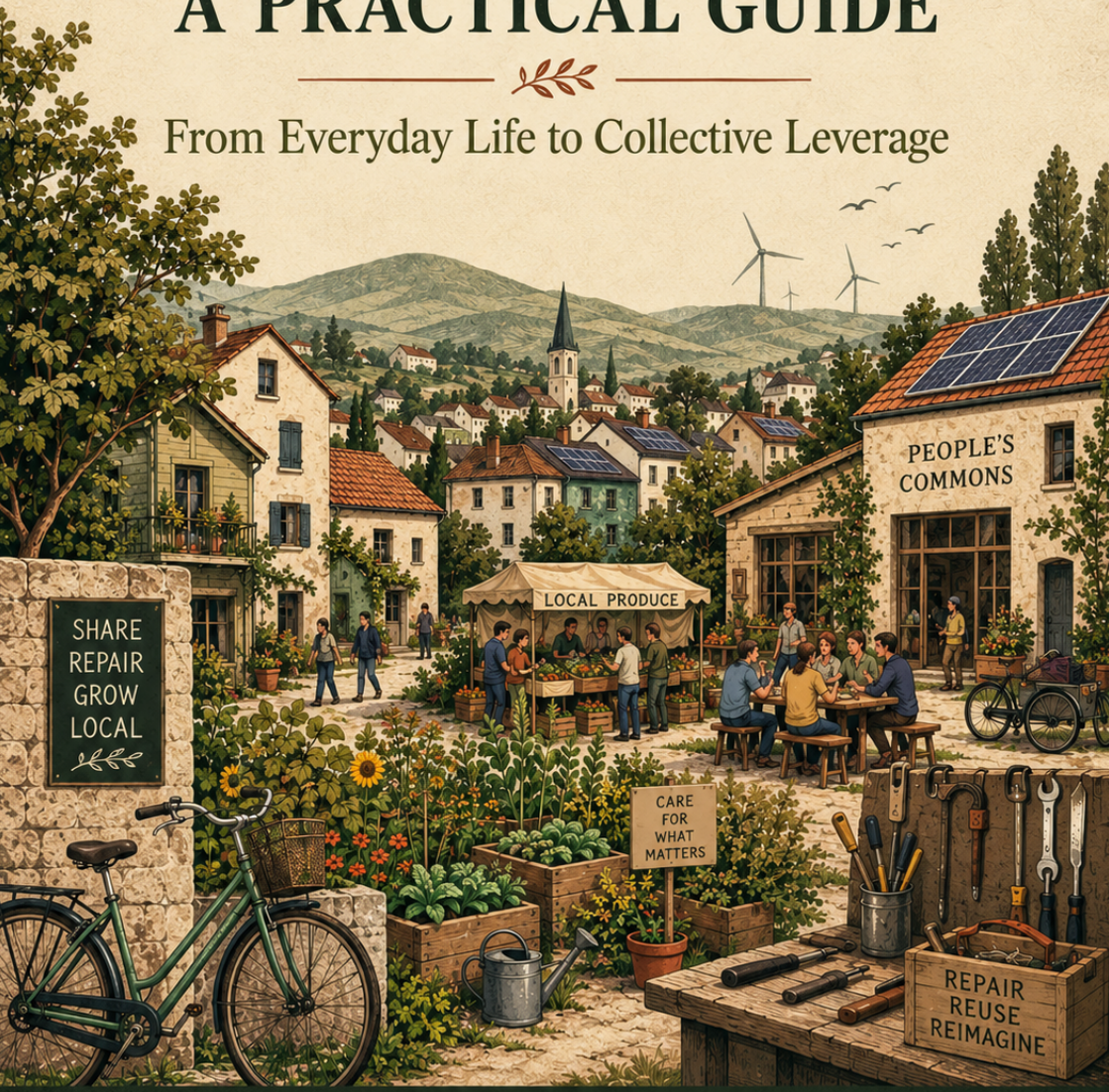
DEGROWTH

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

From Everyday Life to Collective Leverage



Noosophie IA
under the direction of Hieronymus Anonymus

Éditions Noosophie

DEGROWTH

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

From Everyday Life to Collective Leverage

Noosophie IA

under the direction of Hieronymus Anonymus

Éditions Noosophie

Official U.S. edition · September 2026

EDITORIAL INFORMATION

Title:	Degrowth: A Practical Guide
Subtitle:	From Everyday Life to Collective Leverage
Author:	Noosophie IA
Direction:	Hieronymus Anonymus
Publisher:	Éditions Noosophie
Publishing entity:	Association Noosophie
Public location:	Roumagne, Lot-et-Garonne, France
Website:	noosophie.fr
Edition:	U.S. Edition v2.2
Publication date:	September 2026
Format:	A5 digital edition
ISBN:	To be assigned
Price:	Free
License:	CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
Rights holder:	Hieronymus Anonymus (public pseudonym)
Contact:	contact@noosophie.fr

NOTE ON GENERATION AND EDITORIAL RESPONSIBILITY

This book was developed through a collaboration between Hieronymus Anonymus and Noosophe AI. Hieronymus Anonymus initiated the project, defined its subject and purposes, arbitrated its orientations, reviewed, corrected, and validated the final manuscript. Noosophe AI contributed to documentary research, structuring, drafting, comparison of arguments, coherence checks, and editing.

The text is therefore neither raw model output nor a human text merely corrected by AI. It results from an iterative process of generation, critique, verification, correction, and human validation.

Decisions about purpose, values, final validation, and publication remain human.

CONTENTS

Introduction — Starting Before the World Is Ready 1

Chapter 1 — See Your Flows Before Changing Them 6

Chapter 2 — Reduce, Extend, Repair, Share 16

Chapter 3 — What Your Money Really Changes 27

Chapter 4 — Putting Pressure on a Company Without Wasting Your Effort 38

Chapter 5 — From Isolated Individuals to Organized Force 49

Chapter 6 — Acting on Elected Officials, Agencies, and Rules 65

Chapter 7 — Building the Alternatives That Make Degrowth Possible . . 75

Chapter 8 — Making the Trajectory Last 92

Conclusion — From Proof-Action to Collective Leverage 105

General Bibliography 115

INTRODUCTION

Starting Before the World Is Ready

There is a discouraging way to talk about degrowth: start with everything that should already be different. Cities should be easier to navigate without a car. Products should last longer and be easier to repair. Energy systems should waste less. Advertising should have less power over attention. Public policy should make low-consumption ways of living easier rather than harder.

Much of that may be true. But if action can begin only after the surrounding system has already changed, then action never really begins.

The opposite mistake is just as serious: treating degrowth as a private test of character. Buy less. Drive less. Waste less. Repair more. Choose better products. Those choices can matter, but they cannot by themselves redesign a transit network, change a product standard, alter a utility system, rewrite a zoning code, or create a reliable repair economy. People can change some of the flows that run through their own lives. They cannot individually redesign all the systems that shape those flows.

This book starts from that tension. It asks neither that we wait for an ideal society nor that we pretend each household can build one through personal discipline. It proposes a sequence: begin with what can be seen and changed now, test what that action actually accomplishes, and then notice the point at which the problem has to move to another scale.

Here, degrowth means a deliberate effort to reduce material and energy flows that are excessive while maintaining or improving the conditions of a dignified life. That definition is intentionally limited. Degrowth is not one fully settled scientific or

political program. The literature includes critiques of growth as a social objective, research on energy and resource use, and debates about well-being, distribution, institutions, and ecological limits. Treating all of that as a single doctrine with every question already answered would be misleading.

Degrowth is not the same thing as recession. A recession is an economic contraction; it can destroy jobs and useful capacity without producing any coherent ecological reduction. Degrowth is not austerity either, if austerity means cutting spending or services without distinguishing what is excessive from what people need. And degrowth must not become a polite word for poverty. Some people use far more resources than are necessary for a decent life. Others still lack adequate housing, energy, mobility, food, health care, time, or essential services. Asking the same reductions of both groups would erase the very differences that a serious transition has to see.

That distinction will remain central throughout the book. Voluntary sufficiency is not imposed deprivation. Taking fewer discretionary flights is not equivalent to asking someone to live in an unsafe temperature because their utility bill is already unaffordable. Keeping a phone that still works is not equivalent to keeping equipment that is dangerous or incompatible with a job or disability. The practical question is not, “What can everyone be told to give up?” It is, “Where are the excessive flows, where is there real room to act, what costs would a change impose, and which constraints come from systems rather than choices?”

American life makes those structural differences especially visible. The EPA’s household carbon-footprint tools separate home energy and transportation because location, housing, vehicles, and infrastructure strongly shape what a household can change. EIA data likewise show large differences in residential energy use across states and climates. National averages can orient attention,

but they are not personal verdicts. A household with no car in a small apartment does not face the same options as a household in a rural area with long work trips and an inefficient home. Numbers should help us ask better questions, not assign moral identities.

Carbon, energy, materials, money, time, accessibility, health, and working conditions all belong in the picture, but they are not interchangeable units. Compressing them into a single "degrowth score" would hide the tradeoffs we need to see. One change may reduce material use while consuming a great deal of time. Another may make an essential service more accessible while still using substantial energy. The dimensions have to stay separate enough for judgment to remain visible.

The book's central practical tool is deliberately modest: the proof-action. A proof-action is not a badge of virtue and not proof that someone has become "a degrowther." It is a concrete action, small enough to carry out and precise enough to evaluate. Delay a purchase that may not be necessary. Repair something before replacing it. Try a different commute when the conditions make that possible. Make a specific demand of a company. Submit a substantive public comment on a proposed rule. Transfer a critical task inside a volunteer group so that the group no longer depends on one person. These become proof-actions when we know what we are trying to change and what evidence would tell us whether the action worked.

The value of the proof-action is that it prevents us from confusing understanding with transformation. You can read extensively, understand ecological limits, agree with a critique of consumerism or growth, and remain practically unchanged. A small action, by contrast, does not need to demonstrate a total conversion. It can produce information. Is this feasible? What actually decreased? What cost appeared? What constraint became

visible? What would have to change for the action to become easier, more durable, or collective?

The book follows that logic through eight movements. First, see the flows running through your life before judging them. Second, ask what can be avoided, used longer, maintained, repaired, reused, borrowed, rented, or shared before replacement. Third, examine what spending and non-spending actually communicate to firms. Fourth, turn diffuse dissatisfaction into a campaign with a target, a demand, and a test of success. Fifth, build enough organization that collective action can survive beyond the energy of a few individuals. Sixth, act on public decisions by identifying the authority, procedure, timing, and evidence that matter. Seventh, build or support the infrastructure that makes lower-consumption practices easier rather than heroic. Eighth, stabilize what works, correct what does not, and move structural problems to the level where they can actually be addressed.

None of this is a moral ladder. No one has to complete every step to earn an identity. The steps describe different functions. Someone may begin by repairing a device, joining a neighborhood campaign, submitting a comment on a proposed regulation, or working inside an organization that can change procurement or infrastructure. The book offers a path through different kinds of leverage, not a sequence of moral advancement.

It also does not promise universal thresholds. There is no fixed percentage of customers that guarantees a boycott will work. There is no universal number of petition signatures that automatically turns a demand into law. There is no reason to assume that every cooperative, local initiative, or sharing service reduces material use. And a reduction in one metric does not prove that every other cost has declined. This book also does not attempt a full treatment of work, income, dependence on wages, or working-time reduction. Those questions belong to the subject, but

they are broad enough to require their own treatment rather than a few improvised pages.

The ambition is narrower and more useful: help an ordinary person begin with something real, see what it changes, recognize what it cannot change alone, and learn when a personal limit has become a collective or institutional problem.

So begin with observation. Before deciding what to reduce, look at what is already moving through your life: transportation, housing, food, equipment, services, energy, money, time, and dependence on systems you do not control.

Notes and Sources

— Engler et al., Ecological Economics, 2024: systematic review of degrowth research and its heterogeneous character.

— Kallis, 2023: degrowth as a critique of growth as a dominant social objective and of its ecological consequences.

— Savin & van den Bergh, Ecological Economics, 2024: empirical limits and the incomplete evaluation of many degrowth proposals.

— Toikka et al., Ecological Economics, 2026: plurality of degrowth and post-growth approaches.

— U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Household Carbon Footprint Calculator: home energy and transportation as household-emissions domains; individual results vary by location and behavior.

— U.S. Energy Information Administration, Residential Energy Consumption Survey and state energy data: substantial variation in residential energy use across regions, climates, and states.

— IPCC AR6 WGIII, Chapter 5 and Summary for Policymakers: interaction of behavior, infrastructure, institutions, technology, and equity.

CHAPTER 1

See Your Flows Before Changing Them

Before you reduce, replace, or refuse anything, you need to see what is actually moving through your life. Modern consumption rarely presents itself as a system. It arrives as separate acts: driving to work, heating or cooling a home, buying groceries, replacing a phone, ordering something online, paying for a subscription. Each choice can look small by itself. Together, they form recurring flows of energy, materials, transportation, labor, infrastructure, and money.

The first move in a degrowth trajectory is therefore not deprivation but observation. Notice what happens often, what uses a great deal of resources, what depends on systems you do not control, what can be avoided or extended, and what no one person can realistically change alone.

Two opposite mistakes become easy when the map is missing. One is to try to change everything at once. The other is to chase highly visible gestures while larger flows remain buried in commuting, housing, equipment turnover, food, or shared infrastructure. A practical approach needs a map before it needs a verdict.

National data can help orient that map, but it should never be mistaken for an individual diagnosis. The EPA's household carbon-footprint tools, for example, separate direct household emissions into home energy, transportation, and waste. Consumption-based research goes further by including emissions embodied in food, goods, services, and supply chains. Those approaches measure

different things, which is precisely the point: there is no single number that captures every material, energy, social, and economic consequence of a life.

U.S. household impacts also vary enormously by geography, income, housing type, climate, household size, transportation options, and the energy system behind the home. Research on U.S. household carbon footprints has repeatedly found large differences both between and within metropolitan areas. Housing and transportation are major components in many household profiles, but that does not mean every reader should begin with the same priority. A renter in a small apartment who does not own a car is not in the same position as a household driving long distances from a poorly insulated detached home. A national average can tell you where to look. It cannot tell you who you are.

See the Big Flows without Turning Yourself into an Accountant

The purpose of this chapter is not to calculate a perfectly precise personal footprint. False precision would be worse than a rough but useful map. Carbon, energy, materials, money, time, health, accessibility, and working conditions are not interchangeable units. A dollar is not a pound of material. A kilowatt-hour is not a unit of social cost. A low-carbon option can consume more time; a socially accessible option can still be materially inefficient. Combining everything into one score would hide the tradeoffs we need to see.

Start with a short inventory of the domains that actually structure daily life: transportation; housing and energy; food; purchases and equipment; services and subscriptions; and, finally, the public or private systems that shape what choices are available.

For each domain, look for observable facts rather than moral labels. How often does the flow occur? What is its rough scale? Could it be avoided, reduced, delayed, repaired, extended, borrowed, or shared? What would a change cost in money, time, comfort, relationships, accessibility, or safety? And most important: who actually controls the decision?

Transportation makes the distinction clear. Start with the trips that matter rather than with an abstract instruction to "drive less." Which trips are daily, weekly, or occasional? How far are they? Are they required by work, caregiving, disability, school schedules, or the absence of transit? Which are discretionary? Are long-distance trips or flights a meaningful part of your pattern?

Two people can drive the same number of miles and have very different room to change. One may have a frequent bus line, safe bicycle route, or workable train connection. Another may work a night shift in a place with no transit and no realistic alternative. Treating both cases as the same personal choice would erase the infrastructure that makes one change feasible and the other costly or impossible.

Housing works the same way. The Energy Information Administration's Residential Energy Consumption Survey shows just how diverse U.S. homes are in size, age, fuel, climate, equipment, and household circumstances. A resident can control some things—thermostat settings, equipment use, maintenance, ventilation—but not necessarily insulation, a landlord's capital decisions, an apartment building's systems, the local electricity mix, or whether a neighborhood has access to district energy or efficient housing stock.

For a homeowner, major building decisions may still require financing, contractors, permits, association approval, or replacement cycles. For a renter, the gap between responsibility and control can be even larger. If a home is expensive to heat or

cool because of its structure, an inventory that records only the resident's behavior will misdiagnose the problem.

Food is another large flow, but this chapter is not a nutrition plan and it does not impose a universal diet. Begin with what is observable. What is purchased repeatedly? What gets thrown away? How much food is prepared at home and how much is purchased away from home? What constraints come from health, culture, budget, time, kitchen access, or nearby retail options?

Food waste is especially useful because it is visible and testable. USDA data distinguish food loss from the food that is actually eaten and document substantial losses at retail and consumer levels. For an individual household, however, the useful question is not the national percentage. It is simpler: what food do we repeatedly buy and fail to use, and why?

Purchases and equipment can look smaller than transportation or housing when viewed through certain carbon metrics, but they matter directly to material throughput. The EPA's sustainable-materials framework emphasizes the whole life cycle of materials: extraction, manufacturing, distribution, use, reuse, maintenance, and waste management. The object on your desk is therefore not only an object. It is the visible end of a chain that may extend through mines, farms, factories, shipping networks, warehouses, repairs, and disposal.

For equipment, the useful inventory is not "count everything you own." A household with many old objects kept for decades may generate less replacement demand than a household with fewer objects that are constantly renewed. Look instead for recurring replacement: phones, computers, clothing, appliances, furniture, vehicles, hobby equipment, or other categories that repeatedly bring new material into the household.

Need, Habit, Desire, and Constraint

Seeing a flow is not enough. You also need to understand why it exists.

A flow may answer a need, a habit, a desire, a social expectation, or a constraint. These categories overlap, but separating them is useful because they imply different kinds of action.

A need, in this book, means something whose removal would seriously compromise a condition of life you regard as important: safe food, adequate heating or cooling, getting to work, accessing health care, maintaining social relationships, or having necessary equipment.

A habit is often more flexible. You buy something whenever you pass a particular store. You replace clothes on a seasonal rhythm. You order food because that is what happens at the end of a long workday. You use a privately owned tool even though an equivalent is available to borrow.

A desire is not therefore false or illegitimate. Pleasure, expression, comfort, and beauty matter. Degrowth does not require pretending that people should want nothing. The useful question is whether a recurring desire justifies the recurring flow it creates, and whether that flow is deliberately chosen or continuously reinforced by routines, advertising, convenience, or social expectations.

Constraint is the category that most needs protection from moral simplification. Someone may use a great deal of energy because the building is inefficient. Someone may drive because the job is inaccessible by any other mode. Someone may rely on prepared food because they work multiple jobs or provide unpaid care. Someone may maintain an expensive subscription because it is required for work, education, or communication.

Calling all of these “bad choices” would convert a map into a judgment.

