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Tools for degrowth? Ivan Illich's critique of technology revisited

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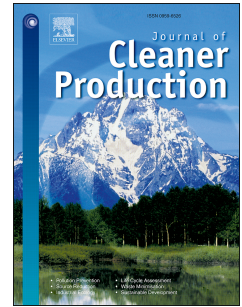
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## **Tools for degrowth? Ivan Illich's Critique of technology revisited**

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### ABSTRACT

**This article revisits Ivan Illich's call for limiting the use of tools and elaborates its implications for degrowth. Illich analyzed growth not as an economic ideology, but - more radically - as the result of a historically unique mindset that turns tools from means into ends. Unlike many advocates of degrowth, he did not propose alternative modes of resource consumption and distribution, but instead tried to defend vernacular subsistence and conviviality against the industrialized satisfaction of needs. Any meaningful limit to growth, Illich insisted, has to be rooted in the defense of a sphere beyond production and consumption. Yet, as he himself realized, in an advanced technological society this distinction between autonomous action and heteronomous need satisfaction is blurred. Modern tools - and especially the computer - not only paralyze innate capabilities, but shape self-perception and subjectivities so as to increase dependencies on technological systems. On the basis of Illich's works, this article will argue first that degrowth requires limits to material as well as immaterial technologies, including political management and professional services; second that these limits have to be based on the appropriate balance between vernacular subsistence and engineered instrumentalities; and, third, that political decisions demand the cultivation of a critical awareness of the symbolic power of modern technologies.**

**Keywords: degrowth, technology, Ivan Illich, conviviality, disembodiment,**

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