005). A business model describes the architecture of an organization and helps to understand how an organization does business (Osterwalder et al., 2005). It describes the value proposition of an organization (Richardson, 2008) and how it creates, delivers and captures value (Chesbrough, 2007). Unlike standard business models sustainable business models not only aim at creating customer and firm value but also at addressing societal and environmental needs through the way business is done (Bocken et al., 2019; Wells, 2006). When sustainability issues are considered within the design of value proposition, creation, delivery and capture, understanding business models "becomes both more complex and more contentious" (Wells, 2016: 38). The concept of degrowth goes clearly beyond the scope of sustainable business models (Khmara and Kronenberg,

2018) and hence organizations approaching degrowth need to alter their sustainable business model design more radically. According to Boons et al. (2013) this could lead to fundamental needs-oriented value propositions, alternative distribution of revenues and changes with regard to embedding organizations within society. Besides the operationalization for transferring degrowth into business practice suggested by Khmara and Kronenberg (2020), precise descriptions or even archetypes for degrowth-conform sustainable business models are currently still missing. Due to the limited business literature related to degrowth it is even questionable, whether precise archetypes for degrowth-approaching business models (similar to sustainable business models (Lüdeke-Freund et al., 2018) or circular business models (Lüdeke-Freund et al., 2019) are already derivable today.

The limited knowledge about concrete architectures for business models for degrowth requires to also look at the contextual framing of organizations that come close to approaching degrowth, i.e. the type of organization chosen. Special attention has been given to cooperatives in previous degrowth research (Kallis, 2011; Kunze and Becker, 2015). Besides cooperatives, Johanisova et al. (2013) consider also social enterprises to be primary candidates for shaping the transition towards degrowth. Social enterprises are described as social, mission-driven private organizations that offer goods or services related to their goal of benefiting the community rather than maximizing profits (Defourny and Nyssens, 2008; Kerlin, 2006). According to Boons and Lüdeke-Freund (2013: 15) their “premise is to develop self-sustaining instead of profit maximizing businesses”. They primarily exist to achieve benefits for the community or cardinal stakeholders (Johanisova and Wolf, 2012). Khmara and Kronenberg (2018) propose to investigate B Corps as special forms of social enterprises regarding their potential qualification for leading a degrowth transition. According to Haigh and Hoffman (2012) benefit corporations are so-called ‘hybrid organizations’ characterized by pursuing business models that blur the boundary between the for-profit and non-profit worlds. The private, non-profit organization B Lab certifies organizations (so called B Corps) who fundamentally aim at social and environmental requirements. The vision of B Lab is to build a global community of B Corps “who meet the highest standards of verified, overall social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability” (B Lab, 2018a). Once successfully certified, it receives a publicly accessible impact report showing a total impact score and individual scores with regard to governance, workers, community, environment, and customers (B Lab, 2018b). The extent to which B Corps intentionally or unintentionally pursue and promote degrowth is, however, yet unclear.

2.4. Research question

We thus see that business-related research within the degrowth discourse is both limited and needed. At the same time, business-related degrowth research is particularly challenging due to the oxymoronic relationship of both areas. Research on sustainable business models on the one hand and alternative types of organizations that go beyond pure profit maximization on the other hand serve as fruitful but not sufficient foundations for exploring the role and design of organizations in line with degrowth. With our study we seek to investigate what organizations need to consider approaching degrowth and to use as foundations for developing degrowth-approximate business models. Our research question can be split into three sub-questions:

- (1) What are guiding principles referred to in the degrowth literature for organizations approaching degrowth?

- (2) How do existing alternative organizations approach the derived principles?
- (3) What tensions can be observed both within the literature-based principles and regarding their application to alternative organizations?

3. Methodology

3.1. Literature review and framework development

To develop a framework that synthesizes existing claims within the international degrowth discourse about how organizations are or should be designed to contribute to a degrowth transition, we followed a three-step process: First, we conducted a systematic literature review to screen the current state of knowledge about the overall role and design of organizations in the context of degrowth, following the suggestions of Kitchenham (2004). Second, we derived distinctive principles that could serve to design and assess organizations with respect to their approximation to degrowth and their respective business models. Third, we conceptualized and organized the identified principles regarding different stakeholder groups to enable the application of the framework.

For the first step, we used a keyword search using the terms ‘degrowth’ and ‘post-growth’ to identify relevant literature. Moreover, we added ‘sufficiency’ due to the close connection between sufficiency and degrowth (Lorek and Fuchs, 2013) but linked the term ‘sufficiency’ with the term ‘business model’ to limit and specify the results. This has been done because the term ‘sufficiency’ is broadly used in many subject areas and in our study only serves to complement core degrowth and post-growth literature. We accessed the databases Web of Science and ScienceDirect. We limited our search to Management, Economics and Environmental Science, and started in 2008, when the term degrowth was coined (Schneider et al., 2010). Using the search phrase and the aforementioned restrictions in the selected search engines, we identified an initial number of 227 articles in Web of Science and 140 articles in ScienceDirect. Fig. 1 shows the process of our literature search.

Based on screening abstracts, keywords and titles, we restricted our analysis to articles that deal with the role of organizations in a degrowth economy. We therefore excluded articles that only consider degrowth in connection with other topics such as policies, environmental or social sciences and that are not applicable to the role or activities of organizations, resulting in a total of 44 articles. Applying our exclusion criteria to the full text articles, a total number of 25 articles remained that are in scope of the research purpose. After deriving the article list, we added three articles that were not result of the literature analysis but were already known prior to the data collection, resulting in 28 articles, which we used for the development of the framework. Appendix 1 shows all papers used for the literature review including their core focus within the context of degrowth and organizations.

For the second step, we screened the articles for passages that contain descriptions of how organizations are or should be designed or what organizations do or should do to contribute to a degrowth transition. We restricted ourselves to only reviewing claims made by scholars that we found in our data sample. In the second step, we reduced the material in several loops. We abridged relevant passages into singular claims and inductively converted similar claims into potential guiding principles for organizations approaching degrowth following the suggestions for inductive category development proposed by Mayring (2000). In the presentation of the guiding principles, we oriented ourselves towards the way Stubbs and Cocklin (2008) conceptualized principles for sustainability business models. For the third step, we reviewed the principles and mapped them to relevant stakeholder groups.

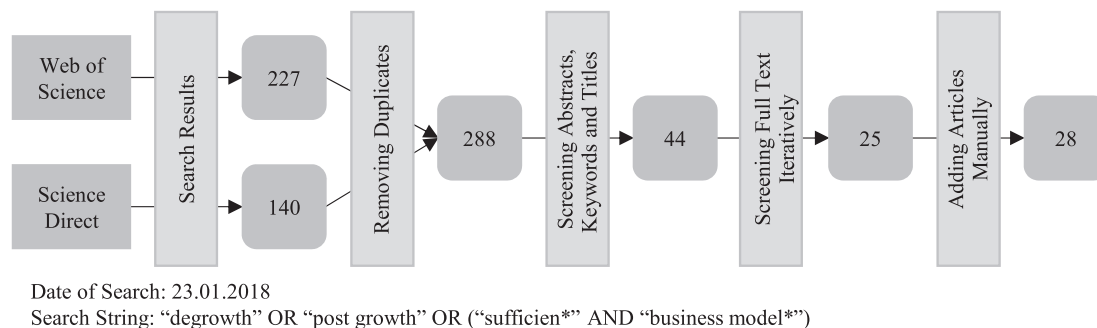


Fig. 1. Screening process.

3.2. Framework application

After having developed a first version of our framework, we followed the suggestions by [Khmara and Kronenberg \(2018\)](#) and [Johanisova et al. \(2013\)](#) to study B Corps as special types of social enterprises with regard to the applicability of our framework (See Section 2.3). In a first step, we approached a sample of ten B Corps via e-mail and received positive feedback from three CEOs. With these three CEOs, we conducted qualitative expert interviews via telephone as a first step. This allowed us to investigate principles for organizations approaching degrowth and their respective business models in the real world context through qualitative data collection and analysis ([Hancock and Algozzine, 2006](#); [Yin, 2018](#)). The first B Corp is Skagerak, a Danish family-owned furniture manufacturer providing indoor and outdoor furniture and accessories. The second B Corp is Jelt, a US-based social enterprise that manufactures environmentally conscious lifestyle products and is specialized in belts made of recycled plastic bottles. The third B Corp is BWF, a Danish manufacturer of leather jackets and bags that are made of recycled materials. Besides illustrating the application of the framework, the interviews with the three organizations helped us to undertake minor adjustments and sharpen the framework by condensing and reformulating some of the principles that comprise the framework. We for instance merged two similar principles (“Provide services” and “Enable sharing of products”) into one (“Enable usage and sharing of products”), because we noticed repetitions and cross references in the answers of the three CEOs.

In a second step, we conducted an in-depth analysis with the US-based natural cosmetics company Dr. Bronner’s. Dr. Bronner’s has the third highest score of all B Corps and therefore fits the purpose of our study particularly well ([B Lab, 2020b](#)). We conducted a group interview with representatives from the US and two separate interviews with representatives of its European subsidiary. For each of the four organizations (see [Table 1](#) for a summary of our selected cases and interviews), we examined additional company data, e.g., annual report, website, and other publicly available information.

We based the semi-structured interviews on an interview guideline, in form of a list of open questions, which enables the comparability of the interviews ([Yin, 2018](#)). When interviewing the first three B Corps, we used questions resampling the principles of our framework as a guideline. With all four interviewees of Dr. Bronner’s we went in-depth through the final framework including all principles and corresponding claims that also serve as more concrete potential means of application in practice (see [Appendix 3](#)). In our subsequent analysis we explored how each organization follows our framework based on qualitative content analysis of the transcribed interview material and additional company data,

and drew generalized conclusions based on differences and commonalities between the four organizations ([Baxter and Jack, 2008](#); [Yin, 2018](#)).

4. Literature-based framework

In the degrowth literature we inductively found eleven principles that could serve as guidelines for organizations approaching degrowth. For each principle, we first summarize the most important claims, which we found in our systematic literature analysis and which resulted into inductively synthesizing the respective principle. The full list of claims and the corresponding references can be found in [Appendix 3](#). Consequently, we portray the mapping of the eleven principles to different stakeholder groups.