Observation becomes politically useful when a significant flow turns out to be hard to change alone. “Why don’t I make a better choice?” gives way to a different question: “What makes this flow necessary?” The answer may be a road network, a work schedule, a landlord, a zoning pattern, a price structure, a technical standard, a monopoly, a lack of repair services, or an absence of public infrastructure.

Public and shared systems belong on the inventory for exactly this reason. No household individually decides the layout of a metropolitan transportation network, the design of public schools, the reliability of a local grid, the location of essential services, or the rules that shape housing construction. Those effects are not outside the subject of degrowth. They mark the point where private action reaches a structural boundary.

Choose a Significant Lever, Not an Endless List

Once the major flows are visible, a list of fifty changes can feel productive. It usually is not. Mapping is useful because it lets you choose a few meaningful levers instead of converting daily life into an endless inventory of obligations.

Four questions are often enough.

First: does this flow happen frequently, or is it large enough to matter?

Second: is there a realistic way to reduce, delay, or extend it?

Third: what personal cost would the change impose—in money, time, comfort, relationships, accessibility, or safety?

Fourth: does the relevant decision actually belong to me?

Consider a phone that is replaced every two or three years while the old one still works. The flow is identifiable. The decision is largely personal. The cost of delaying replacement may be low. The result can be checked: the useful life of the existing device either increased or it did not. That is a strong candidate for a proof-action.

Now consider a renter whose winter heating bills are high because the building envelope is poor. Turning the thermostat down sharply may impose a serious comfort or health cost while leaving the building problem untouched. The resident may have some limited control over use, but the core leverage lies elsewhere: maintenance, landlord investment, building standards, financing, tenant organization, or public policy.

Transportation shows the contrast clearly. If many miles come from short discretionary trips with good alternatives, the personal lever is direct. If most miles come from a mandatory commute with no transit and rigid hours, the next move may be carpooling, a work-schedule change, employer action, transit advocacy, land-use policy, or moving only if that is genuinely feasible. Telling the driver to try harder misses the mechanism. The task is to identify what would actually change the flow.

This method also protects against confusing visibility with importance. Some actions are easy to narrate—a different straw, a different package, a product labeled “green”—while less visible flows sit in housing, commuting distance, equipment turnover, or infrastructure. Small actions are not worthless. They are simply small actions. They should not be assigned a function they do not have.

A Short Inventory without a Score

You can now build a limited inventory over a defined period. A week or two is often enough to reveal recurring flows; occasional travel or major purchases may require a longer window.

For transportation, record the trips that account for most of your mileage, their frequency, mode, and whether they are chosen or constrained.

For housing and energy, record the basic building type, heating and cooling systems, the major energy uses you can identify, and—most important—what the occupant can and cannot change.

For food, identify recurring purchases, waste, meals away from home, and the constraints that shape the pattern.

For equipment and goods, note new purchases, replacements, rarely used items, and plausible repairs or extensions.

For services and subscriptions, identify recurring payments and actual use.

Then add one category that ordinary carbon calculators often understate: external constraints. Which roads, work rules, housing conditions, markets, utility systems, public services, technical standards, or institutional decisions make a significant flow difficult to change alone?

For each important flow, write seven separate observations: frequency; rough scale; possibility of avoidance or reduction; possibility of extension, repair, borrowing, or sharing; personal cost of change; structural dependence; and the next testable action.

Do not add these observations into a score. A flow can be easy to reduce but trivial in scale. Another can be very large but almost impossible to change individually. A single number would erase that difference.

This protects against something else as well: turning degrowth into a moral identity. The map is not the person. Someone can have a high flow in one domain and a low one in another. A disability, job, family obligation, housing market, or geographic location can sharply constrain one part of life. Someone may also decide consciously to retain a materially costly practice because its human benefit matters enough to them. The inventory does not remove that sovereignty. Its job is to make the decision and its costs visible.

The Proof-action for This Chapter

Choose one domain: transportation, housing, food, equipment, or services. Observe the real flow for a defined period. At the end, write three things separately:

What did I actually observe?

What appears realistically changeable by me?

What depends on an external constraint?

Then choose one small, verifiable action. Delay a planned purchase. Keep a device longer. Eliminate one genuinely unnecessary trip. Borrow an item once instead of buying it. Reduce one recurring source of food waste. Or document a structural constraint and begin the first step toward changing it.

The proof you are looking for is not a complete transformation of your lifestyle. It is the passage from a vague intention—"I should consume less"—to a situated change whose effect can be observed.

If the test fails, that is still information. Perhaps the chosen flow was too small. Perhaps the cost was higher than expected. Perhaps the constraint was structural. Perhaps the action simply did not touch the mechanism you thought it did.

The conclusion of this chapter is therefore simple. A degrowth trajectory does not begin by trying to become consistent in every domain at once. It begins by learning to see what actually moves through a life: what is large, what is chosen, what is constrained, what can change, and what cannot be changed alone.

Once that map exists, the next question becomes practical: what should you do with a flow you have identified? Avoid it? Reduce it? Extend the useful life of what you already have? Repair? Buy used? Borrow or share? Replace it with something else?

That is the work of the next chapter.

Notes and Sources

— U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Household Carbon Footprint Calculator and assumptions: household direct-emissions framing around home energy, transportation, and waste; useful as an orientation tool, not a complete consumption-based footprint.

— U.S. Energy Information Administration, Residential Energy Consumption Survey (RECS), including 2024 housing-characteristics releases: nationally representative evidence on the diversity of U.S. homes, fuels, equipment, geography, tenure, and household circumstances. Full 2024 consumption and expenditure tables are scheduled for later release and are not treated here as already available.

— U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Sustainable Materials Management: life-cycle framing for extraction, manufacture, use, reuse, maintenance, and end-of-life materials management.

— U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Food Availability / Food Loss data: food loss at retail and consumer levels and the distinction between food available for consumption and food actually consumed.

— Jones & Kammen, Environmental Science & Technology, 2011, and subsequent U.S. household-footprint research: large variation in consumption-based household carbon footprints across household types and places; national or metropolitan averages should not be converted into individual moral diagnoses.

CHAPTER 2

Reduce, Extend, Repair, Share

Once you can see the flows running through your life, the next question is obvious: what should you actually do with them?

The consumer economy usually offers one answer first: buy a better version. A more efficient appliance. A greener package. A more ethical brand. A newer device marketed as repairable. Sometimes that is genuinely useful. But replacement can also leave the structure of the problem untouched. If every concern about consumption ends in another purchase, the number of objects, the rate of turnover, and the material throughput of everyday life may remain nearly the same.

A degrowth approach changes the order of operations. Before asking how to buy better, ask whether you need to buy at all. Before replacing something, ask what can be extended. Before treating a breakdown as the end of a product's life, diagnose it. Before owning something individually, ask whether the service could be borrowed, rented, or shared.

This is not an absolute moral hierarchy. Sometimes replacement is the right decision. Equipment can become unsafe. Repair can be uneconomical or technically impossible. An old appliance can consume enough energy that replacement is reasonable. A disability, a job, or a family change can make an existing product unsuitable. The aim is not to worship old objects. It is to interrupt the automatic jump from "I have a problem" to "I need a new product."

Reduce Before You Substitute

The least visible form of reduced consumption is often the simplest: not bringing a new object or service into the flow.

That can mean several different things. A purchase disappears after reflection. A purchase is delayed until the need becomes clearer. A function is met with something already owned. A recurring service is canceled because it is barely used. A product is borrowed once instead of bought for years of storage.

Delay is especially useful because it creates information without requiring ideology. Promotions, product launches, frustration with an aging device, and the fear of missing out can make replacement feel urgent when it is not. A short waiting period separates persistent need from temporary impulse. If the need remains, the purchase can still happen. If it disappears, a material flow has been avoided without any new technology or “green” product at all.

Purchases are not suspect by definition. People need tools, clothing, appliances, transportation, communication devices, medical equipment, furniture, and countless other goods. The narrower practical question is what service the purchase is supposed to provide, what it replaces, and whether the same service could be obtained with less turnover.

A phone that still performs the needed functions is a clear example. Replacing it because a newer model exists creates a new manufacturing and supply-chain event even if the new device is somewhat more efficient. That does not prove that old equipment should be kept forever. It means that any claimed benefit of replacement should be compared with the cost of triggering another cycle of production.

Extend What Already Exists

Extending useful life reduces the frequency with which replacement has to occur. That sounds almost trivial, but useful life is not controlled by the owner alone.

Products can be made easier or harder to maintain. Batteries can be accessible or glued in. Parts can be standardized or proprietary. Diagnostics can be public or locked behind manufacturer systems. Software can preserve function or disable features. Documentation can be available or restricted. The repair economy is therefore not simply a matter of personal frugality; it is partly a matter of product design, market structure, warranty practice, and law.

The Federal Trade Commission's 2021 report Nixing the Fix identified a range of manufacturer-imposed repair restrictions in the United States, including limited access to parts, specialized tools, diagnostic software, and product designs that make repair more difficult. The report found little evidence for many of the broad justifications offered for those restrictions and emphasized the competition and consumer-protection consequences of limiting independent repair.

That matters for a degrowth strategy because "keep it longer" is not a meaningful instruction if keeping it longer requires access to parts, information, software, and labor that do not exist.

Maintenance is the first line of extension. Cleaning, lubrication, filters, batteries, seals, software support, storage, calibration, and replacement of ordinary wear parts can slow deterioration. Maintenance is not dramatic, but that is precisely why it matters. A culture of durability is built less through heroic purchases of supposedly perfect products than through repeated care of ordinary ones.

Diagnose Before You Replace

A breakdown is not automatically the end of a product's life.

Yet replacement is often easier than diagnosis. A new product can be delivered tomorrow. A repair shop may require an appointment. The estimate may be uncertain. A replacement part may be unavailable. The manufacturer may restrict software or tools. A product may be difficult to open without damage. The time spent researching repair can exceed the time spent ordering something new.

That is where the individual decision meets the repair system.

When the situation is safe and the stakes are reasonable, one modest rule helps: get a diagnosis before buying the replacement.

A diagnosis can show that a failure is minor, the part is available, and the repair cost is sensible. It can also show the opposite: the equipment is unsafe, the necessary part no longer exists, or the repair would cost more than a suitable replacement. Either outcome is useful because the decision is now based on the actual failure rather than on the assumption that "broken" means "finished."

The right question is not "Should everything always be repaired?" It is "What justifies replacement here?"

There is no universal optimal product life. The answer depends on the product, safety, performance, repair cost, energy use, expected remaining life, and what would replace it. A refrigerator and a pair of headphones do not raise the same questions. Neither do a medical device and a desk lamp.

The U.S. Right-to-repair Landscape Is a Patchwork

The United States does not have one general federal right-to-repair law that gives every owner the same repair rights for every product.

There is, however, a federal legal floor in one important area. Under the Magnuson–Moss Warranty Act, manufacturers generally cannot condition a consumer product warranty on the use of a named brand of parts or a specified repair service unless the required item or service is provided free or the warrantor obtains an applicable waiver. The FTC has repeatedly warned and acted against warranty language that improperly suggests consumers must use authorized parts or service to preserve warranty coverage.

That protection should not be exaggerated. It does not mean every manufacturer must provide every tool, part, schematic, or software key. It does not create one nationwide repairability standard. It addresses a specific category of warranty tying and deceptive warranty practice.

Beyond that federal floor, repair rights increasingly depend on state law and product category.

New York's Digital Fair Repair Act requires covered manufacturers of certain digital electronic equipment to make specified documentation, parts, and tools available to owners and independent repair providers on defined terms. The statute applies to covered equipment first manufactured and first sold or used in New York on or after July 1, 2023, and contains significant exclusions and limitations.

Minnesota's Digital Fair Repair Act takes a different route. For covered digital electronic equipment, it requires manufacturers to make documentation, parts, tools, and certain updates available on fair and reasonable terms, while excluding categories such as

motor vehicles, medical devices, various off-road and industrial equipment, video game consoles, and certain cybersecurity-related material. The law took effect July 1, 2024.

These examples are useful precisely because they are not identical. They show why "right to repair" should not be treated as one uniform American legal object. Coverage, exclusions, enforcement, product definitions, dates, and obligations vary. Other states have adopted or considered their own laws, and the landscape continues to change.

For the reader, the practical rule is therefore simple: do not rely on a generic statement that "you have a right to repair." Check the law that applies to the product and state in question, and distinguish warranty protection from access to parts, tools, documentation, software, or independent service.

This book is not giving individualized legal advice. The legal point is functional: repairability depends partly on institutions and rules, not only on consumer motivation.

Secondhand and Refurbished Goods: Useful When They Replace New Demand

When an existing object can no longer perform its function, new is not the only option.

Used and refurbished products can extend the useful life of goods that have already been manufactured. If buying a used laptop means a new laptop is not purchased, the mechanism is easy to understand. Existing material stays in use longer and new production demand may be reduced.

But "used" is not automatically synonymous with degrowth.

A cheap secondhand market can also increase the number of things people own. If a $20 used item is purchased only because it

feels nearly free, and nothing new was actually avoided, the number of objects in circulation through that household may increase rather than decrease.

Refurbished electronics deserve the same caution. Refurbishment can be an excellent way to extend product life, but the label says little by itself about battery condition, replacement parts, testing, software support, warranty terms, repair access, or expected longevity.

A useful counterfactual is: what would have happened without this option?

Would you have bought new? Kept the old one? Borrowed? Gone without the item? Chosen a different service entirely?

The answer is not a perfect environmental calculation. It simply reveals what role the purchase is playing.

Share When the Need Is Infrequent

Some goods perform an important function but are used only occasionally: drills, pressure washers, ladders, specialty cooking equipment, camping gear, trailers, lawn tools, party equipment, and many other products.

For infrequent needs, individual ownership can produce a large amount of idle equipment. Borrowing, renting, tool libraries, shared workshops, and other access-based models can increase the use made of each product.

The strongest case is straightforward. If ten households reliably use one or two shared tools instead of buying ten separate tools, material ownership has been avoided.

But sharing is not automatically low-impact either.

A rental or sharing service can create transportation, storage, cleaning, booking systems, maintenance needs, and new usage. If

cheap access causes people to use a product much more often than before, some of the material savings can be offset. If borrowing requires a long car trip, the logistics matter. If the shared item is constantly unavailable, participants may eventually buy their own anyway.

Sharing earns its place when it substitutes for ownership. The useful test is simple: what individual purchase or privately owned asset did the shared system actually make unnecessary?

Rebound: Check What Happens After the Saving

Any time a choice becomes cheaper, easier, or more efficient, rebound is possible.

A low-cost repair may extend the life of a product, which is exactly the intended result. But the money saved might be spent on another material-intensive purchase. A secondhand market may displace new goods, or it may encourage more purchases because everything seems inexpensive. A car-sharing service may reduce private vehicle ownership, or it may generate trips that otherwise would not have happened.

It would be wrong to conclude that rebound always cancels the benefit. There is no universal rebound coefficient that can be applied to every household decision.

The safeguard is simple: look at what happened afterward.

Was a new purchase actually avoided? Did the existing product last longer? Did the total number of objects owned decline, stay stable, or increase? Did sharing replace ownership or add another form of use? Did a savings in money or time shift into a different flow that matters to the goal?

The discipline is the same throughout this book: judge mechanisms, not labels.

Human Costs Still Count

A repair can be materially sensible and personally impossible.

It may require time someone does not have. The nearest repair shop may be far away. A renter may lack permission to modify equipment. A person with a disability may need a newer product because the old one is inaccessible. Renting may be cheaper for rare use and far more expensive for frequent use. Borrowing may depend on social networks that not everyone has.

A degrowth practice that ignores these costs turns into an abstract morality.

The relevant comparison is not between “virtuous repair” and “bad replacement.” It is between real options, with their real costs, benefits, risks, and constraints.

A Practical Order of Questions

When a material need appears, use a short sequence.

First: does the need persist if the purchase is delayed?

Second: can what already exists be used longer?

Third: would maintenance or diagnosis solve the problem?

Fourth: is repair safe, available, and reasonable?

Fifth: would used or refurbished actually replace a new purchase?

Sixth: if the need is infrequent, can the function be borrowed, rented, or shared?

Seventh: if new equipment is still necessary, can you choose for durability, repair access, appropriate performance, and long useful life rather than novelty alone?

Treat the sequence as a brake on automatic replacement, not as a mandatory seven-step ritual for every purchase.

Sometimes the sequence ends immediately: an essential and unsafe product needs to be replaced. Sometimes two questions —"Can this wait?" and "Can this be repaired?"—are enough to change the flow.

Proof-actions for This Chapter

Choose one non-urgent purchase you expect to make and delay it for a defined period. At the end, record whether the need remained.

Take one broken product you were planning to replace and obtain a diagnosis before buying new, when doing so is safe and practical.

For one product you may need to replace, check the manufacturer's actual repair support: parts, manuals, diagnostics, software support, independent service, and warranty terms. If a state right-to-repair law may apply, verify its scope rather than assuming coverage.

For one infrequent need, borrow, rent, or use a tool library once instead of purchasing the item. Record whether an individual purchase was actually avoided.

After one repair, secondhand purchase, or sharing decision, ask a control question: what did this actually replace?

These actions are small, but they generate useful information. They expose the real obstacles: repair price, parts availability, product design, proprietary software, lack of local repair shops, transportation, time, warranty confusion, or a state law that does not cover the product.

At that point, the issue may no longer be individual. It may be a market problem, a design problem, a warranty problem, or a regulatory problem.

That transition leads directly to the next chapter. Reducing, extending, repairing, and sharing can change personal material flows. But when you move spending away from one company, switch providers, or join a boycott, a different question appears: what does your money actually change inside a market and inside a firm?

Notes and Sources

— Federal Trade Commission, Nixing the Fix: An FTC Report to Congress on Repair Restrictions, 2021: manufacturer repair restrictions, parts/tools/diagnostics, competition and consumer-protection implications, and the limited evidence supporting many broad manufacturer justifications.

— Federal Trade Commission, Magnuson–Moss Warranty Act guidance and enforcement materials: federal limits on conditioning warranty coverage on branded parts or specified repair service when statutory conditions are not met; FTC enforcement against deceptive or unlawful warranty restrictions.

— New York General Business Law § 399-nn, Digital Fair Repair Act: access to specified parts, tools, and documentation for covered digital electronic equipment, subject to statutory scope, dates, and exclusions.

— Minnesota Statutes § 325E.72, Digital Fair Repair Act: access to documentation, parts, tools, software-related material, and updates for covered digital electronic equipment; state-specific exclusions and limitations; effective July 1, 2024.

— U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Sustainable Materials Management: life-cycle framing of extraction, manufacturing, use, reuse, maintenance, and end-of-life management.

CHAPTER 3

What Your Money Really Changes

Two opposite claims are common. One says that every purchase is a vote: buying rewards a company, refusing to buy punishes it, and the market instantly records our values. The other says individual spending choices are irrelevant: one missing purchase disappears inside the scale of a large company, production continues, and only political action matters.

