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FASHIONING THE FUTURE OF THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY: EXPLORING DEGROWTH THROUGH PATAGONIA

Marta Rey-García

marta.reyg@udc.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9453-8551>

Full professor of Marketing

University of A Coruña, Spain

Vanessa Mato-Santiso

vanessa.mato@udc.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8158-0179>

Assistant lecturer of Business organization

University of A Coruña, Spain

Alejandro Fernández Marzoa

alejandro.fmarzoa@udc.es

Student

University of A Coruña, Spain

Abstract:

The Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development signified a crucial shift towards sustainable and green growth. In this context, the degrowth movement opposes the current growth paradigm, being critical of the existence of unrelenting growth on a finite planet. Contrary to the profit-centric norm in business, the degrowth approach presents an alternative emphasizing environmental and social purposes.

The objective of this case study is to explore the links between business activities according to Porter's value chain model and degrowth related principles. To that end, the example of Patagonia is analyzed, a Californian outdoor apparel retailer that has been doing business differently for 50 years (recognized by its status as a B Corp). In this case study, degrowth is operationalized in order to assess its potential contribution in the transition towards more sustainable business models, with a special focus on marketing, corporate culture and values, and stakeholder engagement.

Keywords: *Degrowth; Sustainability; Fashion industry; Patagonia (company); Value Chain.*

MODELANDO EL FUTURO DE LA INDUSTRIA TEXTIL: EXPLORANDO EL DECRECIMIENTO A TRAVÉS DE PATAGONIA.

Resumen:

La Conferencia de la ONU Rio+20 sobre el Desarrollo Sostenible marcó un cambio crucial hacia un crecimiento sostenible y verde. En este contexto, el decrecimiento se opone al paradigma de crecimiento actual, siendo crítico con la existencia de crecimiento ilimitado en un planeta finito. En contra de la norma empresarial centrada en las ganancias, el decrecimiento presenta una alternativa que prioriza el ámbito social y medioambiental.

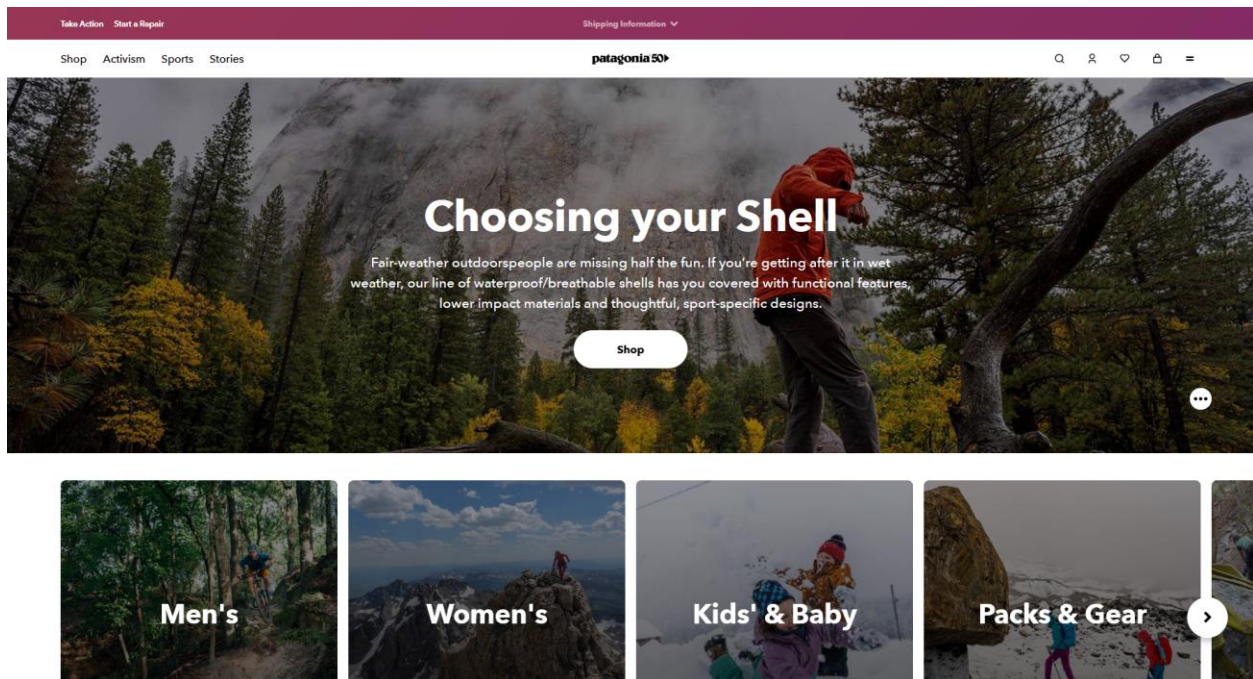
El objetivo de este estudio de caso consiste en explorar los vínculos entre las actividades empresariales según la cadena de valor de Porter y los principios del decrecimiento. Para ello, se analiza el ejemplo de Patagonia, una compañía de ropa californiana que lleva haciendo negocios de manera diferente desde hace 50 años (con reconocimiento como B Corp). En este estudio de caso, el decrecimiento se operacionaliza para evaluar su contribución potencial en la transición hacia modelos empresariales más sostenibles, con énfasis en el marketing, la cultura y los valores corporativos, y la implicación de los *stakeholders*.

Palabras clave: *Decrecimiento; Sostenibilidad; Industria de la moda; Patagonia (compañía); Cadena de Valor.*

1. Introduction

Yvon Chouinard established Patagonia, Inc. (henceforth referred to as Patagonia), in California in 1973 (Chouinard, 2016). The company (see Figure 1) has been a B Corp since December 2011, having received widespread recognition for its dedication to ethical business practices and environmental sustainability. In 2022, the B Corporation organization named the company "Best for the World" for its achievements in the environmental and community impact categories (B Corporation, 2022a; 2022b).