A first decisive claim about organizations approaching degrowth is the de-emphasis on profit maximization ([Johanisova et al., 2013](#)) in favor of a focus on benefits for the community and the environment ([Bloemmen et al., 2015](#); [Speth, 2012](#)). Organizations that are driven by a social mission as their core purpose are more likely to meet ‘real needs’ and consequently the importance of growth diminishes ([Johanisova and Wolf, 2012](#)). This is also linked to an alternative understanding of corporate success ([Liesen et al., 2015](#)). In particular, corporate success (or growth) should not lead to the externalization of the resulting costs in a degrowth society ([Schneider et al., 2010](#)). Keeping the size of the business small and at a certain size could ensure direct contacts with employees and customers, which is expected to decrease with corporate growth. A small(er) size guarantees a high quality of products and services due to motivated employees ([Liesen et al., 2015](#)) and that corporate values and ethos are maintained ([Bocken and Short, 2016](#)). Since competitive pressures are among the crucial factors forcing corporate organizations to grow, a niche positioning could be helpful to reduce corporate growth pressure ([Hörisch, 2015](#); [Liesen et al., 2015](#)). [Bocken and Short \(2016\)](#) argue that sufficiency-oriented business models could focus on the strategy of organic growth, meaning that a company with a meaningful impact can and should grow to displace more environmentally harmful organizations. Since degrowth aims at downscaling production and consumption on a societal level, corporate growth of some organizations with a clear purpose for environment and society could be approaching degrowth. While selective growth of certain organizations might, thus, still be suitable ([Schneider et al., 2010](#)), it is important to take into account how profits are distributed and shared among stakeholders and whether they are placed above other interests ([Bocken and Short, 2016](#); [Wells, 2018](#)).

- (1) Organizations approaching degrowth aim at **repurposing the business for the environment and society**.

Table 1
Cases and interviewees.

Organization	Industry	Country of Origin	B Corp Score*	Focal Impact Area ^a	Interview ID	Position and Responsibility	Date	Length
Skagerak	Furniture manufacturing	Denmark	102.2	Workers (29.7), environment (27.1)	IV1	CEO and owner	April 3, 2018	38 min
Jelt	Fashion	USA (Montana)	83.3	Community (48.8)	IV2	CEO and owner	April 4, 2018	27 min
BWF	Fashion	Denmark	100.7	Environment (37.9), community (30.1)	IV3	CEO and co-founder	April 30, 2018	24 min
Dr. Bronner's	Soap and Personal Care	USA (California)	177.8	Community (68.5), Environment (64.5), Workers (29.3)	IV4	Founding family member, president and co-owner	April 12, 2019	100 min
					IV5	Founding family member and blogger		
					IV6	CEO of European subsidiary	March 14, 2019	74 min
					IV7	Director of sales of European subsidiary	March 20, 2019	44 min

Notes. *B Corp Scores vary between 0 and 200.80 points are required to become a B Corp.

^a Impact Area with scores >25.0 according to B Lab, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d).

A second claim about organizations approaching degrowth is that they transport a positive image of a future beyond materialism, not one of painful sacrifices (Schneider et al., 2010). Advertising plays a central role, but rather in the sense of education. Bocken and Short (2016: 58) argue that consumers should be “cognisant of the impacts of their purchasing and consumption decisions” to shift from consumption as a means to satisfy material needs towards creating a personal identity. Thus, campaigns should not only raise awareness of environmental issues but rather promote lifestyle movements that promote degrowth (Haucke, 2018; Khmara and Kronenberg, 2018). These movements are seen as an important factor for a societal change towards degrowth (Dedeurwaerdere et al., 2017; Haucke, 2018). Considering the role of NGOs in a degrowth society, Lorek and Fuchs (2013) go even further and argue that such organizations need to foster a social debate. They point out that corporate organizations should address their customers not only as consumers, but more as citizens.

To promote the societal acceptance of degrowth, a stronger coalition-building between organizations and their stakeholders might be important. A joint strategic re-orientation along the degrowth path could thus be implemented more easily (Lorek and Fuchs, 2013). The influence of multiple stakeholders helps to normalize new behavior (Bocken, 2017). This joint communication of the effects of products and services on sustainability can also enhance pressure on established competitors to adopt the new state of the art (Hörisch, 2015) and increase sustainability expectations of consumers.

(2) Organizations approaching degrowth **promote the societal acceptance of degrowth thinking.**

Degrowth emphasizes the need to reduce the environmental impacts of economic activity to a sustainable level. Limits to and reductions in the overall scale of production and consumption are central to achieving a future of low material use (Schneider et al., 2010). Organizations could improve the environmental performance within the firm in the sense of increased efficiency and reducing absolute resource use (Liesen et al., 2015). The use of recycled and/or renewable materials in the production process and renewable energy is important for reducing the environmental impact (Khmara and Kronenberg, 2018). Moreover, applying circular economy (see e.g., Stahel, 2016) thinking is essential (Hobson and Lynch, 2016). In this sense, businesses should offer repair and take-back services for their own products (Bocken and Short, 2016; Liesen et al., 2015). Thus, closed-loop (see e.g., Guide et al., 2003) or

cradle to cradle (see e.g., McDonough and Braungart, 2009) initiatives, whereby producers have full responsibility for their products at the end of the usage phase to recirculate the components, are important (Bocken et al., 2014; Lorek and Spangenberg, 2014). In addition, hazardous wastes should be reduced or eliminated from the production process (Khmara and Kronenberg, 2018).

(3) Organizations approaching degrowth aim to **reduce the environmental impact along their value chain.**

In recent decades there has been a transition to a consumption society: the length of usefulness of products is becoming less and less relevant. Contrarily, obsolescence is often planned (Schneider et al., 2010). For-profit organizations can be seen as drivers for unsustainable consumption patterns by creating products with decreasing lifespans (Bocken, 2017) in order to maintain the tension between supply and demand (Kostakis et al., 2015). Thus, organizations must fundamentally change product development to promote product design changes that integrate the conviviality concept (Lizarralde and Tyl, 2018) and enhance longevity (see e.g., Bakker et al., 2014), repairability and are not subject to fast-fashion trends (Bocken and Short, 2016; Lizarralde and Tyl, 2018). Strategies to achieve these targets also include modular product architectures (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018), premium pricing (Bocken and Short, 2016), and co-creation and co-financing of products (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018; Kostakis et al., 2018).

(4) Organizations approaching degrowth promote **product and service design for sustainability.**

The focus on economic growth and a consumption-based society is currently one of the main causes of unsustainability and overconsumption (Bocken and Short, 2016). Hence, Bocken and Short (2016) suggest that encouraging sufficiency is important to limit overconsumption and consequently unnecessary resource use. Consumption behavior should be influenced to reduce absolute demand. Since the degree of sustainable consumption and forms of participation are closely linked (Rommel et al., 2018), it could be important for alternative business models to transform consumers into prosumers (i.e. people who are both consumers and producers of a product) in order to promote sustainable consumption. A strong focus and close relationships to consumers are important to encourage sufficiency (Bocken and Short, 2016). In general, the idea of sufficiency should not only focus on the demand side, but should be a societal organizing principle (Lorek and Fuchs,

2013). According to Lorek and Fuchs (2013), adjustments relying on technological solutions and product based sustainable consumption approaches do not suffice to foster radical changes towards strong sustainable consumption. Successful degrowth governance rather rests on taking radical positions, which include not only capping and protecting resources but also phasing out unsustainable consumption options.

(5) Organizations approaching degrowth **encourage sufficiency.**

Besides design strategies for product life extension, sharing is a second way to reduce the number of products in a society. Forms of collaborative consumption, such as sharing, renting, trading and leasing need to gain attention of organizations acting in a degrowth society (Hobson and Lynch, 2016). The idea is that no ownership is delivered, rather a usage is sold. Thus, the business retains ownership of the product as an asset (Bocken and Short, 2016; Wells, 2018), the product can be used by multiple customers. However, rebound effects must be considered and collaborative consumption initiatives must be applied in a degrowth context. The peer-to-peer service Airbnb, for example, an online home sharing platform, could increase the travel frequency of users and the range of lower-cost destination choices. Consequently, in a degrowth society, peer-to-peer services should be “based on mutual help and the exchange of skills or knowledge rather than the exchange of money” (Hobson and Lynch, 2016: 22). As part of a shift from a product-based to a service-based economy, providing additional repair services next to the sale of products increases the useful lifetime of products and also creates incentives for organizations to create products of higher quality and longer lifetime (Bocken and Short, 2016; Liesen et al., 2015). Organizations might offer their customers to have their products renewed or repaired even decades later (Liesen et al., 2015). Additionally, the provision of opportunities for customers to reuse products, e.g., by creating second-hand markets, helps to reduce landfills or idle assets. Partnerships can be helpful to facilitate repairs or resell of products (Bocken and Short, 2016).

(6) Organizations approaching degrowth **enable usage** (instead of owning) **and sharing of products.**

As the organizational structure of traditional profit-oriented organization is seen as a mechanism that forces the economic production system to grow (Johanisova and Wolf, 2012), democratic ownership structures are another important element for organizations approaching degrowth. Organizations with a democratic ownership structure are less likely to externalize their costs and are more able to meet real needs (Johanisova et al., 2013). Commons-based peer production, for example, promotes participatory decision making through peer governance (Kostakis et al., 2015, 2018). This idea can also be found in community renewable energy projects (Kunze and Becker, 2015; Rommel et al., 2018) which emphasize civic engagement and participation and make use of collective legal ownership. Citizens jointly invest in renewable energy, thus becoming user and investor at the same time (Rommel et al., 2018). More generally, crowdfunding ensures that financial resources are allocated in a more democratic way (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018). This increases the voluntary contribution of involved citizens in the planning and realization of projects. To ensure a democratic governance, the top management must be committed to the corporate values, in particular to oppose the trends of business-as-usual (Bocken and Short, 2016). A strong personal identification with the enterprise and holding values like sufficiency, honesty and transparency, that free from mechanisms of

growth are important (Leonhardt et al., 2017). Lastly, transparency of practices and policies are important in a democratic governance (Khmara and Kronenberg, 2018).

(7) Organizations approaching degrowth demonstrate **leadership commitment** and implement **democratic governance.**

As degrowth focuses on a high quality of life, organizations could contribute to individual wellbeing by ensuring the compatibility of work and private life. Collaborative work, reciprocal relationships based on trust and equal rights and opportunities should be promoted (Bloemmen et al., 2015; Rommel et al., 2018). In addition, it is important to keep the workload at an appropriate level to ensure a high quality of life, health and leisure time (Liesen et al., 2015). Job sharing is proposed as a promising (but arguably debatable) approach in which two (or more) people share a job and the corresponding salary (Sekulova et al., 2013). By increasing leisure time, an organization contributes to a so called ‘amateur economy’ (Nørgård, 2013) in which a large part of the free time can be used for unpaid, voluntary activities encouraged by personal motivation. Reducing working hours can also have a positive impact on the environment: if working hours are reduced, income and thus consumption, including energy, are reduced (Nørgård, 2013). Thus, more leisure time could be a socially and ecologically beneficial goal for a degrowth society. When creating a good work-life balance, the personal moral philosophy and the lived values of the owner-managers are decisive, as they should “strive for their company to exhibit a strong identity and value-conformity, maintain a positive role, be perceived positively by society and customers, provide a good work-life balance” (Leonhardt et al., 2017: 14–15). Another aspect for improving the wellbeing of employees might be to train mindfulness to reduce stress, develop attitudes and creativity (Siqueira and Pitassi, 2016).