Both claims capture something real. Both become misleading when treated as universal rules.

Your money is not a ballot. A company does not count the moral intentions of its customers. It sees sales, revenue, margins, subscriptions, cancellations, inventory, market share, complaints, reputation, distributor behavior, investor reactions, and regulatory risk. A purchase is better understood as participation in an economic flow. Removing money from that flow can matter, but what happens next depends on the mechanism: did consumption actually fall, or did it move to another seller? Can customers switch easily? Is the reason for the change visible? Is the company vulnerable to reputation? Are other customers doing the same thing? Do retailers, investors, regulators, or business partners react?

Impossible purity is not the standard, and spending is not powerless. The practical task is to identify what mechanism a purchase, non-purchase, or substitution can realistically affect—and to recognize when the consumer lever has reached its limit.

From the Receipt to the Economic Signal

Suppose you buy the same product from the same company every week. You learn about a practice you no longer want to support: planned short product life, pollution, aggressive overproduction, labor conditions, a marketing strategy built around constant replacement, or some other decision you consider unacceptable. You stop buying.

One thing is certain: your spending with that company falls. What is not certain is that its production falls by the same amount.

Between a retail purchase and a production decision lie inventories, wholesalers, distributors, contracts, forecasts, pricing, promotions, margins, capacity decisions, and sometimes several geographic markets. A decline in sales can be absorbed for a while through discounts, lower margins, advertising, inventory adjustments, or expansion elsewhere. If the cause is unclear, it may be treated as ordinary market noise rather than a response to the contested practice.

It helps to keep several levels separate. Unit sales show what was purchased. Revenue also reflects price. Margin reflects what remains after costs. Inventory shows what has not sold. Distributor orders transmit information upstream. Production responds with delays and constraints of its own. Investment and brand strategy respond to longer-term expectations. A movement at one level does not mechanically reproduce itself at the next.

That does not eliminate consumer power. It makes the mechanism more precise.

The current U.S. antitrust framework explicitly treats customer substitution as part of the competitive process. DOJ and FTC guidance examines whether customers can and will switch between firms' products. It also recognizes that switching costs, network effects, scale advantages, and control over routes to

market can make competition weaker and entrench a dominant position. The point for this book is not to turn every purchase into an antitrust case. It is simpler: the possibility of exit matters, and the cost of exit matters too.

Leaving can mean different things.

If you simply avoid a purchase you do not need, you reduce your own material flow.

If you buy the same type of product from a competitor, you shift demand and market share but may not reduce material throughput.

If you substitute a product or service that performs the same function with fewer resources, the material effect may be useful, but it still has to be checked.

If you delay the purchase and later make the same purchase, you have postponed the flow rather than necessarily eliminated it.

These are four different mechanisms. Treating all four as "responsible consumption" hides the difference.

Replacing every purchase with a greener-branded purchase can leave the underlying consumption structure untouched. The number of objects, the replacement cycle, and total demand may barely move. In a degrowth strategy, ask first whether the purchase needs to happen at all. Repair, extension, used goods, sharing, or changing suppliers come after that question, not before it.

A silent non-purchase has another weakness: it may be hard to interpret. A company can observe lower sales without knowing whether the cause was inflation, a new competitor, a distribution problem, a fashion shift, bad advertising, or a boycott. If your only goal is to reduce your own consumption, silence is fine. If your goal is to make the company change a specific decision, the reason

has to become more legible. A documented complaint, a cancellation that states the reason, a direct request, or a coherent public campaign can give meaning to the economic change.

Before calling a purchase a political lever, name what is actually changing. The number in your personal budget is certain. The effect on the company depends on a transmission system.

When Switching Has Power — and When It Does Not

A customer's economic leverage depends heavily on the ability to leave.

Sometimes exit is easy. Several stores offer comparable products. There is no contract. Learning costs are low. Your data are portable. The service is not tied to a network that everyone you know already uses.

In other situations, exit can be expensive or close to impossible. You may be locked into a software ecosystem, a long contract, a proprietary file format, an essential utility, an employer-linked service, a platform where all of your contacts are, or a local market with no realistic competitor.

Switching costs are not only financial. They can include time spent finding an alternative, uncertainty about quality, training on a new system, loss of data, incompatibility, contract penalties, network effects, transportation, disability access, or the fact that no substitute exists where you live.

U.S. competition guidance treats these kinds of frictions as real constraints. That matters because the simplistic idea of "voting with your wallet" eventually becomes a moral judgment against people who cannot leave. If someone continues paying a dominant provider because the alternative is unusable or nonexistent, that payment does not prove approval. It may reveal dependence.

Consider two situations.

In the first, you dislike the policy of a coffee chain in a city where many substitutes exist. You can leave at low cost. If enough customers do so and the reason is visible, the company can plausibly connect lost business to the dispute.

In the second, you depend on the only practical broadband provider in your area, or on a digital ecosystem that would make leaving costly in data, compatibility, contacts, or professional workflow. You may strongly disagree with the company while continuing to pay. The consumer lever is weak because the market structure limits exit.

At that point, the relevant question changes scale. The answer may involve interoperability, portability, a new competitor, public infrastructure, procurement, regulation, antitrust enforcement, or organized users. The individual economic lever has not become meaningless. It has reached a structural boundary.

Companies also differ in vulnerability. A small firm dependent on a narrow customer base may react quickly to a visible loss. A diversified corporation may absorb losses in one segment, discount aggressively, or shift resources elsewhere. A brand highly dependent on reputation may respond before measurable sales losses become large. Another may accept a temporary decline because it expects public attention to fade.

There is therefore no universal percentage at which “the market obeys.” Claims that 1 percent, 5 percent, or 10 percent of customers leaving will force a company to change invent a law that does not exist. The effect depends on margins, market structure, customer concentration, substitution, publicity, investor expectations, distributor behavior, and the company’s ability to shift costs or sales.

Keep the indicators separate. Sales, stock price, media coverage, retailer reactions, public statements, policy changes, supplier changes, product withdrawals, and regulatory commitments are different kinds of evidence. A company can lose sales and refuse the demand. It can gain publicity while changing nothing. It can announce a major commitment whose implementation is minor.

Boycott research becomes useful precisely here: it helps separate the mechanism of pressure from the symbolism of refusal.

What Boycotts Can Do — and What They Can Trigger Instead

A boycott is often imagined as the clearest form of consumer power: enough people stop buying until the company gives in. Sometimes that mechanism is real. Research, however, shows a more complicated interaction between lost sales, reputation, media attention, pricing, corporate vulnerability, and counter-mobilization.

Brayden King's study of U.S. corporate boycotts found that concessions were more likely when campaigns threatened important corporate resources, including reputation, and when the target was already vulnerable. Media attention mattered because it made the threat more visible. The implication is important: a boycott is not simply a pile of missing receipts. It becomes more powerful when economic loss is connected to a legible cause and a target that has something meaningful to lose.

Kasaundra Tomlin's study of 125 U.S. boycotts found measurable negative shareholder-wealth effects around boycott announcements on average. That shows that boycotts can create financial costs. It does not show that financial cost automatically produces the requested political or ecological change.

An international example makes the mechanism even clearer. Research on a boycott of a major dairy producer in South Korea estimated a substantial sales decline over the following year. The company also cut prices. In other words, the firm did not simply accept the moral demand; it responded through ordinary commercial tools. If the campaign's objective is a change in corporate practice, lost sales are a means, not the end.

The Goya controversy in the United States shows the opposite risk. Highly visible boycott calls were accompanied by organized purchases from supporters of the brand. Research found a temporary increase in sales during the controversy, particularly in politically favorable areas. A boycott can therefore function as advertising and generate a "buycott" when a dispute becomes polarized.

These cases do not create a formula for future campaigns. They remove a false formula: public anger plus boycott language does not automatically equal falling sales, and falling sales do not automatically equal concession.

Reputation is another channel. Research by McDonnell and King found that targeted companies often increased prosocial claims and communications after boycott pressure. That response is rational. If the threat is reputational, improving the company's image may be cheaper than changing the underlying practice.

For this reason, a new sustainability page, a new set of commitments, a green advertising campaign, a public statement, or a revised brand message is evidence of response—not evidence of victory.

Return to the contested decision. Was the product withdrawn? Did warranty terms change? Was the supplier replaced? Was repair access improved? Did production volume actually change?

Was a specific practice ended? Is the change still in place months later?

A further safeguard is necessary. Making a company lose money is not automatically the same thing as reducing material flows or improving social conditions. A firm can protect margins by cutting labor costs, pressuring suppliers, relocating production, raising prices, or shifting toward another market. Economic pain is therefore not the objective in itself.

Leverage means creating a cost that is connected clearly enough to the contested practice that changing the practice becomes more attractive than maintaining it. The aim is pressure, not revenge.

Know When the Wallet Has Reached Its Limit

The wrong conclusion would be that every consumer must become a permanent investigator of every brand. That would turn anticonsumerism into another consumer obsession.

It helps to separate three different goals.

The first goal is personal and material: you want to reduce your own consumption. In that case, a silent non-purchase may be enough. If you keep a phone longer, borrow a drill, cancel a barely used subscription, or stop replacing clothes on a fixed schedule, the company does not need to know why. The proof is the reduced or delayed flow.

The second goal is economic: you want to support an alternative or move demand away from a company or business model. Then you need to check whether a real alternative exists, whether switching is feasible, and whether the alternative reproduces the same problem. Switching can create a competitive signal without necessarily reducing total material use.

The third goal is political: you want the company to change a specific decision. At that point, the wallet alone becomes insufficient. If people leave silently, the company may not know what would bring them back. The demand has to be visible, specific, and connected to a result that can be checked.

This transition from consumer to citizen or organized participant is one of the central movements of the book. You do not abandon the economic lever. You give it meaning and connect it to collective leverage.

A cancellation that states a precise reason is politically more legible than an unexplained cancellation. A hundred people making the same verifiable demand produce a clearer signal than a hundred unrelated complaints. A boycott whose participants know what would end the boycott is more intelligible than indefinite hostility toward a brand.

A Short Protocol for Using Money as a Lever

Start by naming the flow you want to change: a recurring purchase, a device, an energy service, a subscription, or another service.

Then separate the objective. Are you trying to reduce the flow, substitute another supplier, or change a company decision?

Identify realistic substitutes and the cost of switching: money, time, data, learning, mobility, accessibility, professional constraints, family constraints, or network effects.

Look at the structure of the market. If several credible substitutes exist, individual exit can have a direct economic function. If you are effectively captive, do not convert dependence into guilt. Identify the collective or institutional lever that would make exit more realistic.

If the non-purchase carries a demand, make the demand legible through a legitimate channel. Then observe what changes. Keep sales, reputation, messaging, and actual business practice separate.

Finally, set a limit. If individual spending cannot plausibly affect the target, or if the demand requires a wider decision, change scale.

Proof-actions for This Chapter

Take one significant recurring purchase and identify the alternatives that are genuinely available to you. Write down the real switching costs rather than assuming that an alternative is easy.

For one purchase you recently avoided, classify the result in one sentence: reduction, substitution, or delay.

For one company you are considering boycotting, state before taking action the exact decision you want changed and what outcome would be sufficient to end the action.

If a market makes you captive, replace the sentence “I should make a better choice” with a structural question: what rule, infrastructure, interoperability requirement, alternative provider, procurement decision, or organization would make exit possible?

These exercises prevent “responsible consumption” from becoming an internal morality play. They force a distinction between what happens in your budget, what happens in a market, and what requires organized leverage.

The conclusion is simple. Your money matters, but it does not speak by itself. Companies observe and interpret economic flows. The easier substitution is, the more those flows can discipline a supplier. The more a market is concentrated, locked in, or structured by high switching costs and network effects, the weaker

the wallet becomes as an individual lever. A boycott can create financial losses, reputational pressure, commercial responses, or counter-mobilization. Even when it succeeds economically, it does not guarantee the ethical or ecological change that motivated it.

Instead of asking whether a purchase "changes the world," ask what mechanism the purchase, non-purchase, or substitution can actually change—and when the problem requires more organized action.

That is where the next level begins. Several people can turn the same refusal into a legible demand, identify a decision a company can actually make, coordinate channels and allies, and define what victory would look like. At that point they are no longer acting only as scattered consumers. They are beginning to build a campaign.

Notes and Sources

— U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission, 2023 Merger Guidelines: customer substitution, switching costs, network effects, barriers to entry, and competitive constraints. Used here as a current U.S. framework for the limited claim that the ability and cost of switching shape competitive pressure; not as a general consumer-rights rule.

— King, B., Administrative Science Quarterly, 2008: corporate boycotts, media visibility, vulnerability, resource threat, and concessions.

— Tomlin, K., Southern Economic Journal, 2019: study of 125 U.S. target-firm boycotts and observed financial effects.

— Liaukonyte et al., Marketing Science, 2022, "Spilling the Beans on Political Consumerism": Goya controversy, boycott, counter-purchasing, and temporary sales effects.

— McDonnell, M.-H. & King, B., Administrative Science Quarterly, 2013: reputational threat and increased prosocial claims after boycotts.

— Management Science, study of a South Korean dairy boycott: estimated sales decline and firm price response; retained as an international mechanism example, not an American institutional reference.

CHAPTER 4

Putting Pressure on a Company without Wasting Your Effort

Discontent is not yet a campaign. Thousands of people can dislike a company, repeat the same screenshots, post angry comments, announce that they are done buying, and still produce little more than noise. The company may notice the controversy, issue a statement, wait for attention to fade, and continue almost exactly as before.

What is missing is not necessarily anger, numbers, or visibility. It is often a legible mechanism of pressure.

An effective campaign has to answer a small set of demanding questions. What specific decision is being challenged? Who actually has the authority to change it? What observable change is being requested? What facts support the demand? Which channel fits the problem? How will a response be recorded? What would count as a partial concession, a real victory, an informative failure, or a reason to stop?

The central principle of this chapter is simple: putting pressure on a company does not mean flooding it with messages. It means making a collective demand clear, documented, persistent, and costly enough to ignore that changing the disputed decision becomes a serious option.

Turn Anger into a Demand Someone Can Act On

A vague complaint rarely produces a precise answer. “This company is irresponsible,” “this product is unacceptable,” or “they

need to change" communicates judgment, but not yet a decision the target can accept or refuse.

A campaign begins when the problem becomes operational. Remove this product. Extend this warranty. Make this replacement part available. Stop this advertising practice. Change this supplier. Publish this information. Revise this procurement standard. End this subscription practice. Restore this service. Adopt this repair policy.

That precision has strategic value. A company can answer a general accusation with general public relations. It is harder to answer a concrete request without revealing whether the request was accepted, rejected, postponed, or only rephrased.

Then identify the actual decision-maker. The brand visible to customers may not control every part of the problem. A subsidiary may answer to a parent company. A retailer may sell a product without controlling its design. A customer-service employee may be able to issue a refund but not alter a warranty policy. A platform may mediate a transaction without manufacturing the product. A trade association may advocate for an industry position without controlling any one company's operations.

Before applying pressure, map the decision chain.

A useful first proof-action is to rewrite one diffuse complaint as a single sentence containing three elements: the decision being challenged, the entity or function capable of changing it, and the change requested. If that sentence cannot yet be written, the campaign probably does not yet have a usable target.

Coordination Is Not Saturation

One of the easiest mistakes is to assume that effectiveness rises mechanically with message volume. The boycott research discussed in the previous chapter points toward a different

picture: visibility, reputational vulnerability, economic dependence, coalition, and threat to resources matter because they change what the target has to lose.

A thousand incoherent or automated messages can be filtered as noise. A hundred real customers making the same documented request through an appropriate channel, explaining why they care and what would resolve the dispute, may create a more interpretable signal.

That does not mean numbers are irrelevant. A company may care very much whether ten customers or ten thousand customers are prepared to leave. But headcount and channel saturation are not the same thing. The point of coordination is to make support visible without making the communication system itself the target.

This book therefore excludes spam, automated flooding, technical disruption, targeted harassment, impersonation, and attempts to make ordinary communication systems unusable as standard campaign methods. Those tactics can shift attention away from the disputed decision and toward the disruption itself. They can also impose costs on employees who have no authority over the issue.

Coordination means something else: real participants using a common demand; a joint letter; documented complaints where each complaint corresponds to a real experience; a public statement; a petition whose function is defined; a boycott with a known condition of exit; outreach to relevant partners; or a campaign in which different participants contribute different forms of evidence while preserving a common objective.

The participants do not have to agree on everything. They do need to know what they are jointly asking the company to do.

Use the Right Channel Before You Turn Up the Volume

An individual consumer dispute is not automatically a public campaign. A defective product, billing error, unfulfilled warranty, or service failure may first require a documented complaint rather than public escalation.

USAGov's current consumer guidance reflects that logic: gather the relevant records, contact the company first, state the problem and the requested remedy, and escalate when the company does not resolve the issue. Depending on the problem, further channels can include state consumer-protection offices, state attorneys general, specialized regulators, consumer organizations, or the legal system. The FTC accepts reports involving fraud, scams, and bad business practices, but the correct agency depends on the subject matter.

This structure matters because a complaint mechanism and a political campaign perform different functions.

If the dispute is "the company charged me twice," a formal complaint may be the efficient tool. If the dispute is "the company is legally allowed to use this sales model, but we want it to abandon the model," a customer-service ticket is unlikely to be sufficient by itself. The first problem is primarily remedial. The second is a struggle over corporate policy.

A proportionate sequence can therefore be useful: first, document the facts. Second, contact the company through the channel designed for the issue. Third, if the issue is shared, coordinate the people affected. Fourth, if the company's response does not address the disputed policy, make the disagreement public in a factual form. Fifth, look for actors who possess real leverage over the target. Sixth, when law or regulation is genuinely implicated, use the relevant regulatory, administrative, or legal channel.

No escalation sequence fits every case. A severe, urgent, or already public problem may justify a different order. The narrower principle is to choose a channel because of what it can do, not because it is more dramatic.

Look for Leverage Where the Company Depends on Others

A company does not act in isolation. It depends on customers, retailers, suppliers, platforms, lenders, investors, insurers, employees, contractors, regulators, licensors, landlords, trade associations, and sometimes public purchasers.

Those relationships can create leverage, but only when the dependency is real.

A major retailer may influence a supplier because losing shelf space matters. A large institutional purchaser may be able to impose contract standards. A platform may be able to suspend or alter access. An investor may raise governance or risk concerns. A supplier may be able to refuse a disputed specification. A regulator may be able to investigate a legally defined practice. A trade association may transmit pressure across an industry.

But naming a powerful actor is not the same as establishing leverage. Before contacting a retailer, investor, platform, or partner, ask what power it actually has. Can it change the contract? Remove a listing? Modify a purchasing standard? Refuse financing? Trigger an investigation? Change access? Require disclosure? If that link cannot be shown, the supposed lever may be only another audience.