Figure 1. Home screen of Patagonia's official website.



Source: [<https://eu.patagonia.com/es/home/>], as of 21/11/2023.

Initially established as part of the Chouinard Equipment Company, the outdoor apparel retailer has become a large company involved in international operations. As a global company, Patagonia owns and operates offices in the United States, Japan, South Korea, Chile, Argentina, the Netherlands and Australia. These offices help coordinate the two distribution centers the company operates, as well as its more than 70 stores worldwide (Patagonia, 2023 -m).

Patagonia's status as privately-owned firm, retained by the Chouinard family, creates an environment where the company's mission may be guided by the values of its major stakeholders rather than by profits, as it needs not to comply to outside investors' expectations. Chouinard (2016, p.14) reflects the challenging nature inherent to Patagonia as a brand, representing a new style of responsible business set to displace "the accepted model of capitalism that necessitates endless growth and deserves the blame for the destruction of nature". Ultimately, this company does de-emphasize profit maximization in favor of benefiting the environment and the community. Furthermore, in a recent interview with McKinsey, the founder of the company stated his concerns about the limits to Patagonia's growth, emphasizing the need to make growth intentional, prioritizing longevity over expansion (Hansen, 2023). Overall, Patagonia's market orientation has as its main motivator the acquisition of financial stability to provide for its environmental objectives, declaring as its mission statement that "[They] are in business to save our home planet" (Farra, 2021).

In terms of organizational values, those listed by the firm (quality, integrity, environmentalism, justice, and not being bound by convention) are upheld by the whole organization, supported by the work of Patagonia's Director of Philosophy through "philosophy classes", in which the way of conducting business is questioned and discussed by members of different departments (Farra, 2021). Additionally, through its platform, Patagonia Action Works, the company funds organizations that commit to long-term change, addressing the root causes of current problems (Patagonia Action Works, 2023 -a). Most notably,

the firm has pledged, since 1985, 1% of sales to domestic and international grassroots environmental groups, cofounding in 2002 the non-profit 1% for the Planet to encourage other businesses to do the same (Patagonia, 2023 -a).

The concept degrowth, initially coined *décroissance*, is reported to have been used for the first time in 1972 by French intellectual André Gorz (1923-2007), in the context of a debate regarding the work of Meadows et al. (1972) in *Limits to Growth*. This embryonic conception of the term degrowth does not align with its current conception, but rather is a synonym to “productive shrinking” (Gorz, 1982) and “contraction of economic and market activity” (Gorz, 1983). In the year 2008, the first International Conference on Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity took place, establishing degrowth as a proper academic study object, and marking the first official use of the term in the English language (Demaria et al., 2013; Kallis et al., 2015). The Paris Declaration stemmed from this gathering, providing the earliest extensive definition of degrowth as a concept: *a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society, calling for a paradigm shift from the general and unlimited pursuit of economic growth to a concept of ‘right-sizing’ the global and national economies* (Flipo & Schneider, 2008).

Consequently, Patagonia presents itself as an appropriate case study for evaluating degrowth ideas taken from the literature, and of utmost relevance within the fashion industry. This idea of the firm as an extreme instance is consistent with the logic for developing a single-case design presented by Yin (1994, p. 47). The present case study adheres to a linear-analytic structure, following a sequence of subtopics through which the convergence of degrowth principles and fashion companies are explored (Yin, 1994).

Concerning data collection for the present case study, various secondary sources were used to enable the discussion of the topic at hand. Data sources used included multiple documentary evidence, such as reports of the organization, internal documents, Patagonia’s corporate website, press releases, statements made by Yvon Chouinard, and peer-reviewed papers that analyze the company. Regarding data analysis, the computer program Excel was utilized to gather and categorize data, labelling specific excerpts and sources of information, and classifying the sources reviewed. Collected information was then collated in order to address the key points and information needs of the case study.

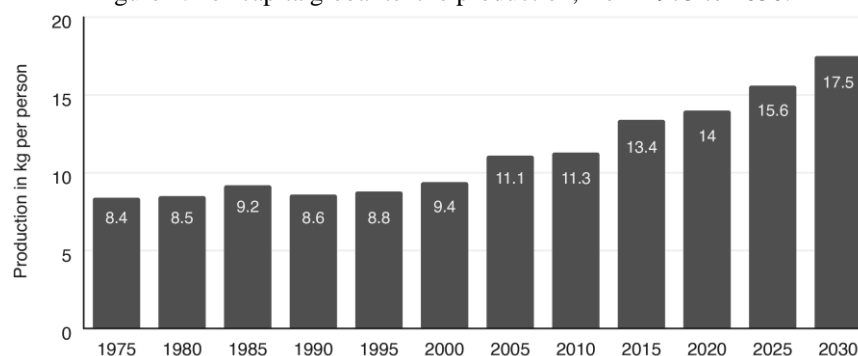
2. Degrowing fashion: The case of Patagonia

2.1. Contextualization of the case study

Contextualizing the case study, the fashion industry carries a significant weight in the world’s economy, standing as a substantial driver of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with an estimated revenue of 2.5 trillion dollars, and employing over 300 million people worldwide (McKinsey & Company, 2019).

As a result of population growth, as well as the improvement of living standards and global incomes, global per-capita textile production has burgeoned from 9.4 kg to 14 kg per year from the year 2000 to 2020, being projected to reach over 17 kg by 2030, as depicted in Figure 1. This extreme growth of the sector, based on the ever-increasing consumption and production of textile goods, has been enabled by the advent of fast fashion; a business model based on impulse buying and consumption ad nauseam, imbuing a perception of dire necessity when purchasing (Niinimäki, 2018). The development in this direction is illustrated by the global success of Shein, an ultra-fast online retailer headquartered in China with annual revenue estimated at 22.7 billion American dollars (Olcott & Massoudi, 2023).