(8) Organizations approaching degrowth are designed to **improve the work-life balance of employees.**

Since degrowth calls for an efficient use of materials and energy, local roots of an organization and the relocalization of its activities might be an important part of enterprises in a degrowth society (Johanisova et al., 2013). Locally rooted organizations generate a range of positive externalities and tend to be rather efficient in materials and energy use. In addition, organizations acting on a local scale reduce the risks of being unable to adequately control international activities (Khmara and Kronenberg, 2018). The support of the regional economy and the local embeddedness might be important success factors and strategies for organizations approaching degrowth (Liesen et al., 2015). In addition, local orientation must also take place at the product design level: this includes the involvement of local actors and skills as well as the local production. Commons-based peer production and desktop manufacturing should be of particular interest within the degrowth movement in order to enhance global design collaboration next to the relocalization of production and manufacturing (Kostakis et al., 2015). Commons-based peer production facilitates a shift away from profit-oriented organizations towards a community-based approach that produces knowledge and goods for its members according to their needs. Commons projects, such as hackerspaces or fablabs, share their knowledge and support their members in the design and production of goods (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018; Kostakis et al., 2018). This could enable autonomy and conviviality of local communities and individuals in the sense of the idea of a ‘convivial society’ proposed by Illich (1973), in which everyone is granted a high degree of access to use tools to creatively and literately carry out their own aims (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018).

(9) Organizations approaching degrowth are **locally embedded and community-based**.

Degrowth strives for global justice with a more equal distribution and access to resources (Pansera and Owen, 2018). Organizations should hence accompany the process of capacity development (see e.g., Peredo and Chrisman, 2006) in weaker sections of society. By helping people to expand their capacity to act, organizations help to strengthen their skills and competences and to empower such communities. A focus on alternative framings of technology and society “which privileges new forms of autonomy and subsistence based on local knowledge and appropriate technology” (Pansera and Owen, 2018: 5) should move to the forefront. To empower rural populations, organizations approaching degrowth might want to focus on low-tech and low-scale, hence affordable and autonomous, projects rather than scale up and horizontal solutions (Pansera and Owen, 2018). Frugal innovations (see e.g., Weyrauch and Herstatt, 2017) play an important role in enabling autonomy as they focus on the provision of products and services to low-income markets (Bocken and Short, 2016).

(10) Organizations approaching degrowth **enable autonomy and capacity development**.

A company can collaborate with other organizations and share knowledge, skills and experiences in a convivial manner (Bloemmen et al., 2015). The sharing of staff or buildings can improve the financial autonomy of organizations (Dedeurwaerdere et al., 2017). Hence, globally linked enterprises can create new global knowledge networks, based on shared knowledge, code, designs and software (Kostakis et al., 2015, 2018). Open design strategies should also be taken into account (Haucke, 2018; Kostakis et al., 2015; Wells, 2018). Design can be shared, modified, replicated and improved by anyone (Kostakis et al., 2018). Next to sharing know-how and designs, sharing the infrastructure through open spaces facilitates resource sharing (Kostakis et al., 2018). Finally, the usage of crowdsourcing enables sharing of knowledge and prevents reinventing. Consequently, resources may be used more efficiently (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018).

(11) Organizations approaching degrowth are open to **sharing resources**.

Concluding, organizations approaching degrowth should not be focused on maximizing profits or shareholder value, but a strong focus on stakeholders is required (Johanisova et al., 2013; Johanisova and Wolf, 2012). Consequently, we mapped the identified principles to stakeholders of an organization (see Fig. 2). Naturally, classic stakeholders such as financiers, shareholders or investors (Laplume et al., 2008) become less important in a degrowth context, while other stakeholder groups are more crucial. The first two principles explain that degrowth oriented organization should aim to help the *society* in general, either by providing direct benefits or education. Principles 3 and 4 are directly targeted at environmental goals. Value creation should consequently aim to minimize harmful and maximize positive effects for the *environment*. Principles 5 and 6 are directed towards the *customers*. The organization should enable customers to be more sufficient by consuming less (but more qualitative) goods and by sharing products. Principles 7 and 8 refer to structures within the organization. Members of the organization (i.e., *employees* and *managers*) should work together in a responsible and a socially sustainable manner towards a common (democratic) goal. Finally, Principles 9, 10 and 11 address the *community*, whether it is the network partners or local and disadvantaged communities.

5. Framework application

In the following, we present the results of applying the framework to the four organizations. We start with the presentation of Dr. Bronner's, our main case, followed by the shorter initial cases. We summarize the application of the principles within each stakeholder category to each of the four organizations individually, followed by a final section, in which we jointly portray the assessments.

5.1. Application to Dr. Bronner's

At first glance, Dr. Bronner's is a soap and personal care company with a conventional business model of sourcing resources, producing and selling products (IV4, IV6). At second glance, considering the history of the organization the key purpose turns out to be unconventional. IV6 describes it as follows:

“Emanuel Bronner was a soap master maker who had lost his parents to the Holocaust [...], [which] motivated Emanuel to come up with a strategy how to prevent [...] a second Holocaust from happening. He came up with a very simple statement ‘We are all-one or none’, meaning that there is no difference between human beings no matter where you're from, what sex you are, what your religion is. [...] Based on this idea he founded the company. But not with the intention of selling products but to use the soap as the symbol for his mission. [...] And to this day this is still the engine and the driver, the motivation for the company.” (IV6)

Thus, while following a rather conventional business model, the intrinsic motivation is highly society-driven (IV4). Dr. Bronner's mission is to bring positive change into every aspect of the operation, to the environment and to the society (IV6). This includes how profits are generated and how profits are shared. Profits are generated based on organic-regenerative farming and fair-trade principles (IV4, IV7). A third of the profits are donated to NGOs around the world, another third gets reinvested into supply chain and operation management, and the remaining third is shared among the employees (IV6). All interviewees agree that the success of the mission of Dr. Bronner's correlates with the growth of the company. Nonetheless, for Dr. Bronner's it is not the “foremost target to drive the company to the max and have a very firm and definite growth plan” (IV6). Instead, sales increased genuinely due to market developments towards organic products in the US and in Europe, without using classical marketing such as advertisement (IV4). “Growth has to be regarded as a consequence of our target, not the other way around.” (IV6). IV5 therefore also sees clear boundaries for growth. For IV 6 “control is key when it comes to growth” and IV4 argues that “remaining full autonomy is more important than to grow” (IV4). For Dr. Bronner's it is therefore crucial to also measure their success with social and environmental indicators such as greenhouse gas emissions, acres cultivated organically, fair-trade projects and donations besides looking at economic key performance indicators (IV4, IV6, IV7). Regarding Principle 2, Dr. Bronner's has never promoted post-growth thinking directly (IV6). IV6, however, clearly identified “matching potential within [Dr. Bronner's] communication and [its] set targets”. Under the umbrella term “constructive capitalism”, Dr. Bronner's promotes “a new business approach offsite from the conventional business practices of growth, growth, growth” (IV6). Bringing change to society and to the environment, is for IV6 a core element “within the degrowth movement and also within constructive capitalism.” Moreover, one crucial element for Dr. Bronner's is to engage in and finance activism for topics that directly relate to business operations, such as mitigating climate change, farming

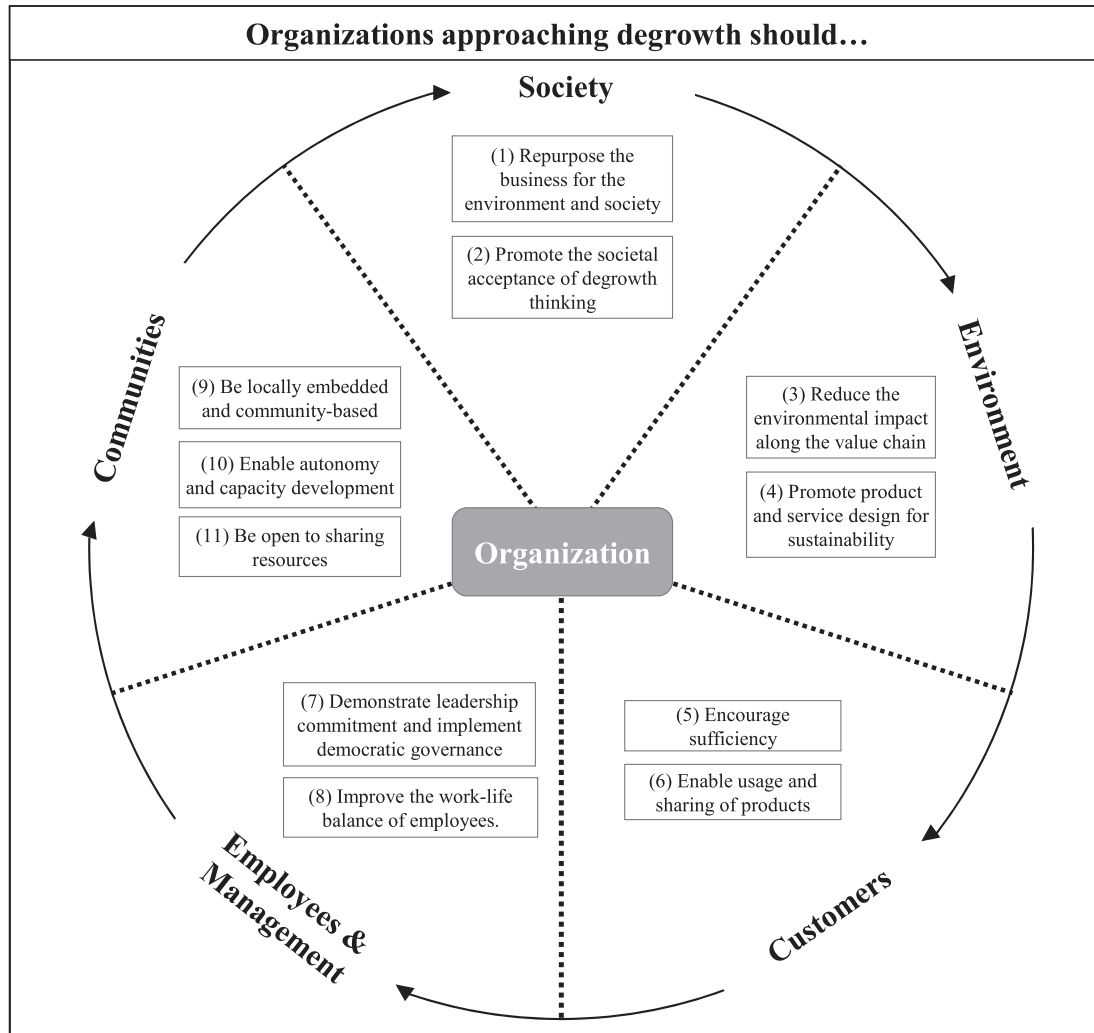


Fig. 2. Framework for organizations approaching degrowth.

practices, animal rights, or to the overall “we-are-all-one”-mission such as supporting LGBT-events, or minimum-wage legislation (IV4, IV5, IV6).