Campaigns also lose force when they multiply targets unnecessarily. The objective is not to attack everyone connected to a company, but to identify the smallest set of relationships capable of changing the decision.

Reputation Is a Channel, Not the Result

Public exposure can make a company react quickly. That reaction is evidence that pressure exists, but not necessarily that the campaign has won.

Research on corporate responses to boycotts has found that targeted firms may increase prosocial claims and public communication after reputational threats. That response makes sense. If the cost is reputational, repairing the image may be cheaper than changing the underlying practice.

A campaign should therefore distinguish at least four levels.

First: the company acknowledges the demand.

Second: the company changes its language or announces a commitment.

Third: an observable corporate decision changes.

Fourth: the change remains in place long enough to be verified.

A sustainability page, CEO statement, new pledge, revised advertising campaign, or public apology can be meaningful evidence of response. None of them is automatically evidence of the requested operational change.

Return to the object. Was the product withdrawn? Was the warranty changed? Was the supplier replaced? Was the part made available? Was the subscription policy actually revised? Was the procurement rule adopted? Did production, sourcing, pricing, repair access, or another relevant mechanism change?

Partial victories become easier to describe accurately once the stages are separated. A company may disclose information it previously withheld, open negotiations, modify one part of a policy, or adopt a temporary measure. Serious campaigns do not

need to call every partial concession either total victory or total failure.

Define Victory Before Escalation

A campaign without an exit condition can continue simply because people have become invested in continuing it. At that point the campaign risks becoming an identity rather than an instrument.

Before escalation, decide what will be observed.

A first-level result may be a formal acknowledgment and a verifiable response channel. A partial victory may be a measurable but incomplete change. A strong victory may be adoption of the requested decision. A durable victory requires evidence that the change persists.

Failure can also produce information. The chosen target may not control the decision. The pressure channel may not affect the company. The alternative may be weaker than expected. Public attention may not translate into economic or reputational vulnerability. The coalition may be too small. The demand may be poorly framed. Or the cost of continuing may become greater than the likely benefit.

These are not reasons to pretend success. They are reasons to learn.

Keep the indicators separate: real participants; complaint volume; customer departures; press attention; public response; partner reaction; reputational change; observable financial effect; partial concession; policy change; implementation; durability. They are different kinds of evidence. A campaign can generate national attention and obtain no operational change. Another can obtain a quiet contractual modification with almost no public visibility.

Boycott: a Contextual Tool, Not a Magic Formula

A boycott fits inside this broader campaign logic. It can reduce purchases, create reputational pressure, make a demand visible, recruit participants, or demonstrate that a group is willing to bear a cost. But it should not be treated as a universal mechanism.

If a boycott is intended to obtain a specific decision, the demand and exit condition should be known in advance. Otherwise the target may know that people are angry without knowing what would resolve the conflict.

The U.S. legal framework also requires care with language.

The Supreme Court's decision in NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware is a major First Amendment protection for peaceful political boycotts, advocacy, assembly, and associated expression. The Court distinguished protected nonviolent political activity from violence and other independently unlawful conduct. That precedent is important, but it should not be converted into the statement that every activity called a boycott is automatically lawful in every setting.

Different legal questions can arise from threats, violence, trespass, defamation, contractual obligations, employment relationships, sector-specific rules, state law, or other conduct accompanying a campaign. The relevant facts and jurisdiction matter.

There is also a separate antitrust meaning of "group boycott." The FTC uses that term for certain concerted refusals to deal among competing businesses. Competitors who agree not to deal with another firm can create antitrust problems, especially when the agreement restrains competition or supports price coordination. That commercial-antitrust category is not the same thing as ordinary consumers independently deciding, or publicly

urging one another, not to buy from a company for political or ethical reasons.

Keeping those categories separate avoids two opposite errors: claiming that "boycotts are always protected," or assuming that antitrust cases about competing firms make consumer boycotts generally illegal.

This book does not provide individualized legal advice. The practical safeguard is to keep the campaign focused on a documented practice or decision, use peaceful and lawful methods, avoid threats or harassment, and obtain qualified advice when the campaign enters a legally specialized area.

A Campaign Must Know How to Stop

Collective pressure does not have to become permanent.

It can stop because the requested change has been made. It can stop because a partial concession is accepted. It can stop because the lever has been shown to be ineffective. It can stop because the original target was wrong. It can stop because a regulatory or institutional channel becomes more relevant. It can stop because the organizational cost is now larger than the expected effect.

That ability to stop is a safeguard against escalation for its own sake.

Before each new stage, ask four questions. What changed after the previous stage? What new capacity does the proposed step add? What additional costs will it impose on participants and on people who are not responsible for the disputed decision? What condition would justify correction, de-escalation, or closure?

More visible, more aggressive, or more expensive does not necessarily mean more powerful. Escalation is useful when it adds leverage.

Proof-actions for This Chapter

Take one complaint about a company and rewrite it as a single observable demand. Identify the entity or function that can actually make the requested change.

Send one documented request through an appropriate channel and keep the response. If the issue is a personal consumer dispute, use the complaint path that fits the problem before turning it into a generalized campaign.

If several people share the same demand, coordinate one common statement rather than generating contradictory or automated noise.

Before increasing visibility, write down one response indicator and one victory or stop condition.

If you plan to pressure a retailer, investor, platform, supplier, regulator, or other partner, write down the specific power that actor has over the target. If you cannot identify that power, treat the relationship as unproven.

After any public response from the company, record separately what changed in communication and what changed in practice.

If you are considering a boycott, state the decision being challenged, what participants are being asked to stop buying, what would end the boycott, and whether the method stays within peaceful and lawful conduct. Do not rely on the generic assumption that the word “boycott” settles the legal question.

These actions are deliberately small. Their purpose is to test a central competence: can indignation be transformed into a pressure mechanism that is understandable, proportionate, and verifiable?

The next chapter begins at a familiar failure point. A campaign can have a clear target, a strong argument, and real support and

still collapse because nobody knows who does what, information is concentrated in one person, decisions are forgotten, or participants burn out. Pressure becomes durable only when a group acquires organizational capacity.

Notes and Sources

— Brayden King, Administrative Science Quarterly, 2008: corporate concessions, reputational vulnerability, media visibility, and threats to firm resources in boycott campaigns.

— McDonnell & King, Administrative Science Quarterly, 2013: reputational threats and increased prosocial communication by targeted firms.

— USAGov, “How to file a complaint about a company’s products or services,” updated July 2, 2026: document the transaction, contact the company first, then use appropriate consumer, governmental, or legal channels when unresolved.

— USAGov, State consumer protection offices: state-level offices assist with complaints against businesses, scams, and related consumer matters.

— Federal Trade Commission, Consumer Advice and ReportFraud: FTC reporting channels for fraud, scams, and bad business practices; reports can support enforcement and are available through Consumer Sentinel to participating law-enforcement agencies.

— NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware Co., 458 U.S. 886 (1982): strong First Amendment protection for peaceful political boycott, advocacy, assembly, and associated expression; protection does not erase liability for independently unlawful conduct.

— Federal Trade Commission, “Group Boycotts,” Guide to Antitrust Laws: separate antitrust category involving certain agreements among competing businesses to refuse to deal; not a general rule governing ordinary consumer political boycotts.

CHAPTER 5

From Isolated Individuals to an Organized Force

A campaign can have a clear target, a sound argument, and genuine public support and still collapse for an ordinary reason: no one knows who is doing what. Information lives in one person's inbox. One volunteer owns every password. Decisions are made but not recorded. The same two people attend every meeting. Tasks accumulate on whoever is most available until that person burns out. New participants arrive and cannot tell what has already been tried.

At that point the group may have enthusiasm, numbers, and even visibility, but it does not yet have much collective capacity.

Moving from isolated individuals to an organized force does not mean creating a large institution immediately. It means making a few basic things possible: decide together, assign responsibility, preserve knowledge, execute decisions, correct mistakes, and continue when a central person steps away.

The legal form can matter later. It may become necessary to hold money, sign a lease, employ staff, enter contracts, receive grants, insure activities, or assume formal responsibilities. But legal form and organizational capacity are not the same thing. A newly incorporated nonprofit can still be completely dependent on one founder. An informal neighborhood group can sometimes have excellent role distribution, memory, and continuity.

The principle of this chapter is therefore simple: a collective becomes stronger when people do more than act in parallel. They

become able to make, carry, preserve, and revise common action without depending entirely on particular individuals.

A Crowd Is Not Yet an Organization

Ten people can sign the same petition without forming an organization. A thousand people can join the same boycott while remaining strangers. Ten thousand followers can amplify the same message while the entire campaign still depends on three people who write the posts, manage the contacts, and decide what happens next.

Collective action already exists in those situations, but organizational capacity is limited.

Numbers solve only some organizational problems. More participants can increase visibility, legitimacy, money, contacts, or pressure. They do not automatically create decision rules, task ownership, institutional memory, or resilience.

Social-movement research has long shown that collective action can be carried by many forms: informal groups, networks, unions, nonprofits, coalitions, cooperatives, campaign committees, mutual-aid structures, professional associations, and hybrids. No single form is intrinsically superior for every purpose.

Choose the lightest structure that can perform the required function.

If five neighbors are trying to keep a bus stop from being removed next month, they may need a shared contact list, a meeting, a spokesperson for one hearing, and a record of who promised what. They do not necessarily need to create a corporation.

If the same group later receives substantial donations, rents space, hires staff, purchases insurance, or signs contracts, more

formal structure may become necessary. Let function create structure instead of treating structure as proof of seriousness.

This protects against two opposite failures.

The first is premature bureaucracy: an initiative spends its limited energy building committees, bylaws, titles, and procedures before it has enough activity to justify them.

The second is romantic informality: the group rejects structure in principle, then discovers that authority still exists—it is simply hidden in whoever has the passwords, donor relationships, technical knowledge, longest history, or most free time.

A group can be informal without being vague. It can be structured without being heavy.

Make Functions Visible

Even a group that rejects permanent leaders contains functions.

Someone schedules the meeting. Someone moderates. Someone maintains the mailing list. Someone knows the journalist. Someone understands the city process. Someone keeps the budget. Someone owns the shared drive. Someone writes the statement. Someone welcomes new people. Someone makes a judgment when an unexpected problem appears.

Saying “we are horizontal” does not make those functions disappear.

The problem is not that coordination or leadership exists. The problem begins when those functions become invisible, irreplaceable, or immune to challenge.

An openly defined role can be less hierarchical than an informal power everyone pretends does not exist. A temporary coordinator whose responsibilities are known, limited, and transferable may exercise less durable power than the person who quietly controls

every account and relationship because nobody else knows how the system works.

A useful organizational exercise is therefore to list the functions the group actually needs rather than inventing titles first.

For a small campaign, the list may include:

— coordination and scheduling;
— internal communication;
— external communication;
— research or evidence management;
— relationship management with allies or institutions;
— money or resource management when relevant;
— memory of decisions;
— execution of specific tasks.

Then ask one question for each function: who can do this today, and what happens if that person disappears for a month?

If the answer is “nothing happens,” the group has found a critical dependency.

That dependency is not automatically a failure. New projects often begin with one person carrying a disproportionate amount of knowledge. The problem is leaving the dependency invisible indefinitely.

Constant rotation is not a virtue in itself. Some roles require skill and continuity, and reassigning every responsibility every week can destroy competence. The aim is not for everybody to know everything. It is for crucial functions to be transmissible.

Transmission can be lightweight. Pair a second person on an important task. Keep a one-page procedure. Share access rather than keeping credentials on one private device. Have two people attend a key meeting. Record the contact and next step after an external conversation. Store the final version of a document where the group can find it.

The test is simple: can the group continue when one central person stops?

Decide without Worshipping One Procedure

An organization needs a method for deciding that fits the decision.

There is no single correct mix of consensus, voting, delegation, facilitation, or executive discretion for every group and every problem.

Choosing the date of a meeting does not require the same level of agreement as publishing a statement in everyone's name, spending a large amount of shared money, changing the campaign's purpose, or accepting a compromise that will end an action.

A light governance system begins by clarifying who may decide what.

Some decisions can be delegated to the person responsible for execution. If someone is asked to design a flyer within an agreed message and budget, the whole group may not need to approve each font choice.

Some decisions belong to a working team operating inside a defined mandate.

Some decisions need broader approval because they change the objective, commit significant resources, create legal exposure, change relationships with partners, or speak for the whole group.

The essential point is to know the decision rule before a serious disagreement reveals that no rule exists.

Many groups appear harmonious while everyone agrees. Their actual governance becomes visible at the first conflict. Without an explicit method, power tends to migrate toward the most available,

longest-serving, most charismatic, most technically skilled, or most persistent participant.

Consensus can be valuable when durable commitment from everyone is genuinely necessary. It can also become paralyzing if it gives one person an indefinite veto over ordinary decisions.

Voting can be efficient. It can also create a permanent losing minority if no mechanism exists for amendment, reconsideration, or protection of important constraints.

Delegation can accelerate action. It can also become opaque if the mandate is vague and accountability disappears.

No decision method is morally pure. The better question is which method fits the stakes, reversibility, urgency, and cost of error.

A minimal rule is often enough: identify who decides, by what method, within what scope, and when the decision can be revisited.

Keep Enough Memory to Learn

An organization without memory repeatedly becomes a new organization.

People revisit the same arguments because no one remembers why a decision was made. New participants cannot distinguish an abandoned idea from an active plan. Responsibilities remain ambiguous. A promise made in one meeting becomes a rumor in the next.

Organizational memory does not require transcripts of every conversation.

For many small groups, a useful record can fit in a few lines:

Decision.

Owner.

Deadline or next checkpoint.

Main reason.

Date for review when needed.

That simple record separates several things that groups frequently blur: what was discussed, what was proposed, what was decided, what was assigned, and what was actually done.

Meetings can create a false sense of progress. A group may spend three hours reaching apparent agreement while assigning nothing to anyone. Another may execute efficiently while never asking whether old decisions still make sense. Useful memory supports both action and correction.

After a campaign action, record a short after-action note. What was the objective? What happened? What evidence do we have? What failed? What should change next time?

This allows failure to become information rather than accusation.

A failed meeting with an official may reveal that the wrong office was targeted. A weak turnout may reveal that recruitment assumptions were wrong. A communication error may reveal that only one person knew the approval process. A successful action may reveal a practice worth repeating.

Without a record, the lesson survives only as private memory. When that person leaves, the group loses the experience.

Distribute Opportunities to Act, Not Just Tasks

Participation becomes weak when important information, relationships, and meaningful tasks remain concentrated in a small core.

A group can have many nominal members while most of them are spectators. They receive announcements, attend occasional meetings, and are asked to show up when numbers are needed, but they never gain access to the information or responsibility that would let them become capable participants.

Research on community organizing and social movements suggests that participation is supported not only by motivation but also by organizational opportunities, relationships, and access to meaningful roles.

That does not mean inventing pointless jobs so everyone feels included. It means distributing real opportunities to gain competence and exercise responsibility.

Invite a newer participant to join an external meeting with someone experienced. Give another person access to the campaign archive. Pair people on media outreach. Let someone own a bounded research task from start to finish. Rotate attendance at coalition meetings where continuity allows. Explain not only what task must be done but why it matters to the strategy.

Equal contribution is not the standard. People have different time, skills, health, money, mobility, caregiving obligations, employment schedules, and comfort with public exposure.

Equality of participation cannot mean pretending those differences do not exist.

A group may call itself open while implicitly requiring three evening meetings per week, rapid response during business hours, frequent travel, unpaid technical work, and constant availability. That structure selects for the people who can afford those costs.

Make the costs visible. Then adjust the organization where possible: asynchronous work, remote participation, defined task sizes, reimbursement when resources allow, childcare support

where feasible, fewer meetings, clearer deadlines, multiple levels of involvement, or explicit permission to decline tasks.

A participant who can contribute two reliable hours per month may be more useful to a durable organization than someone pressured into ten hours for three weeks and then lost entirely.

Do Not Turn Commitment into an Endurance Test

Burnout is not only an individual weakness or a private wellness problem. Organizations can produce the conditions that exhaust their own members.

Permanent urgency, unclear expectations, tasks without owners, leaders who cannot step away, meetings without decisions, unresolved conflicts, guilt around absence, and the idea that every action is historically decisive can make exhaustion structurally predictable.

Recent work on activist and social-change burnout emphasizes that persistence depends partly on organizational conditions, relationships, resources, and role design rather than only on personal resilience.

There is no universal formula for preventing burnout. But several practical safeguards follow directly from the mechanism.

Make workload visible.

Share or back up critical functions.

Give tasks an end point.

Allow people to say no without requiring a moral defense.

Distinguish genuine emergencies from habitual urgency.

Reduce meeting frequency when meetings are consuming more capacity than they create.

Remove tasks that no longer serve the objective.

Create periods when central participants can step back without the organization collapsing.

A durable organization is not one in which everyone gives the maximum amount of effort all the time. It is one that retains capacity outside peaks of mobilization.

Sometimes the correct organizational decision is not “find another volunteer.” It is “stop doing this task.”

Collective action has its own degrowth problem. Organizations can accumulate activities, communication channels, campaigns, meetings, documents, and obligations beyond what their real capacity can sustain.

More activity is not automatically more power.

A useful proof-action is to identify one task currently carried by a single overloaded person and ask whether it can be reduced, shared, automated safely where appropriate, transferred, or eliminated. If no one can imagine the group functioning without that person doing everything, the group has discovered a structural weakness.

Cooperate without Demanding Total Identity

Collective power can also grow through coalition.

Coalition does not require organizations to become one organization or agree on an entire worldview.

A tenants’ group, transit riders, disability advocates, a labor union, a climate organization, neighborhood associations, public-health groups, and local businesses might cooperate to preserve or expand a transit service for different reasons. Their broader political views may diverge sharply. The relevant question is whether those differences prevent this action.

Research on coalitions points to the importance of prior relationships, trust, resources, organizational structure, political context, and a sufficiently clear common objective. It also shows why coalition should not be confused with ideological merger.

A limited coalition needs a limited agreement.

What is the common objective?

What is each group actually committing to do?

Who may speak for the coalition?

What claims are shared, and which remain the position of individual members?

How are disagreements handled?

What ends the cooperation?

These questions protect against false unity. A coalition becomes fragile when a press release claims agreement that the participants never actually gave.

They also protect against unnecessary purity tests. Two organizations do not have to agree on every economic, cultural, or political question to cooperate on a repair ordinance, a public-transit budget, a right-to-repair campaign, a building standard, or a local reuse network.

When disagreement appears, ask whether it touches the objective, the means, or an indispensable value of this specific action.

If not, cooperation may be possible.

If yes, the disagreement is not a minor personality issue. It has to be named as a real limit.