Figure 2. Per-capita global textile production, from 1975 to 2030.



Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on the data extracted from Statista Research Department (2023).

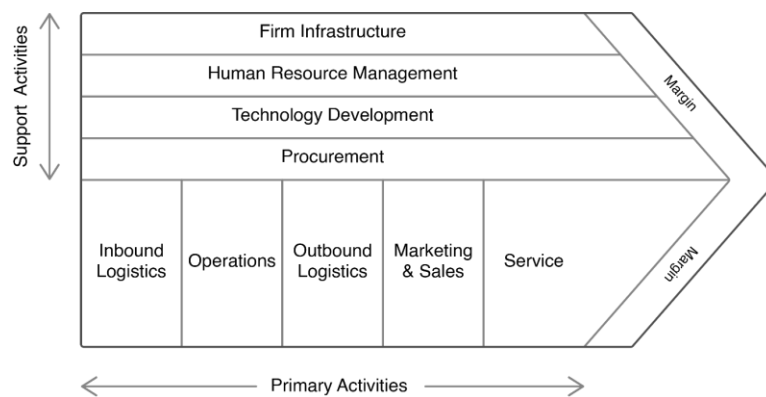
Throughout the past decade, the textile industry has been the object of vast criticism because of the absence of sound measures to address its environmental and social impacts; yielding extremely harmful impacts, generating vast amounts of waste, and creating “a social and environmental sustainability crisis” (Bick et al., 2018; Brydges, 2021). This paradigm is epitomized in the so-called economic linear model, defined by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) as consisting of three key stages, “take” (the obtention of raw materials), “make” (the manufacturing of garments), and “dispose” (the usage and posterior disposal of garments).

At the same time, economic growth has set itself as the ethos of contemporary society, becoming the panacea for environmental, social, and economic problems, a rapid means towards general prosperity. Therefore, a growth paradigm has been established, whereby economic growth is conceived as inherently good, necessary, and imperative (Dale, 2012; Purdey, 2012). At the same time, economic growth has set itself as the ethos of contemporary society, becoming the panacea for environmental, social, and economic problems, a rapid means towards general prosperity. Therefore, a growth paradigm has been established, whereby economic growth is conceived as inherently good, necessary, and imperative (Dale, 2012; Purdey, 2012). The development of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was a key factor in defining, measuring and standardizing economic growth (Ashley, 1983; Coyle, 2014). As highlighted by Fioramonti (2017), the embracement of GDP shifted the concept of economy, centering the aspiration of limitless economic growth as an object of policy. Academic research currently contests the feasibility of unlimited economic growth on a limited planet given the lack of evidence that it can be effectively and rapidly unlinked from its environmental, social, and economic impacts (Daly, 2019; Jackson, 2017; Kallis, 2015; Kurz, 2019; Niccolucci et al., 2007; Raworth, 2017).

2.2. Porter's Value Chain model applied to the case of Patagonia

The case study will be configured following Porter's Value Chain model, so as to approach the main points of the case study in an orderly manner, as well as to stay relevant in a business context. This model (depicted in Figure 2), as defined by Porter (1985, p.33), “disaggregates a firm into its strategically relevant activities”, reflecting the company's strategy and the underlying economics to the activities themselves.

Figure 31. Porter's Value Chain model.



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data extracted from Porter (1985).

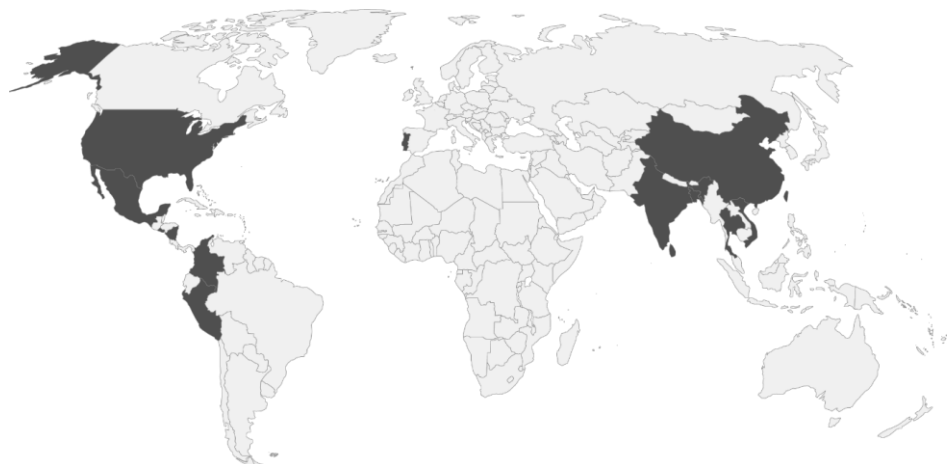
2.2.1. (Inbound and Outbound) Logistics and Operations

This dimension is divided into three separate activities in Porter's Value Chain, namely, inbound logistics, outbound logistics, and operations; which covering the reception, storage and dissemination of inputs to the product, the transformation of inputs into the final product, and the storage, collection and distribution of this final product to buyers (Porter, 1985). However, this case study studies them jointly since the application of degrowth principles regarding these company functions could be seen as analogous.

In his book ‘Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman’, Chouinard addressed the need for Patagonia to transition towards local production and a more locally based economy (Chouinard, 2016, p. X), showing his consonance with the notion that a globalized economy holds very negative repercussions both socially and environmentally. Analyzing Patagonia's supplier locations,

depicted in dark gray in Figure 4, one can observe that the geographical distribution of its supply chain is far from complying with either a smaller or more localized scale.

Figure 42. Geographical distribution of Patagonia's finished goods suppliers.



