New Political Economy

ISSN: 1356-3467 (Print) 1469-9923 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/cnpe20

Understanding the roles of decommodification in socioecological transformations: a new theoretical approach

Geoff Goodwin

To cite this article: Geoff Goodwin (20 Jan 2026): Understanding the roles of decommodification in socioecological transformations: a new theoretical approach, New Political Economy, DOI: 10.1080/13563467.2025.2601107

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2025.2601107

Published online: 20 Jan 2026.

NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY
https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2025.2601107

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Understanding the roles of decommodification in socioecological transformations: a new theoretical approach

Geoff Goodwin

School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

ABSTRACT

Decommodification is widely considered a central pillar of progressive socioecological transformations, like the green new deal, degrowth and ecosocialism. Yet it is inadequately problematised and theorised in the existing literature. It is often simply stated as a normative goal rather than theorised as a central part of the transformative process. It is also commonly reduced to services, such as transport and energy, and sometimes framed in Eurocentric terms. The global geographical diversity of decommodification is therefore overlooked and the wider role it plays in both supporting and challenging capitalism is underexplored. This article introduces a new theoretical approach that captures these dimensions and provides a stronger foundation to analyse and strategise the diverse roles of decommodification in socioecological transformations. It argues that the relationship between decommodification, production, and value is crucial for grasping the character of decommodification and its capacity to support or hinder progressive socioecological transformations. Further, the article shows that although decommodification is central to progressive transformations, it can also support regressive and reactionary responses to environmental crises. Hence, simply calling for more decommodification is not enough; grasping its limits and contradictions, and tailoring it to the context and task are essential.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 30 March 2025
Accepted 2 December 2025

KEYWORDS
Commodification; decommodification; green new deal; degrowth; ecosocialism

Introduction

Decommodification is widely considered a central pillar of progressive socioecological transformations, like green new deal, degrowth and ecosocialism.[1] In contrast to neoliberal approaches, these responses to socioecological crisis actively call for constraining or transcending capitalist markets and expanding non-market relations, processes, and institutions. Yet decommodification is inadequately problematised and theorised in the critical environmental literature. It is sometimes simply stated as a normative goal rather than theorised as a central part of the transformative process. It is also frequently reduced to services, such as transport and energy, and sometimes framed in Eurocentric terms. The

CONTACT Geoff Goodwin g.b.goodwin@leeds.ac.uk

global geographical diversity of decommodification is therefore overlooked and the wider role it plays in both supporting and challenging capitalism is underexplored.

In this article, I will introduce a new theoretical approach that captures these dimensions and provides a stronger foundation to analyse the complex and contextual relationship between decommodification and socioecological transformation. This framework is rooted in a critical Polanyian reading of decommodification that recognises its progressive potential but also highlights its limits and contradictions. Viewed from this perspective, (de)commodification is understood as a gradational, dialectic process – commodification and decommodification are located on a spectrum, with the self-regulation of commodification at one end and the absence of commodification at the other. Decommodification thus limits commodification to varying degrees. In doing so, it creates alternative ways of organising, relating, and living. However, it is a contradictory process, as it can also support commodification. For example, welfare regimes can decommodify labour while supporting commodified consumption and housing. The simultaneous escalation of decommodification and capital accumulation is thus perfectly possible from this conceptual standpoint. I will seek to show that the relationship between decommodification, production, and value is crucial for grasping the character of decommodification and its capacity to support or hinder progressive socioecological transformations.

Significantly, I will also argue that although decommodification is central to progressive socioecological transformations, it can support regressive or reactionary responses to the environmental crisis. Further, decommodification can be a form of violence, dispossession, and domination, especially when it is organised through the state in post-colonial and settler colonial settings. For instance, a national park might create a new decommodified space for some sectors of society while alienating Indigenous peoples from their land. Therefore, simply calling for more decommodification is not enough; grasping its limits and contradictions and tailoring it to the context and task are essential to understanding the roles it can play in progressive socioecological transformations.

This article makes three main contributions to political economy and environmental politics scholarship. First, it develops a new conceptualisation of commodification, which combines Polanyian and Marxist approaches with insights from Latin American environmental scholars. Second, it elaborates a new framework to analyse fictitious commodification, which retains a critical focus on nature, labour, money while integrating a select range of services and activities that perform vital social functions and are problematic when treated as commodities. Third, it integrates these conceptual innovations into a new theoretical framework to analyse and strategise decommodification in the context of socioecological transformations.