It is also useful to distinguish a temporary coalition from a durable alliance and from organizational merger.

A temporary coalition may need only one objective, a coordination channel, a shared statement, and a division of work.

A durable alliance requires more trust, conflict management, resource arrangements, and decision rules.

A merger transforms identities, assets, responsibilities, and often legal obligations. It is not a naturally superior final stage.

Bigger coalitions can bring more members, legitimacy, expertise, money, and reach. They can also increase coordination costs, dilute demands, and slow decisions. Scale should remain subordinate to function.

Legal Form Is a Tool, Not Organizational Proof

American groups have many possible formal arrangements, and the exact legal consequences vary by state, tax status, activity, funding model, employment, and other circumstances. This chapter does not need to choose one for the reader.

Organizational function and legal form are different things.

A group may begin informally because its work is limited and low-risk. At some point it may need a bank account, insurance, contracts, grants, paid staff, ownership of equipment, formal governance, liability separation, or tax treatment that requires specialized choices. That is the moment to investigate the relevant legal structure and obtain qualified advice where necessary.

Do not treat “nonprofit” as a synonym for collective legitimacy, and do not treat federal tax status such as 501(c)(3) as a generic label for every civic group. Those are specific legal and tax arrangements with their own requirements and limitations. A campaign can be real without them, and acquiring them does not solve failures of governance, memory, or participation.

The organizational question comes first: what function needs a formal structure that the current arrangement cannot safely or reliably perform?

A Minimal Governance System to Start

A small group can test its organizational capacity with a very light framework.

It needs an explicit objective.

It needs a rule for who can decide what.

It needs visible roles for critical functions.

It needs at least one backup or transmission path for irreplaceable knowledge.

It needs a short record of decisions and commitments.

It needs owners for agreed tasks and a time or condition for checking them.

It needs a simple way to handle disagreement.

It needs a way for people to step back without destroying the group.

Use this as a checklist of failure points, not as a canonical constitution.

Can we state what we are trying to accomplish?

Do we know who may make the decisions required to pursue it?

Do we know who owns each critical task?

Could another person take over a key function?

Can we find the last important decision and why it was made?

Do commitments have owners?

Do we know when we will review them?

Do we know what happens when we disagree?

Can the organization survive the departure of one active member?

If several answers are no, recruiting more people may not solve the problem. The group may need to strengthen capacity before expanding audience.

Keep the indicators separate. Number of participants, diversity of people who can perform critical functions, tasks completed, continuity after an absence, distribution of relationships, financial resources, trust, coalition reach, burnout, turnover, and external victories describe different dimensions.

Do not collapse them into an “organizational power score.”

A fragile group can occasionally win a major external victory. A robust organization can lose a campaign while becoming more capable for the next one. Internal capacity and external result are related, but they are not the same thing.

Proof-actions for This Chapter

Take one collective objective for the next few weeks and rewrite it as an observable result. Avoid “raise awareness” unless awareness itself is genuinely the measured objective. Prefer something whose completion or failure can be seen.

List the functions required to pursue that objective. For each one, name who can perform it today. Identify one function held by only one person and create a backup: a second person, a short procedure, shared access, or another practical transfer.

For every new commitment, assign one person or small team and one checkpoint. When the checkpoint arrives, record what happened without converting the result immediately into a judgment of character.

Identify one recurring burden that is wearing down a participant. Test one change: reduce it, share it, simplify it, postpone it, or stop doing it.

Choose one outside organization with which limited cooperation could strengthen a current objective. Write the smallest common objective both groups could honestly support. Do not require agreement beyond what the action needs.

Finally, imagine that the most central person in the group becomes unavailable tomorrow. Write down the first three things that would stop working. Those are your current succession priorities.

These proof-actions test one question: is the group becoming less dependent on particular people and more capable of producing, preserving, and correcting common action?

That question leads directly to the next chapter. An organized group can pressure companies, but it can also act on budgets, rules, agencies, procurement, transit, zoning, utilities, and public infrastructure. To do that effectively, it has to identify the authority, procedure, timing, and decision that actually matter.

Notes and Sources

— Kriesi, Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: diversity of mobilizing structures, organizations, networks, and support systems in collective action.

— Rich, 2022: relationships between organizational structure and repertoires of action; organizational forms can be hybrid rather than singular.

— Tesdahl & Speer, 2015: distribution of internal contacts and opportunities to act as factors associated with sustained participation.

— Bunnage, 2014: continued movement participation as a product of individual, relational, and organizational factors rather than motivation alone.

— Sutherland, Land & Böhm, 2014: organizations without permanent formal leaders still contain leadership functions; distribution, visibility, and transferability of those functions matter.

— Zakocs & Guckenburg; Van Dyke; Brooker & Meyer; and related coalition research: organizational capacity, trust, networks, coalition formation, and the possibility of cooperation across partial disagreement.

— Hess, 2026: burnout and disengagement in social-change organizations as partly organizational problems; used here cautiously, without a universal quantitative prescription.

CHAPTER 6

Acting on Elected Officials, Agencies, and Rules

Sooner or later, a degrowth practice runs into a boundary that an individual cannot cross alone. You can buy less, keep products longer, change some travel, join a boycott, or help build a local organization. But major flows are also shaped by budgets, roads, transit, zoning, building codes, utility rules, procurement, product standards, taxes, and administrative decisions. At that point, the question changes. You are no longer only trying to change your own behavior or a company's behavior. You are trying to change a public decision.

The common mistake is to translate that into a vague instruction: contact your representatives. Contact can matter, but the United States has no single ladder of public authority. A city council, county board, state legislature, governor, public utility commission, transit agency, federal agency, Congress, or court may matter depending on the decision. USAGov itself organizes public officials across federal, state, and local levels because jurisdiction is distributed. Sending a hundred messages to an official who lacks the legal or practical authority to act may create attention; it does not give that official the missing power.

The central rule is therefore simple: start with the decision, not with the most visible politician.

Start with the Decision, Not the Officeholder

"The city should do more about climate change" is too broad to guide action. "Keep the Route 18 bus line in the next service plan,"

"change the zoning rule that prevents mixed-use development near transit," "add a repairability requirement to a purchasing standard," "fund weatherization in the next budget," or "change a specific provision in a proposed federal rule" gives you something that can be assigned to an authority, a process, and a deadline.

American government is fragmented both by design and in practice. A mayor may not control a transit authority. A state legislature cannot directly rewrite a federal agency rule. A federal representative may be able to help with an agency case or raise an issue politically while still lacking authority over a county zoning decision. A public utility commission may shape rates or utility obligations that a city council cannot. Start with the actor who can legally or operationally make, amend, fund, suspend, or review the decision—not the person with the largest platform.

A useful first proof-action is to take one concrete public demand and write down three things: the decision you want changed, the body or official that has authority over it, and the next date when that decision can realistically move. If you cannot identify those three items, you do not yet have a campaign target. You have an issue.

Contact Is Not a Procedure

Once the correct authority is identified, direct contact can be useful. A short, documented message can ask for a position, report a problem, request a meeting, or provide information. If several people are affected, a joint letter with real signers can show that the issue is shared.

But raw message volume should not be confused with institutional leverage. The strongest example comes from federal rulemaking. Regulations.gov's own guidance explains that a comment is more useful when it explains impacts, supplies

evidence, addresses the proposal, or recommends a specific change. The same guidance warns that hundreds or thousands of bare statements of support or opposition are less likely to affect agency decision-making, and that repeated identical comments are not inherently more persuasive than a single substantive one.

That does not mean numbers never matter politically. It means numbers and procedural usefulness are different things. A member of Congress may care that thousands of constituents oppose a policy. An agency evaluating a proposed rule has a different task: it has to build an administrative record and respond to relevant arguments. A local board may face still another process, with hearings, staff reports, agenda deadlines, and votes. The channel changes the function of participation.

So before launching a mass-email campaign, ask a more useful question: what does this institution have to do with what it receives?

Use Channels That Leave a Record

Some forms of participation matter because they enter a process that can later be checked. Federal notice-and-comment rulemaking is one example. Proposed rules are published through the Federal Register, and comments can be submitted through Regulations.gov when a docket is open. Agencies may receive enormous numbers of comments, but the relevant practical distinction is not between "few" and "many." It is between comments that merely register a preference and comments that give the agency information, evidence, legal or practical arguments, alternatives, or concrete consequences it must evaluate as part of the rulemaking process.

This gives a citizen a different kind of leverage from a private email. A public comment does not give the commenter a veto. It does create a trace inside a formal decision process. That trace can

later be compared with the final rule, the agency's stated reasoning, and any changes made between proposal and adoption.

Environmental review can create similar opportunities when federal law actually requires them. Under NEPA processes, public engagement may be part of the review of certain federal actions. But that fact should not be generalized into a universal right to a hearing for every local project. The governing statute, agency, project, and stage have to be identified first. The rule is functional: use a process that requires participation to be received, recorded, considered, summarized, or answered when such a process exists.

At the state and local level, the mechanisms vary even more. Public hearings, planning commissions, utility proceedings, school boards, transportation boards, state agency rulemaking, ballot initiatives, and local petition procedures differ by jurisdiction. USAGov notes that state and local governmental structures and ballot mechanisms vary. That variation is not a nuisance to be abstracted away. It is part of the problem you have to map.

There is therefore no honest national equivalent of saying, "Reach this many signatures and the petition advances." The United States has a constitutional right to petition government, but procedural effects depend on the institution and jurisdiction. A petition can demonstrate support, create publicity, trigger a locally defined procedure, help qualify a ballot measure where state law allows, or support a meeting request. It does not become binding merely because a large number appears on the page.

A signature threshold tells you very little by itself. Before collecting signatures, decide what the petition is supposed to do after it is delivered.

When a Petition Is Useful

A petition can perform several different functions. It can show that an issue is not isolated. It can help recruit people. It can give journalists and officials a visible measure of support. In some states or municipalities, a legally specified petition process may help qualify an initiative, referendum, recall, or other formal step. In other settings, a petition may have no automatic procedural effect at all.

These functions should not be mixed together. Ten thousand signatures that generate press attention have done something. Ten thousand signatures that satisfy a legal qualification requirement have done something different. Ten thousand signatures submitted to an office with no obligation to act may still matter politically, but they have not opened a legal procedure.

Before launching a petition, write down the desired next event: a hearing, placement on an agenda, a meeting, qualification for a ballot process, a public response, a committee review, or simply visible support for a broader campaign. If no next event can be named, the petition risks becoming a metric in search of a function.

Organized Advocacy Is Not Automatically Special-Interest Politics

American public life is already full of organized attempts to influence decisions. Businesses, unions, nonprofits, trade associations, professional groups, advocacy organizations, and coalitions all communicate with lawmakers and executive-branch officials. Federal law requires registration and disclosure for defined lobbying actors and activities; the Senate and House maintain public lobbying-disclosure systems under the Lobbying Disclosure Act.

That does not mean that every citizen who calls a senator's office, attends a city-council meeting, or asks an agency to change a rule has become a registered lobbyist. The legal categories are narrower and depend on the activity and circumstances. The useful point is not to borrow a legal label casually. It is to recognize that organized influence is a normal part of political life, and citizens do not make their participation more legitimate by pretending they are not trying to influence power.

A neighborhood coalition can prepare evidence, request a meeting, identify the decision at stake, state whose interests it represents, propose language or an alternative, and then document the answer it receives. A climate group can ask a state agency to amend a proposed rule. Transit riders can organize around a service change. Parents can ask a school board to change procurement or building policy. None of those actions is valuable merely because citizens initiated it. The arguments still need to be defensible, the interests should be explicit, and the methods should remain proportionate.

The organizational advantage is traceability. A meeting can produce a position: support, opposition, a request for more information, a promise to introduce language, a referral to another body. That gives the campaign a political fact to work with instead of a vague impression that "officials know about the issue."

Create Political Cost without Personal Threats

Public pressure works by changing the cost of leaving a decision untouched. That cost can be electoral, reputational, administrative, legal, organizational, or simply the cost of continuing to defend a position in public. None of this requires threats or harassment.

"There are 600 residents asking the board to keep this route, and we will be at the budget hearing" is political pressure. "This

vote will affect how we evaluate our representatives in the next election" is political pressure. Publishing the fact that an office declined to answer a documented request can be political pressure. Threatening an official, staff member, or family member is something else entirely and has no place in the method described here.

Persistence needs the same discipline. Repeated follow-up can be legitimate when a decision is pending and a response has been requested. Making a person's communications unusable is not automatically more effective and can shift attention from the decision to the disruption itself.

Political leverage becomes stronger when it connects four things: a specific decision, identifiable people who care about it, a process or deadline, and a consequence that is lawful and visible. An institution may still choose to absorb that cost rather than change course. The method does not guarantee victory. It makes the choice more legible.

Escalate by Adding Leverage, Not Just Volume

A proportionate civic campaign can move through several levels, but the order is not rigid.

First, identify the decision, authority, and timing. Second, make a documented request and ask for an explicit response. Third, if the issue is shared, coordinate affected people and organizations. Fourth, use the formal process that fits the decision: a public-comment docket, hearing, board meeting, rulemaking, administrative complaint, petition procedure, or other jurisdiction-specific channel. Fifth, increase public visibility through coalition, press, publication of positions, or lawful mobilization. Sixth, when the issue and law justify it, consider specialized administrative or legal review with qualified support.

Each step should add something the previous one lacked. A hearing adds a public record. A coalition adds organizational breadth. A substantive regulatory comment adds evidence to a docket. Press coverage adds visibility. Administrative review or litigation may add a legal remedy, but also cost, delay, filing deadlines, standing or other threshold requirements, and specialized risks. This book does not provide individualized legal advice; any such step requires checking the law, forum, deadline, and eligibility rules that actually apply, often with qualified support. Escalation that adds only more noise is not necessarily escalation in power.

Before moving to a new level, ask four questions. Was the previous target actually competent? Was the demand received or admitted into the relevant process? What new capacity does the next channel add? What additional cost does it impose on the campaign and on others? If those questions cannot be answered, the next step may be symbolic rather than strategic.

Follow the Decision All the Way to Implementation

Institutional access is easy to mistake for success. An acknowledgment proves that a message arrived. A meeting proves that a meeting occurred. A hearing proves that the issue was heard. A public comment proves that an argument entered the docket. A legislator's statement proves that a position was expressed. None of those events necessarily proves that the underlying decision changed.

Return to the object of the campaign. Was the bus route preserved? Did the zoning language change? Was the procurement requirement adopted? Did the proposed rule change before it became final? Was the budget actually appropriated? Was the program funded and implemented, or only announced?

Keep the indicators separate. Number of participants, meetings, press stories, comments, endorsements, agenda placement, hearings, amendments, votes, final rules, appropriations, and implementation are different kinds of evidence. A campaign can be highly visible and change nothing. Another can win a technical change with almost no public attention.

This protects against a familiar illusion: confusing access with power. Being heard is not the same as being followed. But being heard in the right process can create evidence, constrain future explanations, reveal who has authority, and make the next move more precise.

Proof-actions for This Chapter

Choose one public decision that affects you. Identify the level of government and the body that can actually change it. Find the next real decision point: a vote, board meeting, budget deadline, proposed-rule comment period, public hearing, contract renewal, or other formal moment.

Send one short, documented request for a clear position. If other people are affected, coordinate a joint communication with real participants rather than automated saturation.

Check for a formal channel that creates a record. For a federal rule, find the docket and comment deadline. For a state or local matter, identify the hearing, board, commission, agency process, or legally defined petition mechanism that actually applies. Keep a copy of what you submit.

After a reasonable follow-up, record the response or nonresponse without inventing motives. Then, when the decision date arrives, compare the outcome with the original demand. Did the rule, budget, project, timetable, or public position change? If not, did the process reveal that you targeted the wrong authority,

used the wrong channel, lacked support, or simply did not yet have enough leverage?

The purpose of these actions is to turn "pressure on government" into a sequence of observable decisions rather than a mood or a message count.

The next chapter moves from rules to the conditions that make choices possible. Repair, reuse, shared tools, transit, efficient housing, accessible food systems, and supportive institutions can make lower-consumption practices ordinary rather than exceptional.

Notes and Sources

— USAGov, "Find and contact elected officials," updated March 2, 2026: federal, state, and local representation and contact structures.

— USAGov, "State and local elections," updated February 12, 2026: state and local governmental variation and ballot initiatives as jurisdiction-dependent mechanisms.

— USAGov, "Where to file a complaint against a federal or state government agency," updated August 10, 2026: agency-first complaint logic and escalation toward oversight or elected officials when appropriate.

— Regulations.gov, "How You Can Effectively Participate in the Regulatory Process," 2025: substantive comments, evidence, specific impacts, recommendations, and the limited persuasive value of identical mass comments.

— Federal Register, "The Rulemaking Process": petitions for rulemaking, proposed rules, notice-and-comment, and public participation in federal rulemaking.

— U.S. Senate, Lobbying Disclosure Act materials: registration and disclosure obligations for defined lobbying actors and activities and public access to lobbying records.

— Council on Environmental Quality, NEPA materials: public engagement in covered federal environmental-review processes; applicability depends on the action and governing process.

CHAPTER 7

Building the Alternatives That Make Degrowth Possible

Degrowth remains incomplete if it asks individuals to renounce more while leaving the surrounding world organized around high consumption.

Once the personal lever reaches its limit, another list of sacrifices will not solve the problem. The task becomes building the conditions under which lower-material, lower-energy, and lower-ownership ways of meeting needs are ordinary options rather than acts of endurance.

Those conditions can take many forms: repair shops and repair networks; reuse centers; libraries of things and tool libraries; public transit; safe walking and bicycling access; shared mobility; weatherization and building retrofits; food systems that make adequate food accessible; cooperative or public services; shared kitchens and workspaces; procurement rules; local institutions; and businesses that earn revenue from providing a durable service rather than maximizing unit turnover.

None of those labels proves the result. Local, cooperative, circular, shared, public, green, and community-based can describe useful arrangements. They can also describe arrangements that leave total material use unchanged, shift costs onto workers, exclude people who cannot afford access, or add a new service without replacing anything.

The relevant question remains the same as throughout this book: what function does the alternative perform, what does it

actually replace, what new flows does it create, who can use it, and what happens at scale?

Infrastructure Shapes What Choices Are Possible

People do not choose in a vacuum. The IPCC's work on demand-side mitigation makes this explicit: behavior interacts with infrastructure, technology, institutions, and social conditions. A household can change some practices directly. It cannot individually create a bus route, a safe bicycle network, a supply of affordable efficient housing, a repair economy, or a neighborhood with essential services nearby.

Transportation makes this visible immediately. "Drive less" means one thing where frequent transit, safe sidewalks, bicycle routes, and nearby services exist, and something else where work, school, food, and health care are spread across long distances with no practical alternative.