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data extracted from Patagonia (2023 -q)

This global expansion does not keep with the necessity of reducing the environmental impacts derived from economic activity in order to achieve sustainable levels. Accordingly, Hankammer et al. (2021) emphasize the key role limits and reductions in business scale have in achieving a future of low material use and lower impacts. In the case of Patagonia's outbound logistics and operations, the firm has set a plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2025, using the reduction in absolute energy consumption as a main action of the strategy, among other energy and material-use related measures (Patagonia, 2023 -m, 2023 -q).

However, as of 2020, Patagonia's greenhouse gas footprint has only increased, as reflected on the data gathered in Table 1, being only reduced in 2021 because of the operational shutdowns due to COVID (Patagonia, 2022a). Reportedly, the company is increasing the use of drop-shipping as a way to minimize the need for shipments, which could partially reduce the scale of its supply chain (Patagonia, 2023 -m).

Table 1. Patagonia's greenhouse gas emissions.

	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20	FY 21
Scope 1	1,082	1,041	1,442	1,085
Scope 2	3,027	4,114	3,744	2,607
Scope 3	162,948	223,285	219,379	98,966
TOTAL	167,057	228,440	224,565	102,658

The labels for the different columns (FY18, FY19, FY20, FY21), all refer to their respective financial years. The row labels follow the denominations commonly used to categorize a company's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In this way, "Scope 1" includes direct emissions from sources owned or controlled by the company; "Scope 2" accounts for emissions that are indirectly attributable to the generation of purchased energy; and "Scope 3" comprises all other indirect emissions that take place in a company's value chain (Greenhouse Gas Protocol, 2023).

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the data extracted from Patagonia (2022a).

2.2.2. Marketing and Sales

According to Porter's Value Chain, marketing and sales provide the means by which customers can acquire the product, as well as the activities that induce them to do so (Porter, 1985). Overall, Patagonia conducts a lifestyle branding approach that is aligned with the need to create a community;

understanding, rather than targeting its consumers, and fitting their story within the firm's ethos, rather than manufacturing a story for the audience to fit into.

Patagonia has developed its own approach and marketing vision through its online channels, none of which has product selling as its sole purpose. The corporate website, for example, brings together the firm's online shop for gear and apparel, as well as its activism initiatives and stories, being accessible through the Shop, Sports, Activism and Stories buttons, respectively, displayed in the website's header (Patagonia, 2023 -f). The last two are especially relevant in this regard, as they provide a source of information, activism, interaction and conversation between the company and its community.

Regarding the overconsumption, the firm has a dedicated section in its website containing a series of articles dealing with the topic of responsible consumption, under the title "The more you know, the less you need" (Patagonia, 2023 -o). The most representative anti-consumption advertising campaign run by the company (see Figure 5), which featured the phrase "Don't buy this jacket" on The New York Times during Black Friday in 2011, emphasized that "the jacket comes with an environmental cost higher than its price", incited readers to rethink their purchasing habits.

Figure 53. Patagonia's "Don't buy this jacket" advertisement.



DON'T BUY THIS JACKET

It's Black Friday, the day in the year retail turns from red to black and starts to make real money. But Black Friday, and the culture of consumption it reflects, puts the economy of natural systems that support all life firmly in the red. We're now using the resources of one-and-a-half planets on our one and only planet.

Because Patagonia wants to be in business for a good long time – and leave a world inhabitable for our kids – we want to do the opposite of every other business today. We ask you to buy less and to reflect before you spend a dime on this jacket or anything else.

Environmental bankruptcy, as with corporate bankruptcy, can happen very slowly, then all of a sudden. This is what we face unless we slow down, then reverse the damage. We're running short on fresh water, topsoil, fisheries, wetlands – all our planet's natural systems and resources that support business, and life, including our own.

The environmental cost of everything we make is astonishing. Consider the R2[®] Jacket shown, one of our best sellers. To make it required 135 liters of

COMMON THREADS INITIATIVE

REDUCE
WE make useful gear that lasts a long time
YOU don't buy what you don't need

REPAIR
WE help you repair your Patagonia gear
YOU pledge to fix what's broken

REUSE
WE help find a home for Patagonia gear you no longer need
YOU sell or pass it on*

RECYCLE
WE will take back your Patagonia gear that is worn out
YOU pledge to keep your stuff out of the landfill and incinerator

REIMAGINE
TOGETHER we reimagine a world where we take only what nature can replace

water, enough to meet the daily needs (three glasses a day) of 45 people. Its journey from its origin as 60% recycled polyester to our Reno warehouse generated nearly 20 pounds of carbon dioxide, 24 times the weight of the finished product. This jacket left behind, on its way to Reno, two-thirds its weight in waste.

And this is a 60% recycled polyester jacket, knit and sewn to a high standard; it is exceptionally durable, so you won't have to replace it as often. And when it comes to the end of its useful life we'll take it back to recycle into a product of equal value. But, as is true of all the things we can make and you can buy, this jacket comes with an environmental cost higher than its price.

There is much to be done and plenty for us all to do. Don't buy what you don't need. Think twice before you buy anything. Go to patagonia.com/CommonThreads or scan the QR code below. Take the Common Threads Initiative pledge, and join us in the fifth "R," to reimagine a world where we take only what nature can replace.

patagonia
patagonia.com

TAKE THE PLEDGE

* If you sell your used Patagonia product on eBay[®] and take the Common Threads Initiative pledge, we will co-list your product on patagonia.com for no additional charge.

Source: Adapted from Patagonia (2011).

A similar situation can be observed in social media platforms used by the firm, of which the most remarkable is Instagram, where Patagonia has garnered over five million followers. As the data mining analysis of the organization's profile carried out by Zhao et al. (2022) unveils, the main content showcased by the company comprises pictures that emphasize scenic natural landscapes, with a minor appearance of Patagonia customers using the brand's products themselves embedded in this outdoors landscapes. Furthermore, social media channels used by the brand maintain the activist nature at the heart of the firm's philosophy, prompting customers, for instance, to take action regarding certain protesting campaigns, such as the Defense of the Bears Ears National Monument (Patagonia, 2017).