Dr. Bronner’s implemented a zero-waste campaign in the US to reduce the environmental impact along the value chain (IV4, IV5). The factory is solar powered with own solar power stations (IV4, IV6). The product assortment is simple. Within the section of soaps, Dr. Bronner’s offers three main lines, which differ only in their essential oil. The base formulation is similar (IV6). The ingredients are sourced transparently with organic certification, food certification and Fair-trade certification (IV7). With agricultural supply projects, Dr. Bronner’s seeks to expand dynamic agroforestry practices, compost production, and soil regeneration in order to sequester greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere (Dr. Bronner’s, 2019). For the packaging of the soap bottles Post-Consumer Recycled (PCR) plastic is used (IV4). Moreover, distribution of products to unpackaged stores gains increased importance. For instance, at the flagship store in Berlin, Germany, bulks are provided, enabling customers to refill their bottles (IV6, IV7). Also, the longevity aspect plays a crucial role. “Our soaps are, from the perspective of an ordinary retailer, a hell because they are highly condensed” (IV6). This is done on purpose, “providing something that will last way longer [...] and by doing this definitely interfering in the consumption circle” (IV6). Moreover, Dr.

Bronner’s sells basic products fulfilling various needs at the same time (IV6).

For Dr. Bronner’s, creating awareness and a demand for regenerative-organic products is a core issue (IV5). IV7 describes the reasoning of customers for buying Dr. Bronner’s products with doing “something good for yourself but with a nice feeling to do something good for other people at the same time”. The labels of the products are used to provide customers with information about sustainability issues, such as organic farming or fair wages (IV5). Moreover, Dr. Bronner’s “constantly tells people to buy less soap” (IV5). To sensitize for the topic of packaging and consumer waste, Dr. Bronner’s frequently conducts awareness campaigns. In the flagship store in Berlin customers get a product for free when they return five empty bottles (IV6). Lisa Bronner, granddaughter of the founder, runs a blog, on which people are advised how to mix their own products with Dr. Bronner’s ingredients, e.g. deodorants (IV5). This brings people back to the do-it-yourself idea (IV5, IV6), which is also promoted by degrowth.

Regarding employees and management Dr. Bronner’s promotes an “ownership spirit” (IV6) and follows an open-door policy (IV4), building on the idea that new ideas should come from any of the employees (IV4). Moreover, Dr. Bronner’s established a structure for all employees to propose and vote for NGOs and initiatives to receive donations (IV5). Also, in the Fair-trade projects, the

distribution of the Fair-trade funds is organized based on democratic principles between all involved farmers (IV4). However, IV6 states that he would not call the governance structure “base democratic”. Instead, Dr. Bronner’s is organized hierarchically and “eventually decision is up to be made by the executives” (IV6). An important aspect, stressed by IV4 and IV7 is the correlation between employee satisfaction, and the focus of Dr. Bronner’s of measuring “success of the company beyond financial returns” (IV4). From an employee perspective, the opposition to business-as-usual and the establishment of other success indicators “gives you a much different satisfaction [...] as you are not only stupidly defined by the turnover” (IV7). Dr. Bronner’s is a family-owned business, owned 50/50 by the founder’s grandsons and headed by both (IV6). For IV7 the consequent focus on doing something good for society is mainly enabled and secured because there are no other shareholders. The salary for the top management is limited to five times as much as the lowest paid employees (IV6). In the US, Dr. Bronner’s pays at least 170 percent above minimum wage for a permanent position (Dr. Bronner’s, 2019). Moreover diversity plays an important role: More than 50 percent of all employees are women, 43 percent of the managers are people of color (Dr. Bronner’s, 2019). Subsidies are given to employees to switch from combustion to electric vehicles, and recharge stations are provided (IV6). In canteens, free vegan and organic ingredient-based lunches are provided to all employees (IV5, IV6).

Dr. Bronner’s demonstrates a strong embeddedness in California, running many events with the local community (IV6). In the community of their headquarter, Dr. Bronner’s sponsors cultural events, such as the Moonlight Amphitheatre, and social initiatives, such as TERI’s Campus of Life, which serves people with autism and special needs (IV5). In their Fair-trade projects, Dr. Bronner’s works with local people: Dr. Bronner’s pays “way higher wages than industry standard and the regular income standard” (IV6) to enable a decent and autonomous life (IV4). For example, in Ghana, where Dr. Bronner’s produces organic palm oil, farmers are provided with health insurance, and the Fair-trade funds are used for improving social standards of living (IV6). Dr. Bronner’s joined B Corp for the purpose of pushing and promoting a movement (IV4). With the third highest score Dr. Bronner’s perceives itself as a benchmark for other organizations and hopes to persuade especially new start-ups to follow a strong social and environmental orientation with their own operations (IV4, IV6). IV6 claims that Dr. Bronner’s is “willing to give everything away of our knowledge in order to spread the word and bring change”. For instance, in regenerative agriculture and Fair-trade supply chain management, Dr. Bronner’s hosts workshops and invites external people to share knowledge with. Dr. Bronner’s collaborates strategically with likeminded organizations (IV6), such as the outdoor clothing company Patagonia, e.g., in the Regenerative Organic Alliance to provide certification guidelines in the areas of farming, ranching, soil health, animal welfare, and farmer and worker fairness (Marcario, 2018).

5.2. Application to Skagerak

Like the mission of Dr. Bronner’s, also Skagerak describes generating a positive impact on environment and society as their main goal: “We want to give more than we take” (IV1). The company questions the usual understanding of success in form of maximizing profits, understanding success as “using the firm to do something good for society” (IV1). IV1 states: “Profit alone is no success for me, we need to do more, we need to use our company”. The company focuses on being a “solid company” instead of growing further: “Whether I need a higher turnover or stay like this is not important” (IV1). Additionally, the owner gives talks about the company and the B Corp certification at universities, colleges or

other institutions to further raise awareness.

Skagerak is not subject to fast-fashion trends: “If today everything is yellow, then maybe we make a yellow cushion, but no yellow chairs” (IV1). Skagerak’s vision is to manufacture and design long-lasting furniture combining high quality, functionality and aesthetics (IV1). A key feature of Skagerak’s business model consists of pursuing a strategy to encourage a use-and-preserve mindset as a counterparty to the throw-away mentality by focusing on the lifespan of their products (Skagerak, 2016). Skagerak tackles environmental and social issues by “using FSC-certified or comparable wood” (IV1) for the production of its furniture with the goal of a 100 percent coverage by the end of 2020 (Skagerak, 2016). Skagerak’s supplier have to agree with the Code of Conduct that contains zero tolerance requirements such as occupational health and safety, protection of the environment and active initiatives to reduce pollution (Skagerak, 2017). A third-party audit confirms the observance of the requirements ensuring transparency (IV1).

Skagerak enhances awareness of customers and transparency along the supply chain by making it “easier to see where the products come from” (IV1). An important element of Skagerak’s business model is that customers are offered a take-back service, using old furniture as currency when purchasing something new. The returned furniture is resold because of the high quality and durability of the products (IV1). This is complemented by a recycling platform in the show-room, where customers can buy and sell used furniture and accessories (Skagerak, 2017). The company also offers a five-year warranty for furniture that breaks down (IV1). Skagerak is conducting a pilot for rental of furniture. The idea is that customers can rent furniture on yearly and daily basis: “If you need 20 seats and you only have six, then you can rent the last 14” (IV1).

Skagerak states that it pursues three values: “Respect, orderliness and responsibility” (IV1). The owner’s “personal values are now represented in the company” (IV1), and these values are also communicated internally with the team. Whenever possible, the team is responsible for most of the decisions, e.g., whether introducing a new product. In these decision-making processes the CEO perceives himself rather as a “trainer” (IV1) but states that for instance important personnel decisions remain in the hands of a few executives.

Skagerak encourages local volunteering by offering its employees to volunteer in local institutions for three days with full pay each year. The aim is to “help with own hands” (IV1) and to support local communities by providing work force. Skagerak is also involved in a project to create jobs for blind people, where they get the opportunity to manufacture stools (IV1). This project “enables these people to contribute their own part to society” (IV1). While Skagerak would be open for collaborations, they see difficulties in finding “like-minded companies” (IV1) and thus in sharing resources and knowledge with others. One reason for this is competitive behavior, which hinders disclosure any information (IV1). Since Skagerak procures its materials worldwide (Skagerak, 2018), the company lacks our locality criterion with regard to the usage of local resources.

5.3. Application to Jelt

Jelt was founded because of a strong commitment to give back and to support sustainability (Jelt, 2016). IV2 states: “As a social enterprise, everything I do is to give back to my community”. The company does not pursue shareholder value maximization, quite the contrary “all profits are donated to charity” (IV2). Yet, when it comes to size, the company has recently expanded its sales to Amazon in the United Kingdom and Europe and strives for further growth (IV2). A precondition to grow is to “stay to the vision to give

back" (IV2). If expanding proves successful, Jelt would "look into charities overseas" (IV2) to generate a positive impact in the countries where their products are sold.

Jelt applies circular economy practices by using recycled materials for the production and packaging of their belts. "It is an old idea of an elastic belt, but it is a new idea that it is made from a 100 percent recycled plastic bottles" (IV2). Further, the packaging of the products is made of 100 percent recycled cardboard that can be recycled again. Customers are offered a take-back guarantee if the product is broken. Jelt recycles the buckle and packaging of returned belts (IV2). The use of recycled materials and CE initiatives corresponds to the need to reduce the environmental impact of the product life cycle. However, since the belt has an inner gel to keep the belt in place, not the entire product is recyclable yet. Jelt is still "trying to figure out how to recycle that back" (IV2).

To raise awareness, Jelt's CEO uses opportunities to talk about "the importance of being a social enterprise and of using the business as a force for good, [...] it is just about educating people" (IV2). Though sufficiency has not been mentioned explicitly in the interview, Jelt criticizes the consumption-based society referring particularly to textiles and food: "There is no way they could sell it all and there is no way we can use it all" (IV2). This shows a certain commitment to counter business-as-usual trends. Jelt is pursuing a price premium strategy and strives to educate people to spend more money on environmentally friendly products (IV2).

According to IV2, Jelt has a "very relaxed, happy corporate culture". Jelt highly encourages its employees to volunteer in the local community to "take care of the community's needs" (IV2). Employees have the autonomy and independence to plan their scheduled working hours. Flexibility is also given on other occasions to improve work-life balance, for example when "you need to leave for your child, a baseball game or you have a doctor's appointment" (IV2).