Repair follows the same logic. A willingness to keep a product longer matters little when parts, documentation, diagnostic tools, trained repairers, or compatible software are unavailable.

Housing makes the point even more sharply. A resident can adjust a thermostat. They cannot personally replace an apartment building's envelope, heating system, wiring, or capital plan. A renter may have even less control. If the building itself wastes energy, individual restraint can reduce some use while leaving the main mechanism untouched.

Infrastructure therefore changes the distribution of responsibility. When a lower-consumption practice is difficult because the enabling system is absent, the problem has moved beyond personal behavior.

That does not mean every infrastructure project is automatically desirable. Public infrastructure can be badly

designed. Private services can perform a useful collective function. Cooperatives can reproduce high-consumption models. Informal networks can sometimes work better than formal programs. The organizational form matters less than the function it actually performs.

Social justice also remains part of the test. Degrowth is not a demand that every person receive less service. Some people need more mobility, safer housing, better cooling, more reliable food access, assistive technology, or greater access to public services. Reducing excess and reducing deprivation are different operations.

From Ownership to the Service You Need

Many material goods are purchased because they provide a service. A drill provides holes. A car provides mobility. A pressure washer provides occasional cleaning. A printer provides printed pages. A ladder provides temporary access to height.

Once the service is made explicit, individual ownership becomes one possible arrangement rather than the definition of the need.

This creates room for borrowing, renting, sharing, service contracts, libraries of things, equipment pools, repair-supported leasing, and other arrangements that can increase the useful work obtained from each physical object.

A business model can sometimes reinforce that logic. If a provider earns money by keeping a piece of equipment working for years rather than by selling a replacement every two years, durability can become economically valuable to the provider as well as to the user.

But the label “product as a service” proves nothing by itself. A service can still require a large fleet, constant transportation,

warehouses, cleaning, digital infrastructure, replacement stock, and labor. Cheap access can also increase use. If a rental service makes an item so easy to obtain that people use it far more often than before, some of the material advantage may disappear.

The test is concrete. How many individually owned products were actually avoided? Did useful life increase? What additional vehicles, buildings, devices, trips, packaging, maintenance, or labor were required? Did total use rise? Did the service displace a more resource-intensive option or a less resource-intensive one?

Make Repair and Reuse Ordinary Infrastructure

Chapter 2 treated repair and reuse as individual decisions. At this scale, the question changes: what makes those decisions easy enough to become normal?

A functioning repair economy needs more than motivated owners. It may need local repair businesses, technical training, parts distribution, diagnostic access, shared workshops, product documentation, collection systems, refurbishment capacity, and rules that allow independent repair.

Reuse works the same way. A usable object does not remain useful merely because someone is willing to donate it. It may need collection, sorting, cleaning, testing, storage, transport, resale, redistribution, or refurbishment before it can replace a new purchase.

The United States already contains many different forms of this infrastructure. EPA's Sustainable Materials Management framework treats source reduction and reuse as higher-priority strategies than managing waste after it has been created, and its current materials guidance recognizes reuse stores, material exchanges, salvage, deconstruction, and reuse networks as real parts of the materials system.

That matters because reuse should not be reduced to a moral instruction to throw less away. Infrastructure can change the option set. A building component that would otherwise be demolished can enter a salvage market. A used tool can circulate through a community. A device can be repaired and resold. A local material exchange can connect an unwanted resource with a new user.

But circularity is not automatically degrowth. A society can recycle a larger share of its waste while continuing to extract, manufacture, purchase, and discard ever larger absolute quantities. Recycling can reduce some impacts without reducing throughput.

For this book, circular systems support degrowth when they contribute to a more demanding outcome: less new material entering the system, longer useful lives, fewer unnecessary replacement cycles, or the same useful service delivered with less total throughput.

A reuse center therefore cannot be judged only by tons collected or objects distributed. Follow the substitution. Did recovered building materials replace virgin materials? Did a refurbished appliance replace a new appliance? Did a tool library reduce purchases, or merely add another convenient source of equipment?

Share Mobility without Displacing the Problem

Transportation is one of the clearest examples of why an alternative must be evaluated by what it replaces.

Shared mobility can include public transit, carpooling, vanpooling, bikesharing, carsharing, demand-responsive service, and other arrangements. The Federal Transit Administration treats

these as distinct forms with different operational relationships to public transportation.

Carsharing can reduce the need for some households to own a vehicle, especially when a car is needed occasionally rather than daily. But the ecological result depends on the trips that follow.

If carsharing replaces a second privately owned car and reduces total driving, it can support a lower-ownership mobility system. If it replaces walking, bicycling, or transit trips, or creates trips that would not otherwise have happened, the result is different.

Ride-hailing and other on-demand services need the same test. Convenience is not the same thing as reduction.

A lower-consumption mobility system therefore cannot be built around one substitute technology. It is a combination: reliable transit where population and geography support it; safe walking and bicycling; accessible services for people who cannot use those modes; land-use patterns that reduce compulsory distance; carpooling and shared vehicles where they perform a real complementary function; and fewer situations in which owning a private vehicle is the only practical way to participate in ordinary life.

Infrastructure succeeds when it changes the counterfactual. Usage alone is not enough; the real question is what private ownership or vehicle travel became unnecessary because the shared service existed.

Food: Build Access, Not Just Advice

Food offers the same lesson. Advice alone cannot restructure the environment in which people obtain meals.

A person can be told to buy differently, waste less, cook more, or choose a lower-impact diet. But actual choices are shaped by

prices, work schedules, transportation, kitchen access, nearby stores, institutional meals, disability, culture, household time, and the reliability of the food supply around them.

Collective alternatives can act on those conditions. They can include institutional food service, school meals, food hubs, group purchasing, shared kitchens, food-waste prevention systems, community distribution, local and regional supply chains, and procurement standards.

Institutional purchasing is especially important because one decision can affect many meals without requiring thousands of people to make the same individual decision every day. USDA's child-nutrition procurement guidance provides mechanisms through which participating institutions can purchase local food under defined federal rules. That illustrates the leverage of procurement; it does not prove that local food is automatically lower-impact.

Local origin is only one characteristic of a food system. Production method, land use, seasonality, storage, diet composition, processing, transport, waste, affordability, and working conditions can all matter. A tomato grown nearby in an energy-intensive system is not made ecologically optimal by distance alone. Nor is an imported food necessarily worse on every dimension.

The objective is broader than telling people what to eat: reduce avoidable food loss and waste, make adequate and sustainable food easier to access, use institutional purchasing where it can change recurring flows, and avoid a transition in which lower-impact food becomes a premium lifestyle available only to people with high incomes and abundant time.

Housing and Energy: Sufficiency Needs Buildings and Systems

Household restraint cannot carry the entire burden of energy reduction when buildings are inefficient.

Sufficiency and efficiency answer different questions. Sufficiency asks whether the service demanded is excessive. Efficiency asks how much energy or material is required to provide the service. Infrastructure determines whether either improvement is practically available.

A poorly insulated home can make adequate winter heat expensive. An inefficient cooling system can make a safe indoor temperature difficult during extreme heat. A tenant may not control either problem. Telling the occupant simply to consume less can turn an infrastructure failure into personal deprivation.

The United States already operates programs that recognize this structural dimension. The Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance Program continues in Program Year 2026 through a federal grant structure that funds weatherization providers via program grantees. Its existence does not mean every household is eligible or that weatherization solves every housing problem. Its relevance here is functional: reducing household energy demand can require organized assessment, financing, skilled work, and building improvements rather than behavior alone.

Larger systems shape the same possibilities. Building codes, retrofit financing, utility programs, district or community energy systems, landlord incentives and obligations, contractor capacity, and public procurement all affect the physical conditions in which energy is used.

Technology should still be judged by substitution rather than novelty. Installing an efficient system while leaving an unnecessary system running in parallel may add capital and material without producing the expected reduction. Electrifying

equipment can reduce some direct fossil-fuel use while shifting demands to electricity generation and grids. A new green layer is not automatically a lower-flow system.

Useful infrastructure may be unglamorous: a financing mechanism that makes insulation possible, a building rule that removes a recurring barrier, a trained local workforce, a repair network for heating equipment, shared space that reduces duplicated facilities, or a utility program that reaches households who otherwise cannot fund improvements.

Legal Form Is Not Proof

Alternatives often come with organizational labels: cooperative, nonprofit, mutual, public authority, community enterprise, benefit corporation, volunteer association, or conventional business.

Those forms can matter. A cooperative can give member-users or workers formal governance rights. USDA Rural Development, for example, supports cooperative development and describes cooperatives as businesses owned, used, and controlled by members. A nonprofit may place limits on distribution of surplus. A public entity may have obligations that private firms do not. Different forms can change access to capital, accountability, ownership, tax treatment, and decision rights.

But legal form is a possibility structure, not evidence of ecological performance.

A cooperative can seek perpetual volume growth, use large material flows, externalize costs, or exclude people who cannot afford membership. A nonprofit can waste resources. A public service can be inefficient or inaccessible. A conventional company can sometimes design a durable product or service that materially reduces turnover.

So ask what the organization actually does.

Does its governance change whose interests shape decisions? Does it reduce throughput? Does it extend useful life? Does it broaden access? Does it shift risk onto workers? Does it depend on unpaid labor that cannot be sustained? Does it remain financially viable without recreating the volume logic it was supposed to escape?

Do not let organizational vocabulary replace observation.

An Alternative People Cannot Access Is Only a Partial Alternative

An alternative can exist on paper and still be unavailable in practice.

Price matters. Distance matters. Hours matter. Disability access matters. Language matters. Digital access matters. Enrollment rules matter. Skills and confidence matter. Geographic coverage matters. Reliability matters.

A bus line that stops before a night shift ends is not a complete alternative for that worker. A repair shop reachable only by car may do little for someone trying to live without one. A tool library open for three hours on a weekday may serve retirees and remote workers while excluding many wage workers. A sharing platform that requires a smartphone, bank card, and constant connectivity may exclude people who lack those resources. Sustainable food that costs substantially more may remain a niche option even if it is physically nearby.

Accessibility therefore belongs inside the effectiveness test, not in a separate moral appendix.

An alternative that reduces environmental impact by transferring a large burden of time, money, risk, or inconvenience onto the people with the least capacity to absorb it has not solved the whole problem. It has changed the distribution of the problem.

No service has to be universally available before it can be useful. Its limits do have to remain visible. Who can use it now? Who cannot? Why? What would have to change for access to widen without destroying the function that made the alternative valuable?

Build at the Scale of a Place

Between the individual household and national policy lies another scale: the place where daily systems meet.

A city, county, neighborhood, region, rural area, tribal community, or metropolitan network contains businesses, residents, schools, utilities, transit providers, local governments, nonprofits, cooperatives, contractors, farms, repairers, libraries, and public institutions. Many lower-consumption alternatives depend on relationships among several of them.

A reuse center is more powerful when contractors know how to deconstruct rather than demolish, local rules allow salvage, buyers can find recovered materials, storage exists, training is available, and public or private procurement creates demand.

A repair network is stronger when parts and documentation exist, training produces skilled repairers, local businesses can survive economically, institutions purchase repairable products, and residents know where to bring equipment.

A food system can become more resilient when growers, aggregators, schools, hospitals, food banks, retailers, kitchens, and transportation systems can coordinate recurring demand and distribution. USDA maintains program resources and directories for local and regional food systems because the sector depends on networks rather than one organizational form.

A place can therefore act as a laboratory for cooperation. But local still does not mean systemic. A successful initiative may

remain tiny. It may depend on one charismatic founder. It may rely on temporary grants. It may reduce one visible flow while importing another from outside the region.

Place-based cooperation becomes more significant when it changes relationships among recurring functions: procurement, collection, repair, mobility, training, financing, access, rules, and infrastructure.

Scaling Does Not Always Mean Getting Bigger

When an alternative works, the reflex is often to ask how the organization can grow.

Sometimes growth is appropriate. A repair service may need more technicians. A transit network may need more routes. A food hub may need more capacity. A weatherization program may need more contractors and funding.

But organizational growth is only one way to increase impact.

A model can be replicated by independent groups. Several organizations can federate while remaining locally autonomous. A city can adopt a procurement rule that spreads a practice without expanding the original organization. A technical standard can make repairability common across many manufacturers. A funding program can allow many communities to reproduce an approach. Training materials can transfer competence. Shared infrastructure can serve multiple organizations. A legal rule can eliminate the need to negotiate the same change one company at a time.

These routes have different costs.

A larger organization may gain professional capacity, purchasing power, visibility, and geographic reach. It may also require more buildings, travel, management, fundraising,

reporting, and coordination. Centralization can make services efficient in one dimension while making them distant or inflexible in another.

Scaling does not always mean becoming larger. Often the more useful question is what, exactly, has to spread.

If the valuable part is a practice, replicate the practice. If it is shared infrastructure, expand the infrastructure. If it is a rule, change the rule. If it is specialized expertise, build training and transfer. If it is purchasing power, coordinate procurement. If it is a network effect, connect independent actors.

An alternative does not have to become a monopoly in order to become normal.

Check Rebound and Displacement

Infrastructure can reduce one burden while creating another.

A sharing service can reduce ownership while adding vehicle trips for delivery and redistribution. A local reuse business can depend on imported replacement parts. A nonprofit can keep prices low through chronically underpaid labor. A digital service can reduce some physical transactions while increasing device turnover or data infrastructure. A cheaper mobility option can generate more trips. A more efficient building can encourage higher indoor temperatures or greater floor area over time.

None of those possibilities proves that the alternative fails. They are reasons to inspect the mechanism after implementation.

Ask what was replaced. How many new products were avoided? Did useful life increase? Did total vehicle miles rise or fall? What logistics were added? Did energy use decline in absolute terms or only per unit of service? Did paid work become precarious or unpaid work become invisible? Did the environmental burden

move to another region or supply chain? Did access improve or worsen? Did the new option displace a more resource-intensive practice—or a less resource-intensive one?

Keep the dimensions separate. Carbon, energy, materials, biodiversity, labor conditions, affordability, accessibility, time, and local resilience do not become commensurable because a project dashboard puts them on one page.

A project may improve several dimensions and worsen another. The judgment has to remain explicit.

A Practical Evaluation

When you encounter or design an alternative, use a limited set of questions.

What need or service is it trying to provide?

What material and energy flows provide that service today?

Which of those flows does the alternative claim to avoid or reduce?

What existing products or infrastructure does it extend, repair, reuse, or share?

What new equipment, buildings, vehicles, software, labor, and maintenance does it require?

What logistics does it add?

Who can actually access it, at what price, distance, schedule, and level of technical or digital ability?

Who governs it, and on what dependencies does it rely?

What rebound is plausible?

What evidence would show real substitution rather than addition?

Can the arrangement endure without exhausting workers, volunteers, public budgets, or participants?

If it works, what should scale: the organization, the practice, the infrastructure, the network, the procurement rule, the standard, or the public policy?

Do not turn these questions into a scorecard. They are deliberately heterogeneous, designed to keep a good label from doing the work of evaluation.

Proof-actions for This Chapter

Choose one recurring need for which you currently own equipment individually. Find one collective option—borrowing, renting, sharing, a library of things, or another access model—and use it once if it is practical. Record whether a purchase or ownership need actually disappeared.

Identify one local repair, reuse, salvage, refurbishment, or material-exchange service. Do not stop at the label. Find one concrete flow it keeps in use and ask what would probably happen to that item or material without the service.

With a group, choose one life function—mobility, food, equipment, housing, or energy—and map the missing infrastructure that makes a lower-consumption practice difficult. The next action may be organizational or political rather than personal: ask for a service, connect two organizations, change a procurement rule, seek funding, create a shared facility, or identify the public decision blocking the alternative.

For any alternative you use or support, check accessibility explicitly: price, distance, hours, disability access, language or technical requirements, enrollment, and geographic availability. Identify at least one group for whom the alternative works poorly and the reason why.

After the alternative has operated long enough to observe, return to the physical result. Did ownership fall? Did purchases decline? Did useful life increase? Did vehicle travel decrease? Did energy use fall? Or did the new service simply add another layer of activity?

Finally, if an initiative works, identify the least costly way to spread its function. Replication, federation, procurement, public support, a standard, training, a shared network, or a rule may produce more effect than making one organization larger.

These proof-actions complete the transition from personal reduction to constructed possibility. They ask not only whether people are willing to consume differently, but whether the material and institutional world gives them a realistic way to do so.

The final chapter turns to durability. Once a practice, organization, rule, or infrastructure begins to work, the next problem is keeping the trajectory from dissolving into fatigue, rebound, identity, or routine accumulation.

Notes and Sources

— IPCC AR6 WGIII, Summary for Policymakers and Chapter 5: demand-side mitigation depends on interactions among behavior, infrastructure, technology, institutions, and equity.

— U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Sustainable Materials Management, updated 2026: life-cycle materials framing, source reduction, reuse, recycling, and infrastructure for managing materials more productively.

— U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, materials-reuse and construction/deconstruction resources, updated 2026: salvage, material exchanges, reuse stores, deconstruction, and reuse networks as parts of the U.S. materials system.

— Federal Transit Administration, Shared Mobility definitions and guidance: distinctions among public transit, bikesharing, carsharing, ridesharing, demand-responsive service, and other shared-mobility forms; their effects depend on the service and what trips they replace.

— U.S. Department of Transportation, pedestrian, bicycling, and transit-access guidance: infrastructure and safety shape practical access to transit and active transportation.

— U.S. Department of Energy, Weatherization Assistance Program, Program Year 2026 materials: federally supported weatherization delivered through program grantees and providers; used here as an example of building-level infrastructure rather than a universal household entitlement.

— U.S. Department of Agriculture, child-nutrition local-procurement guidance and local/regional food-system resources, current 2026: institutional procurement and food-system networks can change recurring food flows; local origin alone is not treated as proof of lower total impact.

— USDA Rural Development, Cooperative Programs: cooperatives as member-owned and controlled organizational forms and federal support for cooperative development; legal or ownership form is not treated here as evidence of ecological performance.

CHAPTER 8

Making the Trajectory Last

A degrowth trajectory is not measured only by the force of the intention that began it. It also has to survive ordinary life without requiring heroic willpower forever. Buying less for a few weeks, changing a habit during an initial burst of enthusiasm, or sustaining one difficult practice for a short period can all matter. But if every action has to be renegotiated internally every day, if its human cost keeps rising, or if the surrounding environment constantly pushes in the opposite direction, the change remains fragile.

This final chapter does not ask for more effort. It asks how useful changes become simpler, more routine, more socially supported, and more compatible with a dignified life. That means stabilizing before adding, changing the context when possible, looking at real costs, distinguishing sufficiency from deprivation, checking rebound effects, and recognizing the point at which an individual problem has become a structural one.