With regard to the sales channels employed by the firm, Patagonia develops its activity both through business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) channels. On the one hand, customers can directly purchase Patagonia's products either through their official website or their brick-and-mortar stores; on the other hand, in order to still provide the physical retail experience for customers across the globe, the brand works with third-party marketplaces and wholesalers that specialize in outdoor apparel, who also sell Patagonia products online.

2.2.3. Service

Services are described by Porter (1985) as the complementary activities performed by the firm that enable the enhancement or maintenance of the value of the product. Among these, the fundamental services in degrowth business are those that allow companies to reduce their environmental impact, particularly by

facilitating a reduction in consumption levels and favoring the concept of sufficiency (Hankammer et al., 2021). For instance, Patagonia offers clothes with an “Ironclad Guarantee,” which ensures the possibility of customers sending goods back for return or repairs, at any time (Patagonia, 2023 -h). In fact, over 85,000 products have been repaired throughout Patagonia’s global product repair centers (Patagonia, 2022a). Moreover, the company has dedicated a division of its website to post repair videos and instructions in several languages, as well as product care guidelines to prolong the customers’ Patagonia gear and apparel (Patagonia, 2023 -b).

Patagonia addressed the quality of their products in a straightforward manner, by stating that the organization is committed to build the best product, which is *useful, versatile, long-lasting, repairable and recyclable* (Patagonia, 2023 -n). In consonance, the brand reports a 0.21% rate of returns based on quality-related problems (Patagonia, 2022a). The emphasis the company places on quality is simultaneously the enabler of the Worn Wear program (formerly known as the Common Thread initiative), which facilitates the purchase of certified second-hand Patagonia products. Through the online platform, customers can both browse used products and trade in their own garments, creating a space in which Patagonia apparel is given a second life (Patagonia Worn Wear, 2023 -b). Garments that are sent in are analyzed on their eligibility to be resold, being recycled if they are not deemed fit for such purpose (Patagonia Worn Wear, 2023 -c).

2.2.4. Procurement

In Porter’s original work, the supporting activity of procurement referred to the “function of purchasing the inputs used in the firm’s value chain” (Porter, 1985, p. 41). However, this case study also considers the use and consumption of said resources, bearing in mind the value chain of Patagonia, in which primary resources are transformed into products by other suppliers.

As part of Patagonia’s commitment to reduce its negative social impacts, the organization engages in a range of due-diligence activities that promote safe working conditions, environmental responsibility, and fair labor practices among its direct suppliers (Patagonia, 2023 -e). The fundamental basis for this due-diligence process is constituted by the Supplier Workplace Code of Conduct, supported by the Responsible Purchasing Practices and the brand’s joining of the Fair Labor Association (Patagonia, 2013). Another material topic in the textile supply chain is the guaranteeing of living wages for all workers. As of 2020, 39% Patagonia’s suppliers were paying living wages to their respective workers (Patagonia, 2023 -i). Despite this, the firm has partnered with Fair Trade USA to provide extra funds for supply chain workers through the sale of Fair-Trade Certified products (Patagonia, 2023 -e).

In addition, the way procured resources themselves are consumed has implications for businesses trying to approach a degrowth perspective, focusing on the measures needed for establishing a sufficiency-based resource consumption. A vision akin to sufficiency is shared by Patagonia’s senior manager of environmental responsibility, Paul Hendricks, who considers that “*if materials cause pollution and energy causes pollution, but a business still needs to provide products to the customer, the obvious (albeit, less capitalist) solution [...] seems to be: Make less stuff*”, affirming his belief of needing to go beyond massive assortment (Patagonia, 2023 -l). Patagonia partially aligns with this sufficiency vision by attempting to limit the environmental impact throughout its value chain, particularly through consuming specific materials. For instance, the firm has turned to using renewable resources and energy (Patagonia, 2023 -g, 2023 -j, 2023 -n); while driving out its consumption of non-renewable materials, in favor of recycled alternatives (Patagonia, 2023 -p).

2.2.5. Technology Development

Technology development consists mainly of the activities developed to improve the product and the process, requiring technology itself, know-how, or specific procedures (Porter, 1985). In this sense, technology democratization is one of the main points to address in businesses approaching degrowth principles, which can be interpreted through two different approaches. According to Kerschner et al. (2018), access to technology can be facilitated to consumers in terms of providing use and repair skills and knowledge, a topic already covered in the present case study. The other approach to the democratization of technology entailing the collaboration between companies of a given sector, following the notion of an open innovation paradigm.

In the case of the latter, Patagonia has been known to make available certain technologies to drive industry change. Most notably, the firm developed an innovative material for its line of wetsuits, Yulex biorubber, in conjunction with other major brands such as Billabong or Oxbow (Patagonia, 2023 -r). By putting this technology at the disposal of other competitors as open-source, the creation of the first neoprene-free wetsuit was made possible.

Given the lack of consensus on the role of technology in degrowth, Kerschner et al. (2018) propose evaluating potential technologies to assess their alignment with degrowth principles through the criteria of (1) feasibility, (2) viability, (3) appropriateness, and (4) conviviality. A project developed by Patagonia that could be inscribed within these criteria is the Clean Color collection, which looks to minimize the environmental and health risks of employing synthetic oil-based dyes in wet fabric processing by creating natural and biosynthetic dyes (Patagonia, 2023 -d).