Next to the focus on enhancing lives with responsible and sustainable fashion (Jelt, 2016), Jelt's main mission is to "give back to the community" (IV2). The company donates to local charities including organizations supporting veterans, the environment and the youth (Jelt, 2018). A special feature of Jelt's business model is the relocation of the production from China to the US, where the belts are manufactured via the Montana Correctional Enterprise Program. This program enables prisoners to gain job experience and to earn money. The women incarcerated are enabled to gain work experience and on-the-job training (Montana Department of Corrections, n.d.). They are paid by hour and their salary "goes to their restitution, to their child support and into their savings account" (IV2) for usage after release. Jelt is expanding the sewing and assembly of belts to people working on ranches and farms in Montana. The aim is to "help rural communities in Montana" (IV2). Additionally, Jelt plans to help women with sewing training in Indian reservations, aiming to give these women the opportunity to earn money and to "help people who are disadvantaged" (IV2). These initiatives contribute to the empowerment of different population groups.

5.4. Application to BWF

The CEO and co-founder of BWF states that they "have built this company in order to benefit [the] community" (IV3). Yet, BWF explicitly strives for growth, because "the positive impact that BWF makes, is directly associated to growth" (IV3). The CEO states that every jacket sold improves the world to some extent by preventing the purchase of harmful textiles instead (IV3). "In order to really reap the benefits of the company we need to grow" (IV3). Thus, the own growth is legitimized through preventing other organizations to grow.

BWF was founded to contribute to solving "some of the big challenges of mankind" (IV3). A distinguished feature is BWF's circular business model: A new leather jacket or bag is made of 98 percent recycled materials (Better World Fashion, 2018b IV3). BWF uses second-hand leather garments collected by NGO partners in Denmark for producing a new product. (Better World Fashion, 2018a): "We buy waste locally, which has no value" (IV3). The lining is made of recycled plastic bottles and the buttons of re-melted metal (IV3). Hence.

BWF is convinced that their "primary job is not to educate consumers" (IV3). Quite the contrary, the owner explains that consumers should have the freedom to change products as often as they want and continue their current consumption behavior. Hence, BWF supports fast-fashion trends and "built a business model, where people can change often" (IV3). Consumers are offered to lease a jacket or to buy a product with an unlimited buyback guarantee (Better World Fashion, 2018c). BWF guarantees a 50 percent discount on a new jacket when returning the used one, even if the jacket is damaged (IV3). IV3 describes the basic idea behind this approach "to get the leather back. The used leather is raw material for us". BWF deals in two ways with jackets returned: Worn-down jackets are recycled by using the leather for new products; well-preserved jackets are cleaned and resold (IV3). Nevertheless, education takes place through information provided on BWF's website and through the ID of each leather jacket, "where you can see the jacket, who produced it, what kind of leather went into it and environmental impacts" via an integrated app (IV3). The primary aim is to "create transparency" (IV3).

The CEO and the employees of BWF claim to be committed to the corporate values and goals: "All our personal values are greatly embedded into the company" (IV3). BWF has a "flat hierarchy and a great participatory decision-making" (IV3). IV3 states that "the employees in our business are here because they believe in the values and the purpose of this company". It is stressed that even for a Danish organization the level of individual responsibility and participation is very high (IV3).

Besides local collection of leather by NGO partners in Denmark, BWF's products are manufactured in Poland in a family-owned business with fair and social working conditions (Better World Fashion, 2018a). IV3 states that "in relation to the textile industry, Poland is very local [...]. We could also have decided to produce in Bangladesh or Cambodia" (IV3). The premium price reflects the design and manufacturing choices, as producing locally "increases the production costs by a factor of five" (IV3).

5.5. Synthesis of results

In the following, we compile the individual findings and evaluate each principle for each organization, summarized in Table 2.

All organizations claim that they aim to resist the business-as-usual trends and to benefit society and environment. They have in common that they show a high commitment to use business as a force for good, thus repurposing business for society (Principle 1). All four organizations contribute to the promotion of social acceptance of some of the ideas related to degrowth-thinking through education, such as by providing society with environmental and social information about their products and supply chains (Principle 2). However, none of the organizations explicitly approaches degrowth and thus they only implicitly promote post-growth-related thinking. Closely related to the assessment of Principles 1 and 2 our analyses reveal that all four organizations explicitly aim to grow to exert more influence on the environment and society. This idea is especially emphasized by BWF regarding environmental goals and Jelt regarding social goals. BWF wants to prevent the purchase of 'harmful' textiles with every product they

Table 2
Degrowth-approximation of the four organizations.

Principle	Dr. Bronner's	Skagerak	Jelt	BWF
Society				
(1) Repurpose the business for the environment & society	++	++	+	+
(2) Promote societal acceptance of post-growth thinking	+	+	+	+
Environment				
(3) Reduce the environmental impact along the value chain	++	++	++	++
(4) Product and service design for sustainability	++	++	+	++
Customers				
(5) Encourage sufficiency	++	++	+	0
(6) Enable usage and sharing of products	0	+	0	+
Employees & Management				
(7) Leadership commitment & democratic governance	+	+	+	++
(8) Provide a decent work-life balance	++	++	++	++
Communities				
(9) Local embeddedness and community focus	++	+	++	++
(10) Enabling autonomy and supporting capacity development	++	++	++	0
(11) Cooperation and sharing resources with network partners	++	+	0	0

Note. ++ = fulfilled; + = partly fulfilled; 0 = not fulfilled.

sell. Jelt clearly strives for growth and international expansion, aiming to raise as much money as possible to give back to charity. Skagerak incorporates degrowth thinking best, because it explicitly prefers being a solid company, and thus aims to keep the business size at a certain level. Dr. Bronner's is in between Skagerak and BWF by setting clear boundaries to their corporate growth based on both fundamental environmental and social considerations. The most crucial points for discussion are that none of the organizations is seen as an explicit advocate for degrowth per se and that corporate growth is (at least partly) perceived favorable (See Section 6).

Regarding minimizing the environmental impact along the value chain (Principle 3) and designing products and services sustainably (Principle 4) all organizations show a sense of responsibility. All organizations accept higher production costs, for example through local sites or the procurement of more sustainable materials. While the four organizations follow different approaches, all of them showcase how environmental concerns are taken seriously within operations. The idea of less and sufficient consumption and the critique of the consumption-based society is highly present at Dr. Bronner's as well as Skagerak and partly at Jelt. By phasing out unsustainable consumption decisions, and producing goods that last for a long time, each of the four organizations contributes to reducing the consumer demand which is in line with our criterion to encourage sufficiency (Principle 5). However, it should be noted that the approaches implemented by the case organizations are only steps into the right direction but are surpassed in practice by more ambitious approaches. Skagerak, for instance, only offers a prolonged 5-years-warranty, while several other organizations already today offer life time warranties for their products (Woods, 2020). In contrast to the other three organizations, BWF explicitly does not aim to influence consumer behavior towards sufficiency. BWF and Skagerak also designed their business model in a way that customers are encouraged to use and share products by offering repair and exchange services or leasing (Principle 6).

Regarding employees and management, all cases clearly show and emphasize strong leadership commitment towards sustainability goals. Democratic governance is less obvious and thus needs to be assessed separately. BWF fulfills both parts of Principle 7 with leadership commitment as well as flat hierarchies and participatory decision-making processes. Other organizations show at least certain efforts towards a democratic governance structure through ownership culture and proposal rights (Dr. Bronner's) or the involvement of employees in decision-making processes (Skagerak). Each of the four organizations offers distinct approaches to

improve the work-life balance (Principle 8), e.g., by providing flexibility (Jelt), encouraging employees to volunteer in the local community during their paid time (Dr. Bronner's, Skagerak) or by creating a pleasant work atmosphere (Dr. Bronner's, Jelt).

The objectives of all four B Corps go beyond their corporate boundaries as they show a strong commitment to their local community (Principle 9): the procurement of local resources (BWF), the local manufacturing of products (Jelt, BWF) and volunteering or donations within the community (Dr. Bronner's, Skagerak, Jelt). In addition, Dr. Bronner's, Jelt and Skagerak offer approaches to support capacity development and to strengthen disadvantaged communities or regions (Principle 10). While Dr. Bronner's is highly engaged in building partnerships and collaboration with organizations in their network to achieve common goals (Principle 11), the other organizations show more difficulties in finding like-minded organizations in their industry. While the network of B Corp helps to some extent, the density of the connection to others is still rather low.

Overall, the application of our framework shows that none of the organizations serves as a perfect example of an organization approaching degrowth because for each organization there are limitations or even contradictions. However, all organizations clearly incorporate most of the principles to some extent. Thus, the analysis of the four B Corp cases illustrates how degrowth principles are partly approached.

6. Discussion of framework development and application

The framework development and the framework application show that the degrowth discourse has produced manifold ideas that can guide organizations in their business model designs. These ideas, however, have not been put into a sufficiently consistent and comprehensive framework yet. Our compilation and subsequent analyses serve as a step into this direction. However, especially after applying the framework to practice, tensions and minor inconsistencies become apparent. Moreover, further need for research particularly regarding contextualizing the principles within the overall sustainability discourse becomes apparent.

The most pressing tension relates to the question whether the aim of corporate growth in certain organizations is in fact compatible with and can or should thus be accepted in a degrowth society. Our empirical findings and the underlying framework development depict this tension. In our framework application, we see this regarding the overall objective of 'degrowing'. All four organizations neither reject corporate growth as such nor strive for

corporate degrowth. Instead, three of the four organizations explicitly aim to grow to exert more influence on the environment and society. From this insight one could immediately conclude that B Corps are not promising candidates for a degrowth transition. A positive correlation between corporate growth and benefits to society and environment would be more in line with a green growth approach. The framework application emphasizes the need to further answer the following questions:

- Is corporate growth-orientation to be seen as degrowth-approximation in our current economic system if organizations such as Dr. Bronner's combine a strong aspiration for a positive impact on society and environment with corporate growth?
- Is corporate growth-orientation to be seen as degrowth-approximation in our current economic system if organizations with a particularly meaningful impact to society displace others?
- Or do organizations need to follow at least an agrowth-path that does not aim at corporate growth at all to count as degrowth-approaching and otherwise be considered as approaching green growth instead?