The central principle is straightforward: a degrowth trajectory lasts when it becomes less dependent on heroic self-control. Useful practices become easier to repeat, their effects are checked again, their costs remain bearable, and problems that cannot reasonably be solved alone move toward organization, infrastructure, or rules.

Understanding Is Not the Same as Lasting Change

One of the most persistent mistakes is assuming that understanding a problem automatically produces durable change. Knowing that a practice uses a great deal of energy, materials,

money, or time can matter. Understanding how a purchase works inside a market, how a boycott creates pressure, or how infrastructure shapes behavior can change perception. But knowledge by itself is usually not enough to stabilize a practice.

Behavioral research distinguishes many influences on action, including habits, context, motivation, social norms, and practical capacity. Interventions that provide information alone often produce weaker effects than interventions that also change the conditions in which behavior occurs. The lesson fits the method of this book: understanding is not embodiment. A coherent argument, a declared identity, or a sincere decision is not yet a durable practice.

Ask what would make a useful action stop requiring a fresh conscious decision every time.

Someone who wants to carry a reusable bottle can keep it beside the keys or the work bag. Someone trying to reduce impulse purchases can remove promotional notifications and saved shopping shortcuts. A household trying to waste less food can build meals around a repeatable way of seeing and using leftovers. A group can make repair or borrowing the default step in its purchasing process rather than reinventing the choice every time.

Daily life should not become a procedure manual. Where possible, useful practices need to move out of the category of repeated effort. The more a change depends on a tiring decision every day, the more vulnerable it remains to stress, time pressure, emergencies, and social friction.

There Is No Magic Number of Days

There is no universal number of days after which a behavior automatically becomes a habit. Reviews of habit-formation research show wide variation across people and behaviors. Much

of that literature comes from health behavior, which is another reason not to turn its findings into a countdown for degrowth.

The useful conclusion is negative: twenty-one, thirty, sixty, or ninety days is not a universal threshold. A practice may become routine quickly when the context supports it and remain difficult for months when the context keeps creating friction.

Instead of counting days, ask when the behavior happens with little effort and when it disappears. That shifts attention from personal performance to the conditions that support the practice.

A proof-action can be simple. Take one practice you have already adopted and observe it for several weeks. Does it still require a deliberate decision each time? If so, change one element of the context that could make the practice easier by default. Perfect automaticity is unnecessary; the aim is lower dependence on repeated willpower.

Change the Context Before Increasing the Guilt

Demand-side change requires both motivation and the capacity to act. Someone can be completely convinced and still lack the conditions needed to maintain a lower-consumption practice. Infrastructure, prices, schedules, technology, work organization, housing, and rules can all make an action easy or nearly impossible.

That distinction prevents a moral shortcut. Someone who returns to driving because a transit route was cut has not necessarily abandoned a value. Someone who replaces a product because repair is unavailable or costs far more than replacement may be facing a market constraint. Someone who stops buying a preferred food because it is no longer affordable has not automatically failed a test of coherence.

At least two situations should therefore be separated. In the first, a practice is fragile because personal organization can be improved: preparation is weak, the routine is unstable, information is scattered, or the same decision has to be made repeatedly. In the second, the constraint comes from the system: transportation does not exist, housing is inefficient, the price is prohibitive, work schedules are incompatible, repair infrastructure is missing, or a rule blocks the option.

One case may call for a personal adjustment; the other may call for a different scale of action. Demanding more individual sacrifice when the obstacle is structural does not solve the structural problem. It merely transfers the cost to the person.

Recognizing that boundary is itself a competence. Degrowth becomes distorted when every obstacle is interpreted as weak motivation.

The Social Environment Matters Too

A practice can be materially possible and still be socially costly. What people around us do, expect, reward, or criticize influences what feels normal. Refusing some purchases, traveling differently, sharing equipment, or reducing certain forms of consumption can require more effort when no one nearby does the same.

Research on social norms distinguishes, among other things, what people appear to do from what people appear to approve. Both can influence climate-related behavior, and social learning through relationships can help norms move. None of this gives us a formula for predicting a collective tipping point. Social influence is real without being mechanically predictable.

A trajectory often becomes easier when it stops being completely solitary. Neighbors who share tools, coworkers who make a lower-car commute socially normal, families who

reorganize routines together, or groups that share repair knowledge can reduce the organizational and relational cost of a practice.

The aim is not to build a perfectly homogeneous social world. It is to create enough support that every action does not require a permanent conflict with the surrounding environment.

Voluntary Sufficiency Is Not Imposed Deprivation

A degrowth trajectory is not a program of generalized impoverishment. Some people consume far beyond what is required for a dignified life. Others still lack adequate housing, heating or cooling, food, mobility, health care, time, or essential services. Asking both groups for the same reductions would erase the differences that matter most.

Someone with very high discretionary consumption may have substantial room to reduce without undermining basic needs. Someone already living under severe constraints may need more access to energy, mobility, housing quality, services, or material resources in order to reach decent conditions.

This means there can be no uniform checklist. The useful questions are not “How much have you reduced?” or “How strict is your lifestyle?” They are: Which flows are excessive? Which are necessary? What costs are bearable? What constraints are outside the person’s control? Where is there real room to act?

Research on consumption reduction and well-being does not support a universal promise either. Some studies report positive or neutral associations in certain settings; others identify losses or tradeoffs. Autonomy, social relations, context, and the kind of consumption being reduced all matter. It is possible to reduce some forms of consumption without making life worse. It is not

honest to claim that every reduction automatically makes people happier.

A serious trajectory therefore keeps human costs visible: money, time, comfort, health, mobility, relationships, mental load, and access to services. A materially effective change can still become humanly unsustainable. When that happens, the answer is not always “try harder.” The action may need to be redesigned, shared, collectivized, or abandoned.

Not Everyone Has the Same Room to Reduce

Inequality is not only about income. People differ in available time, housing, mobility, health, location, family responsibilities, information, skills, and social networks. Two people hearing the same advice do not therefore have the same capacity to act on it.

The broader evidence also supports a qualitative point used throughout this book: higher-resource households tend, on average, to have higher consumption footprints and more room for discretionary reduction. That does not justify turning income into an automatic moral score or assigning an exact reduction quota from a broad statistical relationship. It does support a basic safeguard: those with more excess consumption usually have more room to reduce without threatening a dignified life than those whose consumption is already constrained.

A degrowth policy that ignored that difference could become regressive. It could demand comparable sacrifices from people whose circumstances are not comparable.

Making a trajectory last therefore requires matching expectations to actual possibilities. The same action may be significant for one person, trivial for another, and impossible for a third. Coherence lies in the relationship among possibilities, costs, actions, and observed effects—not in uniform compliance.

Rebound: Check What Happens After the Saving

A practice can last for a long time and still produce less reduction than expected. That is where rebound matters. The research describes several mechanisms and uses different methods; there is no universal coefficient that can be applied across every household, technology, or service.

For a practical guide, the useful approach is to look for concrete displacement. Did money saved in one place finance a new material-intensive purchase elsewhere? Did a more efficient device get used more because it became cheaper to operate? Did a shared service replace individual ownership or add new trips and uses? Did time saved through one practice move into another activity that increased the flow the person was trying to reduce?

This is not a moral accounting system. Saving money does not create an obligation to spend it in some officially approved way. The narrower test is whether the total flow actually fell or whether part of the reduction reappeared elsewhere.

Take one recent saving—money, time, energy, travel, or equipment use—and follow what happened afterward. Impossible purity is not the standard. The purpose is to detect an offset large enough to change the interpretation of the original action.

Intention, Identity, and Practice Are Different Things

Degrowth can easily become an identity. Someone may describe themselves as frugal, ecological, anti-consumerist, or committed to degrowth. An identity can support action, but it can also create a feeling of coherence after the actual practice has weakened.

Research on sustainable consumption repeatedly finds gaps between favorable attitudes and actual behavior. Motivation, norms, policy, infrastructure, and material constraints interact. The method of this book states the distinction more directly:

formulation, understanding, decision, action, and consequence are not the same thing.

Evaluation must therefore return to observable changes. What flow actually declined? What equipment actually lasted longer? What purchase was actually avoided? What constraint was moved toward a collective solution? What company decision or public rule actually changed?

This also protects against purity politics. If a real practice has changed, the person does not need to build a total identity around it. If the identity becomes stronger while the effect disappears, the trajectory needs correction.

Simplify Before You Add

A trajectory can fail because too many changes are opened at once. Every new personal rule can add decisions, information, alternative products, schedules, coordination, and conflict. Even individually sensible actions can become difficult when accumulated into a dense private management system.

“Decision fatigue” is often used as a broad explanation for this kind of problem, but the evidence does not justify treating it as a universal causal law. We do not need that claim. It is enough to observe that repeated decisions, time pressure, friction, complexity, and competing obligations can make a trajectory hard to maintain.

Stabilize before adding. A few significant levers are more useful than an expanding list of micro-obligations. A practice that has become routine frees attention for another. A practice that remains fragile should first be simplified, supported, or dropped rather than surrounded by new demands.

This also prevents the accumulation of low-impact ecological gestures simply because they are easy to add. Chapter 1 began with

significant flows. This final chapter returns to the same hierarchy. When the trajectory becomes heavy, remove secondary actions and protect the ones that actually change something.

Reassess without Turning Life into a Dashboard

There is no universal ideal frequency for reassessment. A monthly review would be arbitrary for some changes and excessive for others; a yearly review might be far too slow for a costly or unstable practice. Frequency should follow the speed, stakes, and reversibility of the change.

The questions can remain stable even when the schedule does not. Which significant flows actually declined? Which practices became easy or routine? Which remain costly? What rebound or substitution appeared? Are basic needs better or worse served? Is the obstacle personal, organizational, market-based, infrastructural, or institutional? Should the practice be maintained, corrected, stopped, or moved to another scale?

Do not combine these answers into a global score. A practice may reduce materials substantially while imposing an excessive time burden. Another may improve accessibility while reducing little. A third may work well but depend on a fragile infrastructure. These are different dimensions and the tradeoffs should remain visible.

A useful reassessment therefore does not produce a “degrowth rating.” It produces a decision about what happens next.

Know When to Stop an Ineffective Action

Consistency does not require keeping every practice once it has begun. An action may deserve to end because it produces almost no effect, because a better option now exists, because its human

cost has become disproportionate, or because its objective was achieved another way.

The ability to stop matters. Without it, a trajectory can become a collection of inherited rules that survive long after the reasoning that created them. A person keeps doing something not because it still works, but because it was once described as virtuous.

Stopping an ineffective action is not necessarily retreat. It may be correction. A pause also does not erase everything that came before it. Real trajectories include changing jobs, illnesses, moves, family changes, financial shocks, new infrastructure, periods of exhaustion, and shifts in what matters most.

The criterion is the observed effect and the cost that is actually being accepted—not loyalty to an idealized image of oneself.

When Individual Action Has Reached Its Limit

The final movement of the book may be the most important. A personal trajectory should not become a private space for compensating indefinitely for the absence of collective change.

If a reasonable practice remains nearly impossible because transportation is missing, repair is unavailable, housing is poorly designed, food access is inadequate, prices exclude the option, or a rule or service blocks it, the problem should no longer be framed only as a personal difficulty. It has become an organizational, market, infrastructural, or political problem.

People occupy several roles: consumers, citizens, workers and professionals, organization members, investors, users of public services, voters, neighbors, and participants in institutions. The progression of this book has shown how movement among those roles can change the available leverage. Reducing a personal flow may reveal a constraint. The constraint may lead to coordination. A group may act on a company or public institution. A rule may

enable infrastructure. Infrastructure may then make the personal practice easier and less costly.

That loop matters more than perfect individual consistency. Someone who has already reduced what they reasonably can but remains dependent on infrastructure does not necessarily need to sacrifice more. They may need to help change the environment.

Proof-actions for This Chapter

Choose one practice you have already adopted and observe whether it still requires a conscious decision at every occurrence. Change one part of the context to make the practice easier by default.

Identify one practice that costs too much time, money, energy, comfort, or coordination. Decide explicitly whether to simplify it, share it, collectivize it, redesign it, or stop it. Do not turn difficulty automatically into a moral judgment.

Examine one recent saving—money, time, energy, travel, or use—and see where the freed resource went. Check whether an important rebound offset the original effect.

Take one major personal constraint and compare it with the infrastructure around you. Write down what would have to change collectively for the lower-consumption practice to become normal rather than exceptional.

Return after a meaningful period to one important flow you previously changed. Check the effect rather than the original intention: reduction, maintenance, rebound, cost, difficulty, or abandonment.

Finally, choose one individual action that has reached its limit and name the collective, corporate, or institutional action that should take over. This proof-action closes the book's progression:

personal degrowth is not an endpoint. It can be an entry point into broader change.

Making It Last Does Not Mean Becoming Perfect

The purpose of a degrowth trajectory is not permanent total coherence. That demand would ignore the complexity of actual infrastructure, relationships, work, health, and changing constraints.

Making it last means something more practical: preserve a few significant changes, make them easier, verify that they still produce the intended effect, keep their costs visible, protect basic needs, correct errors, and move toward collective action when the problem cannot reasonably be carried alone.

A real trajectory can include pauses, abandoned practices, substitutions, reversals, and changes of scale. Its strength lies in the ability to keep learning.

That learning lets us read the whole book as one movement. See the flows. Reduce what can be reduced. Understand what money actually changes. Turn diffuse dissatisfaction into a legible campaign. Build organizational capacity. Act on institutions. Build the missing alternatives and infrastructure. Then stabilize, verify, correct, and begin again when a new limit appears.

Degrowth is therefore neither a catalog of eco-friendly gestures nor a private discipline of deprivation. It becomes a way of progressively changing material flows, dependencies, and leverage through actions concrete enough to test.

Notes and Sources

— Albarracín, Fayaz-Farkhad & Granados Samayoa, Nature Reviews Psychology, 2024: determinants of behavior; limits of information-only interventions and the role of habits among possible intervention targets.

— Singh, Murphy, Maher & Smith, Healthcare, 2024: wide variation in observed habit-formation times; evidence drawn largely from health behaviors and not converted here into a normative degrowth timetable.

— IPCC AR6 WGIII, Chapter 5 and Technical Summary: motivation and capacity to change; the role of infrastructure, institutions, technology, and social norms; limits of isolated individual action.

— von Flüe & Vogt, 2024, and Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences review, 2021: contextual influence of networks and social norms without a mechanically predictable collective tipping point.

— Riefler et al., Ecological Economics, 2024, and Sustainable Production and Consumption review, 2024: heterogeneous gains and losses associated with consumption reduction; well-being effects are not universal.

— Andrew & Pigosso, Journal of Cleaner Production, 2024, and related work on circular models: heterogeneous rebound effects and the need to examine concrete displacement rather than apply one generic coefficient.

CONCLUSION

From Proof-action to Collective Leverage

This book began with a deliberately modest question: how can someone begin living in a way that is more compatible with degrowth without waiting for every political, economic, and infrastructural condition to change first?

The answer was never individual purity. It was to begin with actions concrete enough to test, then follow what those actions reveal.

A proof-action forces intention and effect apart. Keeping a working device longer, repairing instead of replacing, reducing a recurring purchase, testing a different trip, joining a coordinated demand, documenting an institutional procedure, or transferring a critical task inside a group can all be useful when the intended change is explicit and the result can be observed. The purpose is not to prove that a person has become “degrowth.” It is to learn something real: did a material or energy flow fall? Did a purchase disappear or merely move elsewhere? Did a practice become easier to maintain? What cost appeared? What constraint became visible?

That last question often changes everything. A personal action can reduce a personal flow, but it can also reveal why the flow cannot be reduced very far by personal effort alone. Repair may fail because parts or documentation are unavailable. A lower-car routine may collapse because there is no practical transit option. A household may be unable to reduce heating demand because the building itself is inefficient and the resident does not control the

retrofit. A consumer may dislike a firm but remain locked into a market with high switching costs. A group may agree on a goal but lack the organizational capacity to sustain it.

In those cases, the failure of an individual action is not necessarily evidence that the original goal was misguided. It can be evidence about the level at which the problem actually lives.

The book's movement can now be stated plainly: begin where action is possible, verify the result, identify the constraint, and move the problem toward the actor or structure that can actually change it.

From Personal Action to Leverage

The first chapters focused on what can be seen and changed close to daily life. Observe the major flows before moralizing them. Distinguish need, habit, desire, and constraint. Reduce before substituting when reduction is actually possible. Extend useful life, maintain, diagnose, repair, reuse, and share when those mechanisms genuinely avoid new production or unnecessary ownership. Treat money as participation in economic flows rather than as a perfectly legible vote.

These steps matter, but their limits matter too. A purchase does not automatically tell a company why it happened. A non-purchase does not automatically reduce production by an equal amount. A switch of suppliers may change market share without reducing material throughput. A boycott may create financial or reputational pressure, fail completely, or even trigger counter-mobilization. The mechanism matters more than the symbolic category in which the action is placed.

Once a goal requires a specific corporate decision, the action must become more legible. A coordinated campaign needs a target that can actually decide, a demand that can be acted on, channels

that add leverage rather than noise, evidence that distinguishes communication from concession, and a stopping rule. A thousand incoherent messages do not necessarily create more power than a smaller number of real participants making the same verifiable demand through a relevant channel.

A campaign can still be fragile. If one person holds every password, contact, skill, and decision, mobilization has not yet become durable capacity. Collective force begins when responsibilities are visible, critical skills can be transmitted, decisions fit the stakes involved, memory survives turnover, participation costs are recognized, and the group can continue without requiring permanent heroic effort from a few people.

This organized capacity can then act on institutions. Here again, access is not power. A meeting is not a decision. A public comment is not a rule change. A petition is not a vote. An acknowledgment is not implementation. The relevant questions are: which authority has jurisdiction, which procedure creates a usable record, what decision is actually at stake, what political or administrative leverage exists, and what changed at the end?

Infrastructure completes the shift in scale. A less materially intensive way of living cannot depend indefinitely on exceptional personal effort. Repair networks, shared services, transit, housing quality, energy systems, food access, public procurement, libraries, cooperatives, local institutions, and other enabling structures can make lower-throughput practices easier and more widely accessible. None of those labels validates itself; each has to be judged by what it actually makes possible.

The functional questions remain: what did the alternative replace? What new resources did it require? Who can use it? Did ownership fall? Did useful life increase? Did total travel, energy use, or purchasing actually decline? Were social or environmental costs displaced somewhere else?

Duration Requires Correction, Not Purity

The final chapter returned to the question of duration because a good action that cannot be sustained is still incomplete. Lasting change does not mean maintaining maximum effort forever. It means making useful practices easier, more routine, better supported by context, and less dependent on repeated acts of will.

That also means allowing correction. A practice can be simplified. A burden can be shared. A campaign can stop. A tactic can be abandoned when it no longer produces enough effect. A personal rule can be dropped when its human cost becomes disproportionate. A collective can reduce its workload instead of demanding that someone else absorb it. Persistence is not the same as rigidity.