2.2.6. Human Resource Management

Porter describes this area as the compendium of activities that are needed to recruit, hire, train, develop, and compensate all types of personnel (Porter, 1985). Degrowth focuses on high quality of life, for which, status and quality of employment is essential (Banerjee et al., 2020). Reducing working hours to foster more meaningful job positions and work-life balance is a key consideration (Bocken & Short, 2016). Although implementing different measures, Patagonia has not achieved a reduction in the total hours worked by employees (Benton, 2022). Nevertheless, Patagonia does allow employees to “work flexible hours, as long the work gets done with no negative impacts on others” (Chouinard, 2016, p. 169).

Corporate culture is identified in literature as a potential means to encourage environmentally and socially positive behaviors (Nesterova, 2020). Prominent figures, like Patagonia's founder Yvon Chouinard, play a vital role in shaping the company's identity and sustainability values (Hankammer et al., 2021). Building non-hierarchical structures around mutual support, autonomy, trust, and dignity is essential to minimize the pressure of growth on employee well-being (Cyron & Zoellick, 2018; Froese et al., 2023). As suggested by Bocken and Short (2016) and Plaza-Úbeda et al. (2020), corporate culture permeates all of Patagonia's processes; illustrated by the brand's recruitment efforts, preferring Patagonia product users, who share the values of the brand and its “outdoor culture” (Patagonia, 2023 -c).

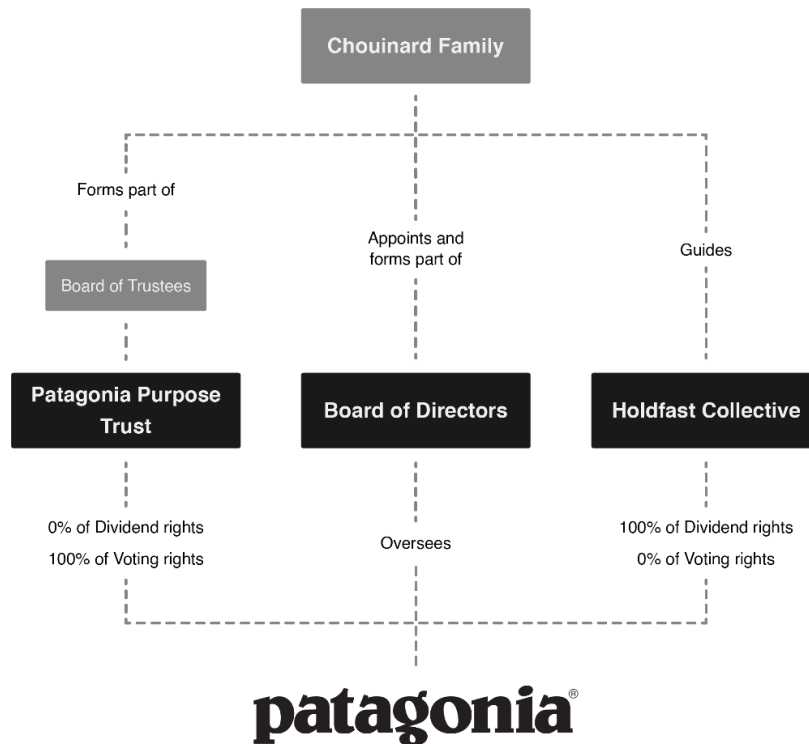
In terms of equality, Patagonia does not report on the existing salary differences between company members employees, despite uniform and equal salary structures being part of the business application of degrowth principles (Froese et al., 2023).

2.2.7. Firm Infrastructure

The activities comprised within the concept of firm infrastructure give support to the whole value chain, rather than specific activities; this includes, inter alia, finance, accounting, legal, and general management (Porter, 1985). As Porter himself underlines, infrastructure can be a source of competitive advantage, and, in the context of degrowth, it sets the basis for a true democratic company that showcases an alternative understanding of business, purpose-driven, and exercising democratic, transparent, and inclusive governance.

One of the main achievements accomplished by Patagonia, which exemplifies its unconventional conception of business, is the transition towards a new type of ownership model. Since September 2023, in accordance with the firm's mission of being in business to save the planet, the company “made Earth [its] only shareholder” (Patagonia, 2022b). In order to achieve so, 100% of all nonvoting stock was transferred to the Holdfast Collective, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to defending nature and fighting the environmental crisis, while 100% of Patagonia's voting stock was reassigned to the Patagonia Purpose Trust. A purpose trust conforms a legal relationship whereby a trustor (i.e., Patagonia Purpose Trust) gives another party, the trustee (i.e., Holdfast Collective), the right to hold title to property of assets for the benefit of a third party, in this case, the purpose of saving the planet (Purpose Foundation, 2022). Therefore, all profits earned by Patagonia will be, after subtracting the investments made on the company itself, redistributed to the Holdfast Collective to fund its activity (Patagonia, 2022b). This legal structure is employed to establish a steward-ownership of the company, described by the Purpose Foundation (2022, p.9) as an alternative ownership model that “secures a company's mission and independence”. The resulting structure of the company is represented graphically in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Patagonia's ownership model and governance structure.



Source: Authors's own elaboration based on data extracted from Patagonia (2022b).

As aforementioned, transparency is also a relevant topic in the context of degrowth. Through the corporate website, the main communication channel with the public, Patagonia provides information about crucial environmental and social matters, as well as the impacts behind each product. Nevertheless, it does not commit to a standardized reporting framework whereby, on a timely basis, it reports on company characteristics and figures that are key for stakeholders, as well as which new initiatives are commenced, tracking and reflecting progress annually. As a result, Patagonia obtained a final score of 44% in the Fashion Transparency Index in 2022, with Governance signifying its lowest result, at a 36% (Fashion Revolution, 2023).

3. Questions for discussion

Question 1. The application of degrowth principles in a business context entails the rejection of profit-making being the sole objective of a firm. How is this different business ethos present in Patagonia?

Strategic management is an area of great interest in degrowth and post-growth business literature, as it correlates with a firm's purpose and voluntary objectives, defining everyday practices, sustainability-oriented matters, ethical practices, and non-market behaviors (Hinton, 2021).