Ultimately, these ambiguities are already apparent in our framework development and are hitherto conceptually debated in the degrowth discourse. On the one hand, the degrowth literature emphasizes the need for and the existence of successful, non-growing organizations that consider growth as unnecessary for achieving their specific corporate goals and as complicating the maintenance of corporate values (Leonhardt et al., 2017; Liesen et al., 2015). On the other hand, especially the idea of a sufficiency-driven business model proposed by Bocken and Short (2016) suggests that organizations with a positive impact can or even should grow 'organically' to replace conventional and environmentally harmful organizations. The goal of growing as a precondition to generate a positive impact fits perfectly into the green growth discourse (Sandberg et al., 2019). If the aim of growing organically is coupled to both creating meaningful impact and displacing more environmentally and socially harmful organizations, however, growth of certain corporate organizations could ultimately lead to degrowth rather than to green growth on a macroeconomic level. In the end, this question is ultimately a macro-economic question that cannot be answered conclusively on the level of individual organizations. While we cannot answer the reconcilability of (specified organic) growth with degrowth comprehensively within our framework, we identify a broad acknowledgment in degrowth literature that an organization that externalizes its costs or strives for highly leveraged growth and acquisitions is not approaching degrowth (Bocken and Short, 2016; Khmara and Kronenberg, 2018; Schneider et al., 2010). This kind of behavior and intention was not seen in any of the four organizations analyzed.

Another tension becomes apparent through the application of Principles 7 and 8. Our framework application showed that leadership commitment and democratic governance are not necessarily closely interlinked and need to be assessed separately. While leadership commitment is strongly emphasized by all four organizations in our framework application, the degree of democratic governance is found to be present to a significantly lower degree. It should be noted that the claim for a high level of democratic decision-making in organizations mainly comes from degrowth research focusing on cooperatives with distributed private ownership (Kallis, 2011; Kunze and Becker, 2015). Such types of organizations are genuinely much more closely associated with a high level of democratic governance than other types of corporate

organizations. While leadership commitment (to sustainability) is also compatible with green growth thinking and is already discussed with regard to standard sustainable business models (see e.g., Kurucz et al., 2017), democratic governance is much more clearly a peculiarity of degrowth thinking. The fact that the two Denmark-based organizations (especially BWF but also Skagerak) are much closer to fulfilling both criteria than the two US-based organizations suggests that the regional, cultural and political contexts in which organizations are embedded should be considered for assessing the degrowth-approximation of organizations. The Danish society is known for promoting and demanding rather flat hierarchies and participatory decision-making. Thus, this second aspect of Principle 7 is much more likely to be found there. The importance for considering the social framework, and thus other actors than organizations, also becomes apparent when assessing Principle 8. Both framework development and application show the importance of improving the work-life balance as a degrowth-approximating design element of organizations. Our framework application confirms that this principle should and can (at least partly) be addressed by organizations, as shown by the contributions to greater flexibility, healthcare support and working atmosphere of the four organizations. However, work regulations, such as job-sharing and the reduction of working hours, are first and foremost a political task (see for instance Speth, 2012). Thus, the degrowth-approximation of organizations is not limited to the corporate level but needs to be pushed by other actors as well.

Next to these tensions, there are other smaller conflicts that our analyses reveal. For instance, Principle 3 might be in contradiction with Principle 1, at least in some industries. A certain size is oftentimes required in order to produce efficiently, particularly regarding the efficient use of resources (Wells, 2016). The material recovery service of BWF, for example, is only efficient if enough customers return used jackets. Further, in the development and analysis of Principle 5, we focused mainly on the overconsumption aspect of sufficiency and covered the underconsumption aspect in Principles 9 and 10 instead. The four organizations analyzed offer high quality products using a premium price strategy. Thus, our distinction is working very well. However, if an organization is assessed with our framework that targets customers at the base of the pyramid with their product or service, our assignment is less useful. Thus, the applicability of the framework depends on its context and could be adapted to different special cases. Moreover, by applying our framework to the four B Corps (and by discussing our results with other (degrowth) researchers¹) we realized that some elements of degrowth were not sufficiently covered in the formulation of our principles. For example, Principle 7 should cover solidarity more explicitly and Principle 8 only implicitly includes equity (e.g., in wages). Additionally, the terms capabilities and empowerment might reflect the discussion on Principle 10 better than the terms capacity development and autonomy. This reflection on the limitation of our framework can serve as a starting point for adjusting and validating our framework in the future.

Finally, questions remain regarding the relative importance of each of the eleven principles for assessing degrowth-approximation of organizations, especially if there is a trade-off between or within certain principles. Is Dr. Bronner's approaching degrowth, although its business model does not allow sharing and although democratic governance is only implemented to some extent? Can the principles be ranked? Are there principles which are indispensable for a degrowth transition and others, which are just complementary? In our framework development, we based the formulation of the eleven principles solely on literature traceable

¹ We thank the anonymous reviewers for very valuable suggestions.

with the search terms degrowth and sufficiency. A subsequent step would be to relate the principles with previous conceptualizations of sustainable business models. Which principles are genuine degrowth principles, go beyond suggestions from standard sustainable business model literature, and should thus be decisive for organizations approaching degrowth? What about less decisive ones? Are those principles of our framework that correspond to propositions made by previous frameworks on sustainability business models (Stubbs and Cocklin, 2008), circular business models (Lüdeke-Freund et al., 2019) or strongly sustainable business models (Upward and Jones, 2016) the basis and thus a must-have or are they rather complementary? Is degrowth-conformity simply the highest level of a sustainability maturity model? Is full sustainability maturity reached if all 11 principles are covered? The question if any organization can (theoretically) cover all principles can most likely be answered affirmatively, the question whether such an organization would indeed be fully degrowth-conform and thus fully sustainability mature must remain unanswered, however. In the end, it seems that under given capitalist circumstances, the best an organization can do is to approach degrowth as much as possible. Hence, the question to what extent organizations can and do approach degrowth must be related to questions on the societal and regulatory level. Approaching degrowth is a societal matter and requires a larger transformation where organizations, the regulatory framework and society would have to play their respective parts.

Besides tensions, which become apparent within our own framework development and application, we checked for consistency and comprehensiveness in the literature published after our framework had been developed. To do so, we searched for and screened relevant literature between 2018 and 2020 in a similar way as described in Section 3.1. We found 17 articles (see Appendix 2 for an overview), which contain business-related findings, and analyzed to which of our principles each article contributes. Moreover, we searched for potential new aspects which could lead to the formulation of new principles. Generally, we noted that the discussion about the role and design of organizations has received increased attention. Various articles directly or indirectly cover the question of how business and degrowth fit together. We distinguish between three different types of articles in our sample: The first group of articles focus on one or few principles of our framework particularly. For instance, Andreoni (2020) assesses the Sharing Economy from a degrowth perspective and contributes to understanding potentials but particularly also limitations of promoting the usage and sharing of products (Principle 6). Bocken et al. (2020) provide a case study of a sufficiency business model, thus elaborating Principle 5. Cyron and Zoellick (2018) assess reasons for business growth and ways to redefine business development (Principle 1). Gunderson (2019) deals with work time reduction and democratic governance (Principles 7 and 8). The second group contains articles that discuss degrowth in relation to other scientific discourses and thus touch various principles. For instance, Khmara and Kronenberg (2020) analyze how the sustainability transitions research can inform the degrowth discourse, Wiefek and Heinitz (2018) merge economy for the common good and degrowth thinking and Houtbeckers (2018) relate social enterprises, degrowth and the Diverse Economy.

Finally, the third group contains four articles which synthesize knowledge with regard to the overall question of how degrowth and business could relate to each other. Banerjee et al. (2020) outline what organizations could focus on in a post-growth era. They propose frugal abundance, conviviality, care, open

relocalization, collective forms of ownership, democratic decision-making, ecological principles, reducing energy consumption, redistributing wealth, sufficiency and growth-independence. Nesterova (2020) pays particular attention to the relation between businesses and their (natural) environment, between people and non-humans, and how business could deviate from profit maximization. Gebauer (2018) describes approaches for growth-independence of organizations, proposing democratic ownership and equity, sufficiency-based limits to firm size, business models and quality development, solidary communities, and transparency and communication for transformative impact. Finally, Schmid (2018) describes post-growth organizations as practice formations addressing social and environmental concerns and simultaneously engaging in post-growth politics, proposing open-sourcing, commoning, low-threshold access, cross-subsidizing, non-hierarchical and inclusive communality and material and spiritual human and more-than-human interrelationships. Particularly regarding this last group, we see that we cover almost all propositions within our eleven principles and that many of our principles are referenced in recent research. Considering the suggestions found in the update of our literature review, three aspects could extend our framework and be considered for developing further principles: (1) considering (collective) ownership structures in a separate principle and thus adding shareholders as another group of stakeholders (Pansera and Fressoli, 2020; Schmid, 2018; Wiefek and Heinitz, 2018), (2) incorporating care and unpaid labor in a separate principle (Banerjee et al., 2020), and (3) cover the role of spirituality and interrelationships to non-humans (Nesterova, 2020; Schmid, 2018).

7. Conclusion, limitations and recommendations for further research

In this paper we sought to contribute to the degrowth discourse and to the discussion on how organizations could approach degrowth by answering three research questions. Concluding our study, we summarize the answers to these three questions and subsequently discuss the limitations of our study.

First, we posed the question, which guiding principles could be derived from degrowth literature for organizations approaching degrowth. By reflecting the state-of-the-art of literature about the role and design of organizations within a transition towards a degrowth society, we provide a comprehensive and structured overview of existing knowledge in the field. Our synthesis and structuring into eleven guiding principles extend the limits of existing literature and indicates starting points for further research in both, the degrowth and the sustainable business model discourse. With our holistic framework, we provide (initial) criteria for the operationalization of degrowth thinking in organizations and potential implementation practices within the contemporary economic system. Our framework advances the results presented by Khmara and Kronenberg (2018) by deriving additional criteria from the degrowth literature (thus, enlarging the framework for assessing degrowth in practice) and by deriving each of the principles in a consistent and comprehensive manner (thus, improving the quality of the framework). Our findings particularly illustrate the need to move beyond traditional measures of success and exceed traditional organizational boundaries, for instance by benefiting local communities.

Our second research question was concerned with understanding how existing alternative organizations (B Corps) approach the derived principles. By applying our framework, we show how

degrowth approximation can be assessed in business practice, particularly in the sphere of B Corps. While [Khmara and Kronenberg \(2018\)](#) provided one case study with the B Corp Patagonia based on secondary data, we applied (and informed the development of) the framework with the help of interviews with the CEOs and corporate representatives of four B Corps. Our framework proved useful in explaining and illustrating the potential contribution of organizations to a degrowth society, but also existing shortfalls. While all four organizations can be considered to approach green growth, we showed that none of them aims to fully cover the principles of organizations approaching degrowth. Thus, none of the organizations can be clearly called a degrowth-advocate. For the network of B Corps our application shows potential for extending the scope of the B Corp certification into a more radical sustainability direction, ensuring human wellbeing within planetary boundaries.