Degrowth cannot be reduced to generalized deprivation because people do not begin from the same place. Income, housing, mobility, health, time, infrastructure, and current consumption all differ. Some people have substantial room to reduce excessive consumption without threatening the conditions of a decent life. Others still need greater access to housing, heating, food, mobility, care, equipment, or public services.

A uniform list of reductions would erase that distinction. The relevant question is not simply how much someone has reduced, but which flows are excessive, which needs remain unmet, what room for action actually exists, and what costs the change imposes.

Social justice is therefore not an optional moral supplement added after the ecological reasoning. It affects whether the transition can work at all. A technically efficient alternative that is financially inaccessible, geographically unavailable, incompatible with disability, or dependent on unpaid and invisible labor may reduce one dimension while failing badly on another. Those costs must remain visible.

Rebound requires the same after-the-fact attention. Saving money, time, fuel, material, or equipment can produce a real reduction, while the freed resource may also be used in ways that recreate part of the original impact. No universal rebound coefficient can settle this in advance. Look afterward at total use, total purchasing, total travel, or total demand.

This is also why the book has resisted a single score from beginning to end. Carbon, energy, materials, money, time, health, accessibility, working conditions, justice, and collective capacity are not interchangeable units. A decision may improve one dimension while worsening another. One number would hide precisely the tradeoffs that require judgment.

Nor can identity replace verification. Calling oneself sustainable, anti-consumerist, ecological, or committed to degrowth does not establish what actually changed. Conversely, someone may reduce important flows, help build a repair network, organize transit riders, or change an institutional rule without adopting any total identity around those acts. The relevant chain remains formulation, decision, action, consequence, correction.

Individual and Systemic Change Are Not Rivals

The book has repeatedly moved between personal action and structural change because the opposition between them is often false. Behavior occurs inside systems, but systems are also maintained, contested, and changed through the actions of people, organizations, firms, and institutions.

The individual-versus-system debate is too abstract to guide action. For each problem, ask where the lever actually sits.

A personal action is appropriate when a personal decision can actually change the flow. Economic pressure becomes relevant when a company or market actor controls the decision.

Organization becomes necessary when action requires coordination, memory, resources, or duration. Institutional action becomes necessary when a rule, budget, right, public service, or infrastructure exceeds the power of the previous actors. Building an alternative becomes decisive when the desired practice cannot become normal without new material or organizational conditions.

These levels can form a loop. A person reduces a flow and discovers a constraint. The constraint becomes a common problem. A group coordinates around it. The group pressures a company or public body. A rule or investment changes. New infrastructure becomes possible. That infrastructure makes the lower-throughput practice easier for many more people. The result is then tested again, because the new arrangement can create its own costs, exclusions, or rebounds.

Nothing in that sequence is guaranteed. A campaign can fail. An institution can refuse. An alternative can underperform. A coalition can fragment. A regulation can be announced and poorly implemented. Failure is not automatically virtuous simply because it occurred in a worthy cause. But when the action is sufficiently precise and its result is observed, failure can still produce information: the target was wrong, the leverage was weak, the cost was too high, the infrastructure was missing, or the theory of change did not fit reality.

Proof-action remains useful at every scale because its function does not depend on household behavior. A documented corporate demand, a transferred organizational role, a formal public comment, a tested shared service, a change in procurement, or a rule whose implementation can be checked can all make a claim answerable to reality.

The Practical Loop

The progression of the book can now be reduced to a compact sequence without turning it into a rigid ladder.

See the important flows. Distinguish what is chosen from what is constrained. Reduce or delay where doing so actually changes the flow. Extend, repair, reuse, or share where those mechanisms substitute for new production or unnecessary ownership. Understand what money can and cannot signal. When a specific corporate decision is at stake, make the demand legible and coordinate pressure. When coordination must last, build organizational capacity. When the problem lies in public authority, identify jurisdiction, procedure, leverage, and implementation. When the practice itself is blocked by missing conditions, build or demand the infrastructure that makes it possible. Then stabilize, reassess, and move the problem again when a new limit appears.

Nor is the sequence a moral ranking. A person does not need to pass through every stage to qualify for an identity. Someone may begin with a repair, join an existing transit campaign immediately, work inside a public agency, build a cooperative service, or already belong to an organization capable of changing rules. The sequence describes functions, not merit.

Nor does every problem need to become a movement. Some flows can simply be reduced. Some purchases can simply be avoided. Some objects can simply be kept longer. The point of changing scale is not to politicize every private choice. It is to stop asking private choices to solve problems they cannot solve.

Structural arguments can also become an excuse to ignore changes that are already possible. Waiting for a perfect system can preserve unnecessary consumption just as surely as pretending personal virtue can redesign the system. Act where the lever exists; move when it does not.

What Remains of the Individual Act

Quite a lot remains. A person can directly reduce some flows, keep equipment in use longer, stop a recurring purchase, change a routine, support an alternative, withdraw demand from a firm, document a constraint, join a formal process, or help an organization become less dependent on one person. Those acts are not trivial merely because they are incomplete.

What they cannot legitimately be asked to do is substitute for everything else. A household cannot build a transit network alone. A consumer cannot create a competitive market by willpower. A tenant cannot necessarily retrofit a building. An isolated activist cannot sustain an organization indefinitely. A citizen cannot make an agency exercise a power it does not have.

Recognizing those limits does not diminish action. It makes action more precise.

What Remains of Collective Action

Collective action turns dispersed preferences into capacity. It can divide work, preserve memory, pool resources, make a demand legible, create economic or political cost, build alternatives, and connect actors who would otherwise remain isolated.

But collective action must also be judged by what it does. A group with many members may be fragile. A coalition may gain visibility while losing clarity. A campaign may exhaust its participants without changing the target. A legally formal organization may lack practical capacity. Internal strength and external success are separate dimensions.

A durable organization therefore needs the ability to learn: to transfer functions, distribute meaningful participation, correct decisions, accept bounded disagreement, protect people from

permanent overload, and stop or redesign tactics that no longer work.

What Remains of Institutional Politics

Institutions can alter rules, budgets, procurement, rights, standards, infrastructure, and public services at scales unavailable to private consumers or informal groups. That gives them a distinctive role in a degrowth trajectory.

But institutional politics is not magic either. Jurisdiction is fragmented. Procedures have calendars and scope. A formal opportunity to participate does not guarantee influence. A vote does not guarantee implementation. An announced program may be underfunded or inaccessible. Institutional action therefore requires the same discipline used elsewhere in this book: identify the actual decision, use the channel that can affect it, preserve a record, and follow the outcome beyond the announcement.

The levels are therefore complementary rather than competing. Personal practice can reveal where the system constrains action. Collective organization can transform that discovery into leverage. Institutional change can alter the conditions. Infrastructure can make a different practice normal. The changed practice can then reveal the next problem.

A small proof-action can begin that loop. Delay one significant purchase. Repair one object. Test one shared service. Write one precise corporate demand. Transfer one critical organizational task. Submit one substantive public comment. Defend one transit route. Change one procurement rule. Build one local repair or reuse connection. None of these proves a complete transition. Each can, however, be observed, corrected, connected to other actions, and converted into greater capacity.

Degrowth in practice is therefore less a doctrine to recite than a method for progressively changing flows and dependencies. Reduce what is excessive. Protect what is necessary for a decent life. Keep costs and constraints visible. Refuse to hide incompatible dimensions inside a single score. Test what actions actually do. When a limit is personal, improve the practice. When the limit is organizational, organize. When it is economic, find the decision and the leverage. When it is institutional, identify the competent authority and procedure. When it is infrastructural, change the conditions that make the unwanted flow necessary.

Then look again.

The reader's first proof-action does not need to be spectacular. It needs to be real: choose one significant flow, change something that can be checked, observe what became easier or harder, and identify what the result says about the next level of action.

The final question is the same question the entire book has been preparing:

If this action has reached its limit, which actor, organization, infrastructure, market condition, or rule now has to change?

At that point, the individual act stops being an end in itself and becomes the beginning of collective leverage.

Notes and Sources

— This conclusion synthesizes mechanisms established in the preceding chapters and introduces no new evidentiary claim.

General Bibliography

U.S. Public Institutions, Law, and Data

— U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Household Carbon Footprint Calculator; Assumptions and References for the Household Carbon Footprint Calculator. Used to orient household observation toward home energy, transportation, and waste without treating the tool as a complete consumption-based footprint.

— U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Sustainable Materials Management; reuse, source reduction, and deconstruction resources. Used for life-cycle materials framing and for repair/reuse infrastructure in Chapters 1 and 7.

— U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). Residential Energy Consumption Survey (RECS), including 2024 housing-characteristics releases and methodological documentation. The manuscript does not treat unreleased 2024 consumption-and-expenditure tables as available data.

— U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service (USDA ERS). Food Loss and Waste resources. Used as a U.S. reference point for household and system-level food-loss questions.

— U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Local procurement and local/regional food-system resources for child nutrition and community food systems; Rural Development cooperative-program resources. Used in Chapter 7 as bounded examples of institutional procurement, food-system infrastructure, and cooperative organization.

— U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). Weatherization Assistance Program, Program Year 2026 materials. Used as one bounded illustration of building-level energy infrastructure and retrofit support, not as a universal entitlement or a complete housing policy.

— Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Shared-mobility resources. Used to distinguish shared mobility from guaranteed reduction in car ownership or travel.

— U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). Pedestrian, bicycle, transit-access, and multimodal transportation resources. Used for the broader infrastructure conditions that shape mobility choices.

— USAGov. Consumer-complaint guidance; state consumer-protection offices; government-agency complaints; elected-official contact resources; state and local government/election resources. Used in Chapters 4 and 6 to identify competent channels without inventing one national procedure for every dispute or public decision.

— Federal Trade Commission (FTC). Nixing the Fix: An FTC Report to Congress on Repair Restrictions; Magnuson–Moss warranty guidance and anti-tying enforcement materials; Consumer Advice and ReportFraud; Guide to Antitrust Laws, “Group Boycotts.” Used in Chapters 2 and 4 with the scopes stated in the text.

— U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission. 2023 Merger Guidelines. Used narrowly in Chapter 3 for customer substitution, switching costs, network effects, barriers to competition, and routes to market; not as a general consumer-rights framework.

— New York General Business Law § 399-nn. Digital Fair Repair Act provisions for covered digital electronic equipment, subject to statutory scope and exclusions.

— Minnesota Statutes § 325E.72. Digital Fair Repair provisions for covered equipment, subject to statutory scope and exclusions.

— NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware Co., 458 U.S. 886 (1982). Used for the First Amendment protection of peaceful political boycott, advocacy, assembly, and related expression, without implying blanket immunity for independently unlawful conduct.

— Regulations.gov. Guidance on effective participation in the federal regulatory process. Used for substantive notice-and-comment participation and the distinction between meaningful input and mere message volume.

— Office of the Federal Register. The Rulemaking Process. Used for federal notice-and-comment and petitions for rulemaking.

— U.S. Senate. Lobbying Disclosure Act guidance and disclosure materials. Used only to distinguish regulated federal lobbying activity from ordinary citizen contact.

— Council on Environmental Quality / federal NEPA materials. Used only where federal environmental-review processes actually apply; no claim is made that every local or state project follows the same procedure.

Research on Degrowth, Consumption, Behavior, and Collective Action

— Engler et al. Systematic review of degrowth research. Ecological Economics, 2024. Used for the heterogeneity of the field and the recurring focus on reductions in resource and energy throughput.

— Kallis. Work on degrowth as a critique of the growth imperative and its ecological consequences, 2023.

— Savin & van den Bergh. Review of empirical evidence and degrowth policy proposals. Ecological Economics, 2024. Used as a safeguard against overstating the empirical maturity of proposals.

— Toikka et al. Mapping of scientific literature critical of growth and post-growth approaches. Ecological Economics, 2026.

— IPCC. Sixth Assessment Report, Working Group III, Chapter 5, Technical Summary, and Summary for Policymakers. Used for demand-side change, infrastructure, institutions, norms, equity, and capacity to act.

— Jones, C. M. & Kammen, D. M. "Quantifying Carbon Footprint Reduction Opportunities for U.S. Households and Communities." Environmental Science & Technology, 2011, together with later U.S. household-footprint literature used only to support variation across households and places.

— King, B. "A Political Mediation Model of Corporate Response to Social Movement Activism." Administrative Science Quarterly, 2008.

— Tomlin, K. "Assessing the Efficacy of Consumer Boycotts of U.S. Target Firms." Southern Economic Journal, 2019.

— Liaukonyte et al. "Spilling the Beans on Political Consumerism." Marketing Science, 2022. Used for the Goya boycott/buycott case and counter-mobilization mechanism.

— McDonnell, M.-H. & King, B. "Keeping up Appearances: Reputational Threat and Impression Management after Social Movement Boycotts." Administrative Science Quarterly, 2013.

— "Corporate Social Responsibility and Consumer Choice: Lessons from the Milk Boycott." Management Science, online publication 2024. Retained as an international mechanism example rather than a U.S. institutional analogue.

— Albarracín, D., Fayaz-Farkhad, B. & Granados Samayoa, J. "Determinants of behaviour and their efficacy as targets of behavioural change interventions." Nature Reviews Psychology, 2024.

— Singh, B., Murphy, A., Maher, C. & Smith, A. "Time to Form a Habit: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Health Behaviour Habit Formation and Its Determinants." Healthcare, 2024.

— von Flüe & Vogt. "Integrating social learning and network formation for social tipping towards a sustainable future." Current Opinion in Psychology, 2024.

— "Influences of social norms on climate change-related behaviors." Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences, 2021.

— Riefler, P., Baar, A., Büttner, O. & Flachs, S. "What to gain, what to lose? A taxonomy of individual-level gains and losses associated with consumption reduction." Ecological Economics, 2024.

— "Reducing without losing: Reduced consumption and its implications for well-being." Sustainable Production and Consumption, 2024.

— Andrew & Pigosso. "Multidisciplinary perspectives on rebound effects in sustainability: A systematic review." Journal of Cleaner Production, 2024.

Organization and Social Movements

— Kriesi. Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements. Used for variation in mobilizing structures, organizations, networks, and support systems.

— Rich, 2022. Work on organizational structure and repertoires of action, including hybrid forms.

— Tesdahl & Speer, 2015. Work on internal distribution of contacts and opportunities to act and its relationship to sustained participation.

— Bunnage, 2014. Work on the maintenance of activist engagement across individual, relational, and organizational factors.

— Sutherland, N., Land, C. & Böhm, S., 2014. Work on leadership functions in organizations without permanent formal leaders.

— Zakocs & Guckenburg; Van Dyke; Brooker & Meyer; and related social-network research. Used for organizational capacity, coalition formation, trust, tolerable disagreement, and cooperation.

— Hess, 2026. Work on burnout and disengagement in social-change organizations, used cautiously and without converting correlational or contextual findings into universal prescriptions.

Bibliographic Note

The chapter notes state the function for which each source is used. This general bibliography groups the principal references actually retained in the U.S. adaptation. French institutional sources removed during adaptation are not reproduced here merely for historical completeness. Where the authoritative manuscript itself provides only an abbreviated bibliographic identification, no missing publication detail has been invented.

ABOUT NOOSOPHIE

Noosophie begins from a simple distinction: reality does not depend on what we believe about it. An idea can be persuasive and still be false. A tradition can contain useful insights and errors. A scientific theory can be exceptionally strong within its domain and still remain limited. Our understanding changes; what we are trying to understand is not reducible to our representations of it.

In the Noosophical project, “Noosophie” names truth or the structure of reality independently of how human beings understand it. We do not claim to possess that truth in full. The texts, concepts, institutions, and people working under this name offer only partial, contestable, and revisable understandings.

Noosophical work therefore means searching more seriously: distinguishing what is known from what is assumed, comparing explanations, examining contradictions, looking at available evidence, acknowledging uncertainty, and correcting an idea when it does not withstand scrutiny.

Connecting fields does not mean blending everything together. Noosophie does not assume that all opinions are equal or that every tradition necessarily contains part of the truth. Integration can also require preserving a difference, contradiction, or uncertainty when it cannot honestly be resolved.

When an idea can be tested in practice, consequences become part of the inquiry. We understand, act at the relevant level, observe what reality returns, correct, and reintegrate. A beautiful theory is not treated as sufficient proof of its value.

Readers do not need to call themselves Noosophists to use these works. They may criticize them, verify them, reject some conclusions, and retain others.

HOW THIS BOOK WAS PRODUCED

This book was developed in successive stages rather than generated automatically as a complete text. Its subject, goals, and general orientations were first defined humanly. Noosophe AI then helped explore the subject, research and compare sources, build possible structures, and surface arguments, objections, and areas of uncertainty.

The manuscript was developed progressively, chapter by chapter. Proposals were reviewed, discussed, corrected, or rejected when they did not fit the project, relied on insufficient evidence, or simplified the subject too aggressively. Distinct phases of research, drafting, critique, coherence checking, and assembly were used where needed.

Artificial intelligence is not treated here as a source of authority. It functions as an active tool for research, formulation, comparison, and testing. Its proposals can be wrong and remain revisable.

The published version results from that iterative work, successive corrections, and final human validation. The method is intended to use the capabilities of AI without transferring to it decisions about the book’s purpose, value choices, or publication.

ABOUT HIERONYMUS ANONYMUS

Hieronymus Anonymus is the human initiator of the Integrative Noosophy project. His work focuses on connecting fields of knowledge and practice that are usually treated separately, and on experimenting with new forms of collaboration between humans and artificial intelligence. He participates in the design, discussion, revision, and validation of works published by Éditions Noosophie.

DISCOVER, BECOME, AND SUPPORT

DISCOVER NOOSOPHIE

Explore the project, its works, and its current public resources.

https://www.noosophie.fr/

BECOME A NOOSOPHIST

Learn how to participate more directly in the movement and its developing structures.

https://www.noosophie.fr/devenir-noosophiste

SUPPORT NOOSOPHIE

This book is available free of charge. If you want to help Éditions Noosophie keep publishing free works and support the movement's research and activities, you can contribute any amount you choose.

https://www.noosophie.fr/soutenir

FINAL RIGHTS AND CONTACT

DEGROWTH
A PRACTICAL GUIDE

Degrowth is often presented as a grand political program or a distant civilizational shift. This book begins elsewhere: with the levers already within reach. It follows the path from everyday habits to organized action, asking what our purchases, repairs, savings, votes, and collective structures actually change. Rather than preaching purity or waiting for perfect conditions, it shows how to reduce harmful dependencies, build practical alternatives, and increase collective leverage over the systems that shape daily life.

Clear, concrete, and strategic, this is a guide for those who want ecological change to become materially possible.

Noosophie IA
under the direction of Hieronymus Anonymus
Éditions Noosophie
www.noosophie.fr