Profit-seeking companies tend to continuously expand their productive capacity, encouraging increasing consumption, driving economic growth, and, concomitantly, environmental and social impacts (Hinton, 2020). For this reason, degrowth literature is critical of profit maximization being the sole objective of a firm (Cyron & Zoellick, 2018; Froese et al., 2023; Hardt & O'Neill, 2017). Thus, following degrowth principles, a nontraditional understanding of business must be developed. The rejection of economic growth and profit-making as the only indicators of a company's success would imply the pursuing and showcasing of alternatives to the prevailing growth model (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2018). In a degrowth society, corporate success should not involve the externalization of environmental and social costs onto others, preventing, as a result of cost-cutting, a "race to the bottom" regarding environmental devastation and inequality (Hinton, 2020; Lloveras et al., 2022).

Ultimately, this company does de-emphasize profit maximization in favor of benefiting the environment and the community, prevalent through its philosophy and distinct organizational culture. In doing so,

Patagonia exhibits the necessary shift towards a paradigm in which companies are established in order to solve environmental and social problems (Hankammer et al., 2021; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2018). The particular ownership structure of Patagonia, which has been previously analyzed, demonstrates such reconciliation between purpose and business. A compromise furthered by the company's acknowledgment of the existing trade-offs "between growth and the environmental impact of [its] operations", reorienting "responsible growth to work fighting the climate crisis" (Patagonia, 2022b, p. 24).

Question 2. How does Patagonia integrate the principles of degrowth into their marketing practices to foster sustainability, promote ethical consumption, and build a value-based community?

The role of marketing in degrowth-based firms is uncertain, as literature on the subject expresses converse ideas. On the one hand, marketing can be thought of as a contrary concept to degrowth itself, primarily due to a traditional conception of the discipline. Taking the definition of marketing provided by Kotler and Armstrong (2018), identifying the discipline as the study of consumer behavior and the activities that improve the processes of distribution, sale and promotion of a company's products; the increase of company sales could be considered as the core motivation of traditional marketing activities (Plaza-Úbeda et al., 2020). The marketing function is, thus, usually linked to the increasing consumerism culture and rising impulsive shopping, driving economic growth mainly through price and promotion (e.g., price reductions, sales, advertising), two of the so-called "4 Ps" of marketing (Hinton, 2020).

On the other hand, in the context of degrowth, if companies were to carry out marketing-related activities, their approach ought to entail the deviation from traditional practices, avoiding the fostering of demand by rejecting a profit-maximization logic (Nesterova, 2020). This opposition means rethinking marketing and redirecting efforts in this area, striving towards a genuine embeddedness within the brand's community, and supporting customers in behavioral change, promoting lifestyles based in less material consumption (Hardt & O'Neill, 2017; Nesterova, 2020). In this way, marketing is the main functional area within companies that holds the potential to bring upon society the needed long-term sociocultural changes indicated by Lorek and Fuchs (2013), albeit with the risk of tendering to overproduction and growing environmental damages by inciting overconsumption (Froese et al., 2023). Patagonia's marketing vision, which has been previously analyzed, successfully implements this latter vision.

Difficulties arise, however, regarding the approach to overconsumption and the need for consumers to reflect on their actual needs and purchasing decisions (Froese et al., 2023; Lloveras et al., 2022; Plaza-Úbeda et al., 2020). Particularly, Bocken and Short (2016) explicitly consider the active role of the firm in educating consumers, in order to avoid channels developing into consumption incentives. Likewise, Patagonia's performance in this matter is also conflicting. Initially, the measures undertaken in its official website to inform customers on the topic of responsible consumption demonstrate both the compromise of the brand and the postulation made by Gossen and Heinrich (2021), stating the affinity of corporate websites as channels to communicate sustainable consumption practices. However, the iconic "Don't buy this jacket" ad obtained controversial results, ultimately seeming to fail its purpose, as Patagonia sales reportedly rose by 30% during the period (Martín, 2012; Stock, 2013).

Last but not least, in the context of marketing for degrowth, companies could create non-monetary value through long-term relationships and loyalty within its community, simultaneously cutting market share from non-sustainability-oriented competitors (Lloveras et al., 2022). This idea is concurred by Gossen and Heinrich (2021), who present the idea of "reach growth" (opposed to sales growth) as an objective of degrowth marketing, with companies setting the spread of their philosophy and encouragement of consumer reflection as an objective of their marketing efforts. In this context, the appeal of the "demarketing" concept, developed by Kotler and Levy (1971) as a means to reduce demand in key markets.

Question 3. As aforementioned, Patagonia has "made Earth [its] only shareholder". Analyzing the company's new ownership model and governance structure, what implications has this change had for its other stakeholders and for democracy within the firm?