To answer our third research question, we searched for tensions within the literature-based principles as well as their application. Our analyses emphasize tensions regarding the acceptance of growth on a corporate level, and especially regarding organizations seeing a direct positive link between corporate growth and their positive impact on society and environment. The need for distinguishing between growth-orientation on a macroeconomic level and on a corporate level becomes apparent. Moreover, the application of our principles indicates a strong need to distinguish more clearly between principles, which are peculiar for degrowth, and principles which also fully correspond to sustainable business models fostering green growth. In our framework development we collected all ideas presented in the degrowth literature regarding businesses. Product design for sustainability, reducing environmental impact along the value chain or leadership commitment could also be in line with 'standard' sustainable business models, whereas democratic governance, encouraging sufficiency or repurposing businesses for society clearly extend this scope. Developing a ranking of principles might help to overcome this tension in the future. Moreover, we found certain inconsistencies between degrowth claims within and between the principles we derived. Our framework can be used for further research shedding light on contradictions and dependencies.

Alongside the contributions of our study, we noted several limitations and a particularly strong need for further research. The framework was derived from a systematic literature review and synthesized claims made by degrowth scholars between 2008 and 2018. Both framework development and application showed that this framework is neither fully comprehensive nor free of overlaps and contradictions. While we used a very practical approach to check the framework (discussion with practitioners in B Corps), a subsequent evaluation of the framework by degrowth researchers could provide a theoretical adjustment and validation. From a conceptual perspective, our research needs to be complemented with further research on potential degrowth principles related to stakeholder groups other than those identified in the existing literature, such as, for instance, owners, suppliers and governments. First starting points for extensions are mentioned in the updated literature review in our discussion section. Moreover, the relationship between claims regarding the different stakeholder groups need to be further elaborated from both theoretical and empirical perspectives. A fruitful direction to further research might also be to analyze the links between organizations

approaching degrowth and relevant institutions (regulations, standards, social norms) and other actors that can foster the transition towards a degrowth society (such as governments, NGOs, social movements or individuals), building on the recent work of [Khmara and Kronenberg \(2020\)](#). Finally, especially the tensions between 'economic degrowth' and 'corporate degrowth' need to be further explored theoretically and empirically.

From an empirical perspective, our research is clearly limited by the choice of the organizations analyzed. Firstly, we restrict our framework application to B Corps. The organizations that we analyzed do not explicitly strive for degrowth. Thus, our framework application is only able to illustrate how degrowth thinking is implicitly incorporated. While degrowth thinking is partly apparent in B Corps, our analyses reveal that the scope is clearly less strict. Thus, organizations explicitly striving for degrowth should be assessed in further research. Starting points could be worker-managed enterprises ([Dow, 2018](#)), commons-based associations ([Euler, 2018](#)), or prosumer organizations ([Dusi, 2018](#)). Secondly, our selection of organizations is limited to the consumer goods industry. Organizations working in the service sector (such as tourism) or in business-to-business markets assume a different role in the current economic system and might also assume a different role in a transition towards a degrowth society. For the tourism-sector, research could build on recent work by [Fletcher et al. \(2019\)](#), while [Wells \(2018\)](#) serves as a suitable starting point for applying our framework to organizations in the automotive industry. Finally, our study is limited by the number of organizations selected and interviews conducted. While we saw some commonalities (which might be caused by the selected sample), there were also significant differences with respect to certain principles within our sample. A sample size of four organizations is helpful to illustrate the application and detect relevant tensions but is not sufficient to provide a robust validation of the suitability of the framework to assess degrowth-approximation of organizations. A larger sample and consequently also a quantitative analysis are needed to provide more robust findings in the future.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Stephan Hankammer: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Project administration. **Robin Kleer:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Lena Mühl:** Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft. **Johannes Euler:** Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix

Appendix 1. List of research articles dealing with degrowth in relation to organizations (included in framework development)

Article	Title	Journal	Core Content
Bloemmen et al. (2015)	Microeconomic degrowth: The case of Community Supported Agriculture	Ecological Economics	Community support; producer-consumer relationships based on mutual trust; production aims at satisfying real needs
Bocken and Short (2016)	Towards a sufficiency-driven business model: Experiences and opportunities	Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions	Encouraging sufficiency; moderating absolute demand by influencing consumption behavior
Bocken (2017)	Business-led sustainable consumption initiatives: impacts and lessons learned	Journal of Management Development	Business-led sustainable consumption/sufficiency through social marketing, business model innovation (sharing and service driven); collaboration between organizations
Bocken et al. (2014) *	A literature and practice review to develop sustainable business model archetypes	Journal of Cleaner Production	Sufficiency as part of a sustainable business model; product design changes (longevity, reparability); frugal innovation; conscious sales
Dedeurwaerdere et al. (2017)	The Governance Features of Social Enterprise and Social Network Activities of Collective Food Buying Groups	Ecological Economics	Hybrid social enterprise/social network organizational forms combining economic sustainability and promotion of social learning
Hankammer and Kleer (2018)	Degrowth and collaborative value creation: Reflections on concepts and technologies	Journal of Cleaner Production	Collaborative value creation concepts and enabling technologies as an important vehicle for businesses to intimate organization-consumer relationship and address degrowth principles
Haucke (2018)	Smartphone-enabled social change: Evidence from the Fairphone case?	Journal of Cleaner Production	Importance of cooperation; open design strategy; offering repair services to customers; product modularity; raising awareness of production background; fair trade
Hobson and Lynch (2016)*	Diversifying and de-growing the circular economy: Radical social transformation in a resource-scarce world	Futures	Addressing the circular economy approach from a social perspective; Sharing Economy; importance of sharing and collaborating; long-term, slow and sustained interactions; community-orientation; exchange of skills and knowledge
Hörisch (2015)	The Role of Sustainable Entrepreneurship in Sustainability Transitions: A Conceptual Synthesis against the Background of the Multi-Level Perspective	Administrative Sciences	Role of sustainable entrepreneurs/start-ups operating in niche markets; communicating sustainability effect of products/services
Johanisova and Wolf (2012)	Economic democracy: A path for the future?	Futures	Importance of social enterprises; democratic ownership structure; de-emphasis on profit maximization; focus on benefiting the community
Johanisova et al. (2013)	Social enterprises and non-market capitals: a path to degrowth?	Journal of Cleaner Production	Role of social enterprises in the context of degrowth; small and local roots; use of local resources and products
Khmara and Kronenberg (2018)	Degrowth in business: An oxymoron or a viable business model for sustainability	Journal of Cleaner Production	Alternative understanding of success; activism; collaborative value creation; democratic governance; leader's commitment to values; reduction of environmental impact; extended product life
Kostakis et al. (2015)	Design global, manufacture local: Exploring the contours of an emerging productive model	Futures	Commons-oriented productive model; community-orientation; conjunction of global design collaborations and the relocalization of production; commons-based peer production and desktop manufacturing
Kostakis et al. (2018)	The convergence of digital commons with local manufacturing from a degrowth perspective: Two illustrative cases	Journal of Cleaner Production	Commons-oriented productive model; three interlocked practices for degrowth: design-embedded sustainability, on-demand production and sharing digital and physical productive infrastructures
Kunze and Becker (2015)	Collective ownership in renewable energy and opportunities for sustainable degrowth	Sustainability Science	Innovative organizational structure: collective ownership, collective benefit allocation and collective decision-making process
Leonhardt et al. (2017)	To Grow or Not to Grow? That Is the Question: Lessons for Social Ecological Transformation from Small-Medium Enterprises	Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society	Non-growing small-medium enterprises; strong leadership commitment; positioning in niche markets; alternative understanding of success
Liesen et al. (2015)*	Successful Non-Growing Companies	Humanistic Management Network	Different understanding of success of non-growing companies; qualitative growth rather than size/profits growth; high-quality products/services; enhancing work-life balance; niche positioning
Lizarralde and Tyl (2018)	A framework for the integration of the conviviality concept in the design process	Journal of Cleaner Production	Integrating conviviality into the design process; extended product life; small scale and local roots; co-create a strong sustainable society with stakeholders
Lorek and Fuchs (2013)	Strong sustainable consumption governance – precondition for a degrowth path?	Journal of Cleaner Production	Fostering strong sustainable consumption patterns; coalitions; promotion of a societal debate; changes in lifestyles needed
Lorek and Spangenberg (2014)	Sustainable consumption within a sustainable economy beyond green growth and green economies	Journal of Cleaner Production	Fostering strong sustainable consumption patterns; considering the important role of NGOs; social innovation; collaborations between organizations
Nørgård (2013)	Happy degrowth through more amateur economy	Journal of Cleaner Production	Work patterns; need for more leisure time; lowering either working time or work productivity and turning some of the leisure time into voluntary activities; amateur economy
Pansera and Owen (2018)	Innovation for de-growth: A case study of counter-hegemonic practices from Kerala, India	Journal of Cleaner Production	Enabling autonomy; capacity development; focus on low-tech and low-scale projects
Rommel et al. (2018)	Community renewable energy at a crossroads:	Journal of Cleaner Production	Community projects: participation model, civic engagement, encourage sufficiency, democratic governance, increase voluntary work efforts, high involvement of local stakeholders, conviviality
Schneider et al. (2010)	Crisis or opportunity? Economic degrowth for social equity and ecological sustainability. Introduction to this special issue	Journal of Cleaner Production	Reducing working hours; shorter work week; limits to advertising; beyond-materialism future; extended product life
Sekulova et al. (2013)	Degrowth: From theory to practice	Journal of Cleaner Production	Social enterprises as primer candidates for a sustainable degrowth economy; sufficiency in consumption; importance of coalitions between organizations; work-sharing; amateur economy; regulation of advertising
Siqueira and Pitassi (2016)	Sustainability-oriented innovations: Can mindfulness make a difference?	Journal of Cleaner Production	

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Article	Title	Journal	Core Content
Speth (2012)	American passage: Towards a new economy and a new politics	Ecological Economics	Mindfulness might lead to sustainability-oriented innovations; fundamental changes in product development and sales tactics needed
Wells (2018)	Degrowth and techno-business model innovation: The case of Riversimple	Journal of Cleaner Production	De-emphasis of profit maximization; locality of businesses; stakeholder primacy; more leisure time Technologies need to be aligned to degrowth principles, business model and democratic governance structure

Note. The three papers which were manually added are marked with a (*).