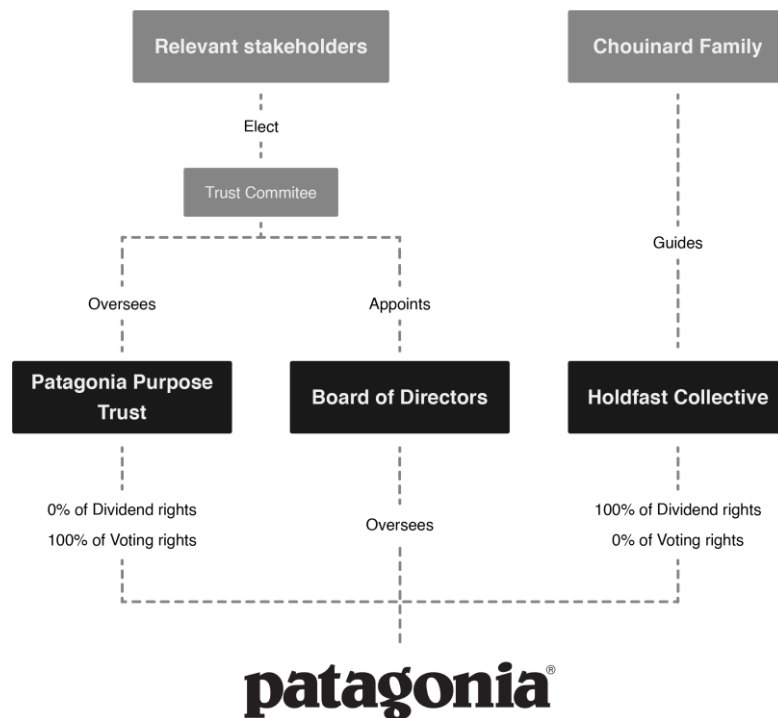
Patagonia's new ownership model fits with the notion of a purpose-driven business that does not follow the prevalent business growth model (Cyron & Zoellick, 2018; Froese et al., 2023; Hankammer et al., 2021; Hinton, 2021; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2018). Despite this advancement towards degrowth

principles represented by the ownership model set up by Yvon Chouinard, in doing so the founder of the company has also disregarded one fundamental underpinning of degrowth applied to business, and the degrowth concept itself: democracy. Hence, democratic governance is a recurrent topic throughout degrowth literature, applied to both private and public organizations (Cyron & Zoellick, 2018; Froese et al., 2023; Hinton, 2021; Nesterova, 2020).

By claiming the planet as its only shareholder, making profits serve its purpose, Patagonia has obtained some of the key benefits of a steward-ownership; namely, mission and values preservation, and long-term orientation, insofar as pressure from external investors is non-existent (Purpose Foundation, 2022). Nonetheless, in this new ownership structure, the Chouinard family is, as depicted previously, in charge of overseeing both the Patagonia Purpose Trust, electing and supervising its leadership, and the Holdfast Collective, guiding the philanthropic work of the nonprofit; all while maintaining the position family members hold on Patagonia's Board of Directors (Patagonia, 2022b). Consequently, the company is simultaneously forgoing the principle of good governance of steward-ownership, given the lack of stakeholder representation in the governance structure, particularly concerning voting rights.

Steward-ownership models can take different structures, in which relevant stakeholders can be given voting stock (without dividend rights), or crucial roles in the creation of a more democratic company (Purpose Foundation, 2022). Figure 7 illustrates a possible reconfiguration of Patagonia's steward-ownership in order to reflect this stakeholder involvement, while still focusing its mission (and funding) towards the Holdfast Collective. The collective could remain to be owned by the Chouinard Family, so as to be guided in accordance with the company's values.

Figure 7. Possible ownership model and governance structure for Patagonia.



Source: Authors's own elaboration.

This scenario poses a fundamental dilemma, since, if the Chouinard family, in pursuit of democracy, would allow more stakeholders to partake in decision-making and governance procedures, it could cause the original values of the brand to be tarnished or shift over time. Despite ultimately not accomplishing its purpose, Patagonia would in turn fulfil the needs and interests of its relevant stakeholders, people who are actively engaged in or connected to the business.

4. Conclusions

The development of the present case study has provided a new understanding of the transition fashion firms can make towards a degrowth-based paradigm, prompting a fundamental question: should

degrowth-oriented companies grow in the current growth paradigm? And if so, where do the limits of such growth lie? On the one hand, enterprises with a different business ethos, such as Patagonia, might outcompete less sustainability-oriented companies, driving them out of the market through their growth. On the other hand, without an overarching constraint on total economic growth, the potential for significant change is limited. As theorized by Khmara and Kronenberg (2018), economic activity should be considered as a sum, allowing for the imposition of regulatory limits (e.g., greenhouse gas emission caps) on companies that do not adhere to degrowth-based business criteria.

Patagonia, to some extent, is aligned with several dimensions proposed for implementing degrowth principles in a business context. Considering these results, altogether, Patagonia cannot be considered a fully degrowth-oriented organization. While it incorporates essential degrowth factors, it falls short in addressing aspects such as democracy, sufficiency or overconsumption. Overall, the application of degrowth principles in a business context should abide by the holistic nature of the concept, favoring an integrated approach. Much like Porter's value chain, the subject areas and concepts hitherto reviewed must not be managed separately, but rather as a consolidated framework.

Consequently, the company is more closely aligned with green growth than degrowth, despite its noteworthy efforts to uphold its values, highlighted throughout the case study. Initially, Patagonia was presented as an alternative company, whose conception of business could be deemed akin to degrowth principles. However, Patagonia is still growing, and in doing so increasing the sales of its products, and its environmental and social footprint, reflecting a paradoxical problematic for degrowth-oriented firms. This paradox is, to a certain extent, reflected in a statement made by Chouinard (2016, p.14), in which the founder of Patagonia admits that: "*Ironically, we have become the large company that we never dreamed of, nor wanted to become*", although he does not "*feel that we have had to compromise our values in becoming this large company*".

Nonetheless, the assessment concluded in the present work does not rule out the possibility of Patagonia aligning itself with key missing degrowth principles in the future; especially given the company's commitment to diminish its negative impact on the environment and society through innovative and non-normative approaches, corroborated by its latest governance change. Hence, it is plausible for Patagonia to restructure its scale in the future by supporting a more localized economy, where cooperatives or social enterprises manufacture products to supply the market on a reduced scale.

Such organizations are favored in degrowth literature because of their small scale, more democratic governance, and their repudiation of the profit-maximization rationale. By partnering with small companies in its supply chain, Patagonia can self-impose limitations on unrestrained growth; all while adhering to its commitment to reduce consumption, taking decisions democratically and transparently, involving its stakeholders. This could establish symbiotic relationships, creating networks for collaborative value creation and scaling up the social innovations of suppliers.

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