Appendix 2. Updated list of research articles dealing with degrowth in relation to organizations (articles published after framework development)

Article	Title	Journal	Core Content	Addressed Principles	Potential Framework Modification
Andreoni (2020)	The Trap of Success: A Paradox of Scale for Sharing Economy and Degrowth	Sustainability	Problems of environmental and socioeconomic impacts of sharing economy; profit logic; redistribution of income; from materialism towards conviviality and participation; sustainable consumption and production	(6)	Critique on sharing principle (6)
Banerjee et al. (2020)	Theoretical perspectives on organizations and organizing in a post-growth era	Organization	Need to break the hegemony of economic growth and move towards degrowth; imagining post-growth organizations based on frugal abundance, conviviality, care, and open relocalization; imagining a post-growth political economy based on redistribution, restoration, cooperation and sufficiency	(1), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), (8), (9), (11)	Care and unpaid labor; stressing collective ownership structures
Bocken et al. (2020)	Sufficiency Business Strategies in the Food Industry-The Case of Oatly	Sustainability	Implementation of sufficiency business strategies focused on moderating consumption levels; framework development for sufficiency business strategies in the food sector	(3), (4), (5)	
Brossmann & Islar (2020)	Living degrowth? Investigating degrowth practices through performative methods	Sustainability Science	Living degrowth as rethinking society, acting politically, creating alternatives, fostering connections, and unveiling the self; transforming current problems into imagined futures in multiple realms	(1), (2)	
Cyron and Zoellick (2018)	Business Development in Post-Growth Economies: Challenging Assumptions in the Existing Business Growth Literature	Management Revue	Re-definition of business development in post-growth economies based on the assumptions about what, why, and how businesses grow	(1), (11)	
Gebauer (2018)	Towards Growth-Independent and Post-Growth-Oriented Entrepreneurship in the SME Sector	Management Revue	Small and medium-sized enterprises as non-growers or slow growers; normative decisions to be a post-growth enterprise are concerned with (1) democratic ownership and equity, (2) sufficiency-based limits to firm size, (3) sufficiency-based business models and quality development, (4) solidary communities of value creation, and (5) transparency and communication for transformative impact	(1), (2), (5), (7), (9)	
Gunderson (2019)	Work time reduction and economic democracy as climate change mitigation strategies: or why the climate needs a renewed labor movement	Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences	Work time reduction and economic democracy needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase well-being	(7), (8)	
Houtbeckers (2018)	Framing Social Enterprise as Post-Growth Organizing in the Diverse Economy	Management Revue	Ambivalence of social enterprises as one potential model for post-growth organizations	(6)	
Khmara and Kronenberg (2020)	Degrowth in the context of sustainability transitions: In search of a common ground	Journal of Cleaner Production	Sustainability transitions frameworks and concepts are helpful for analyzing degrowth transitions	(1), (2), (5), (7), (8), (9), (10)	Link to institutions and regulatory framework
Mair et al. (2020)	A tale of two utopias: Work in a post-growth world	Ecological Economics	Use of utopian fiction provides inspiration for a post-growth vision of work; break link between work and consumption; reduction of labor productivity; increase of work time	(5), (8)	Another aspect of (8): Increase of work time through reduced labor productivity
Nesterova (2020)	Degrowth business framework: Implications for sustainable development	Journal of Cleaner Production	Identification of potential elements of a business for a degrowth economy; framework centered around: (1) environment, (2) people and non-humans, and (3) deviation from profit maximization imperative	(1), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), (8), (9), (10), (11)	Non-human interrelationships
Pansera and Fressoli (2020)	Innovation without growth: Frameworks for understanding technological change in a post-growth era	Organization	Role of innovation in post-growth era; contemporary bottom-up initiatives challenge mainstream ideas about innovation and growth;	(1), (9)	

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Article	Title	Journal	Core Content	Addressed Principles	Potential Framework Modification
Rauner-Lange (2018)	Post-growth Organizations as Resonant and Reciprocal Social Systems: A Matter of Gratification?	Management Revue	limits to innovate; technological determinism and productivism; convivial innovation as post-growth modes of innovating Increasing flexibilization of work requires an organizational culture based on resonance and reciprocity	(7), (8)	
Santarius et al. (2020)	Digitalization and the Decoupling Debate: Can ICT Help to Reduce Environmental Impacts While the Economy Keeps Growing?	Sustainability	Ambivalent role of digitalization for degrowth; digitalization increases absolute energy and resource consumption; digitalization might lead to relative decoupling but not to absolute decoupling;	(3), (4), (5)	
Schmid (2018)	Structured Diversity: A Practice Theory Approach to Post-Growth Organizations	Management Revue	Post-growth organizations as practice formations that address social and environmental concerns and simultaneously engage in post-growth politics	(1), (7), (8), (9), (11)	Spirituality and non-human interrelationships
Souza & Seifert (2018)	Understanding the Alternative of Not Growing for Small Mature Businesses	Management Revue	Choice to remain small by the owners/managers: maintain control; maintain traditional characteristics of the business; conservatism and risk avoidance; disassociation between growth and business success; possibility of surviving and being satisfied with current limits of a small business; personal pain and prejudices to welfare; biological link to owner's life	(1), (7), (8)	Risk Management; perspective of Shareholders
Wiefek and Heinitz (2018)	Common Good-Oriented Companies: Exploring Corporate Values, Characteristics and Practices That Could Support a Development Towards Degrowth	Management Revue	Economy for the common good combined with Latouche's eight 'R's	(1), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), (8), (9), (11)	

Appendix 3. Framework principles and corresponding claims

Principle	Corresponding Claims and Potential Means of Application
Society	
1) Repurpose the business for the environment and society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different understanding of success and de-emphasis of profit maximization (Johanisova et al., 2013) - The company is driven by a social mission: benefiting the community and stakeholders as central goal (Speth, 2012; Bloemmen et al., 2015; Johanisova and Wolf, 2012) - Satisfying 'real needs' as main objective of the company (Johanisova and Wolf, 2012) - Measure success by the environmental benefits resulting from a company's activities (Liesen et al., 2015) - Growth of an enterprise that externalizes its costs is not suitable in a degrowth society (Schneider et al., 2010) - A growth imperative is neither inevitable nor are growth mechanism always operative (Leonhardt et al., 2017) - Important to consider how profits are distributed and shared (Wells, 2018) - Keeping size of business at a certain level to maintain corporate values and/or high quality of products and/or services (Liesen et al., 2015) - Limit to smaller niches (Hörisch, 2015)
(2) Promote the societal acceptance of degrowth thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotion of a future beyond materialism, away from the 'more-is-better' paradigm (Lorek and Fuchs, 2013; Schneider et al., 2010) - Recognizing the vision and value enhancing role of companies (Hörisch, 2015) - Oppositional activism and educational campaigning (Khmara and Kronenberg, 2018; Haucke, 2018) - Internal and external communication of corporate values (Bocken and Short 2016; Hörisch, 2015) - Social marketing initiatives focused on moderating sales rather than manipulative over-selling (Bocken, 2017; Bocken and Short, 2016) - Increasing sustainability expectations of consumers by providing information about sustainability effects of products/services (e.g., providing background information about products/services to raise awareness) (Haucke, 2018) - Engage in real issues and talk about relevant values (Lorek and Fuchs, 2013) - Promote alternative models of social organization (Lorek and Fuchs, 2013) - Stronger coalition-building to contribute to a joint normalization of new behavior (Lorek and Fuchs, 2013) - Promote lifestyle movements (Dedeurwaerdere et al., 2017) - Using communication and information technology to enhance movement to post-growth initiatives (Haucke, 2018)
Environment	
(3) Reduce the environmental impact along the value chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction of absolute resource use (Liesen et al., 2015) - Applying CE initiatives (e.g., creating value from waste, closed-loop, cradle to cradle) (Bocken and Short, 2016; Hobson and Lynch, 2016; Liesen et al., 2015) - Using recycled and/or renewable materials (Khmara and Kronenberg, 2018) - Using renewable energy (Khmara and Kronenberg, 2018) - Enhancing full life cycle efficiency and sufficiency (Lorek and Spangenberg, 2014)
(4) Promote product and service design for sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhancing product longevity and reparability (Lizarralde and Tyl, 2018) - Offering a modular product architecture to facilitate maintenance during the usage phase (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018) - Price premium model (Bocken and Short, 2016)

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Principle	Corresponding Claims and Potential Means of Application
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offering co-creation/co-design possibilities to customers (Kostakis et al., 2018) - Shared funding (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018)
Customers	
(5) Encourage sufficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reducing or moderating the absolute demand by influencing consumer behavior to limit overconsumption and unnecessary resource use (Bocken and Short, 2016) - Phasing out unsustainable consumption options (Lorek and Fuchs, 2013) - Normalizing new behavior through coalition building (Sekulova et al., 2013; Lorek and Fuchs, 2013) - Taking efforts to turn consumers into prosumers (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018) - Intimating relationships to consumers (Bocken and Short, 2016)
(6) Enable usage and sharing of products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitating sharing of products rather than delivering ownership (e.g., renting, leasing, shared use) (Hobson and Lynch, 2016) - Peer-to-peer services (e.g., car sharing, home sharing) (Hobson and Lynch, 2016) - Offering additional service solutions next to the product (e.g., repair services) (Bocken and Short, 2016; Bocken, 2017) - Demand reduction services (Liesen et al., 2015) - Promotion of reuse of products (e.g., by creating secondhand markets) (Bocken and Short, 2016)
Employees & Management	
(7) Demonstrate leadership commitment and implement democratic governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Democratic ownership structure (Kunze and Becker, 2015): 'one-member-one-vote' principle (Johanisova and Wolf, 2012) - Promotion of participatory decision making through peer governance (Kostakis et al., 2015) - Strong commitment to corporate values and to oppose the trends of business-as-usual (Bocken and Short, 2016) - Strong personal moral philosophy and values of top management (Bocken and Short, 2016) - Transparency of practices and policies (Leonhardt et al., 2017; Khmara and Kronenberg, 2018)
(8) Improve the work-life balance of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting collaborative work and creating a working atmosphere based on trust and equality (Bloemmen et al., 2015; Rommel et al., 2018) - Providing flexibility in working time and place (Liesen et al., 2015) - Reduction of working hours and work productivity (Nørgård, 2013; Speth, 2012) and/or enabling job sharing (Sekulova et al., 2013) - Training mindfulness to reduce stress and develop attitudes and creativity (Siqueira and Pitassi, 2016)
Communities	
(9) Be locally embedded and community-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Benefiting the local community as central goal (Liesen et al., 2015) - Using local resources and products (Kostakis et al., 2015) - Generating positive externalities to the local community (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018; Kostakis et al., 2018) - Localized provisioning patterns (Hobson and Lynch, 2016; Liesen et al., 2015) - Local production and manufacturing (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018) - Enabling autonomy and conviviality of local communities (Hankammer and Kleer, 2018) - Supporting collaborative creation at a local level (Kostakis et al., 2015)
(10) Enable autonomy and capacity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supporting capacity development of disadvantaged populations (Pansera and Owen, 2018; see also Peredo and Chrisman, 2006) - Focusing on low-tech affordable and autonomous solutions (Pansera and Owen, 2018) - Frugal innovation as important part of enabling autonomy (Bocken and Short, 2016)
(11) Be open to sharing resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating global knowledge networks and partnerships (Bloemmen et al., 2015) - Following an open design strategy and sharing the product design or technology (Haucke, 2018; Kostakis et al., 2015; Wells, 2018) - Exchange of skills and knowledge between organizations and society in general (Kostakis et al., 2018)

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