The rest of the article is divided into two main sections. It starts by critically reviewing alternative perspectives on decommodification in political economy and environmental politics scholarship, arguing that it is widely considered a central component of socioecological transformations but is insufficiently theorised and problematised. It then elucidates a new theoretical framework to analyse the roles of decommodification in socioecological transformations, bringing it into dialogue with the literature surveyed in the first section and explaining how it advances our understanding of decommodification in theory and practice. The article concludes by identifying elements of a new decommodification research agenda for political economy and environmental politics scholars.

A constructive critique of decommodification in critical environmental scholarship

Progressive socioecological transformations not only seek to tackle the climate emergency and environmental crisis but reduce inequality, precarity, and poverty. This includes approaches that seek to usher in new forms of capitalism, like reformist variants of the green new deal and just transition, as well as those that aim to transcend capitalism altogether, such as degrowth and ecosocialism. The first group broadly aligns with the intermediary form of progressive socioecological transformation identified by Brand *et al.* (2020). This entails initiating a new phase of capitalism that is based on distinct institutional logics and a transformed regime of accumulation (2020, p. 166). The second group fits into the more radical form of socioecological transformation they identify, which involves fundamental socioecological restructuring and transcending the capitalist social order (2020, p. 166, see also Novy 2022; Fraser 2022).

Decommodification abounds in the literature dedicated to both types of transformation. However, it has been insufficiently theorised and problematised, meaning its complexity, contradictions, and potential have not been fully appreciated. I will demonstrate this by critically reviewing this literature, including authors who simply identify decommodification as a normative goal as well as those who discuss it at more length. In doing so, I make no attempt to offer an exhaustive review of this scholarship. Rather, I will identify general themes and specific points that will be developed in the next section by bringing these authors into conversation with the theoretical framework I have developed to analyse and strategise decommodification.

Decommodification: diverse roles and alternative perspectives

Although the commodification of nature has been extensively discussed by critical environmental scholars for decades (Castree 2003), only a handful explicitly call for the decommodification of nature in the process of socioecological transformation. Brand *et al.* (2020), for example, place it at the centre of radical transformations that purposefully move in a post-capitalist direction, claiming that decommodifying nature is essential to pull up the roots of the environmental crisis and transcend the commodifying logics of capitalism (see also Acosta 2015). This process, they argue, would entail 'very different forms of the societal appropriation of nature to fulfil human and societal needs' (2020, pp. 169–170). Hence, for them, decommodifying nature involves going well beyond simply preserving and beautifying nature. Building political institutions that enable the 'democratization of societal nature relations' is required to achieve this (2020, pp. 169–70). Crucially, the authors signal that such transformations are global in scale as they entail overcoming the 'imperial mode of living', which is rooted in structurally unequal economic relations between the centre and periphery of the capitalist world economy (2020, p. 171; see also Goodwin 2024). The imperial mode of living is based on the compulsive mass consumption of commodities and transcending it therefore implies profound changes to everyday life and breaking with the capitalist perspective of nature as a resource for humans to plunder and deposit waste (2020, pp. 169–171, see also Acosta 2015, Unceta 2014).

While their analysis of the decommodification of nature is insightful, it is not entirely clear how they theorise the process. Limiting it to post-capitalist transformations suggests

that they follow a binary reading of decommodification in which nature is fully removed from capitalist production and distribution, i.e., nature is either commodified or decommodified. One important problem with this approach is that it overlooks the centrality of decommodification to neoliberal capitalism. For example, despite decades of relentless commodification and austerity in Britain, the decommodification of nature is still prevalent, including public parks, allotments, green belts, and various other forms of environmental regulation (Goodwin 2024). Hence, while the decommodification of nature is a core feature of post-capitalist transformations, it is not absent from neoliberal approaches. Indeed, it might even be an important pillar of reactionary responses to the climate emergency and environmental crises, including ethnonationalist forms of environmental regulation (see Ajl 2021). Recognising decommodification's capacity to support regressive and reactionary forms of socioecological transformation is crucial for strategising and building progressive political projects (see Bärnthaler 2024). I shall argue in the next section that a gradational, dialectical reading of (de) commodification brings greater clarity as it highlights decommodification's capacity to support capitalist relations, structures and processes while also illustrating its ability to challenge and transcend them. What really matters is the form and scale of decommodification and its relationship to accumulation, production, and value.

Selwyn (2021a) hints at this in his critical analysis of variants of the green new deal, which broadly map onto the typology presented by Brand *et al.* (2020). Focusing on food and agriculture, he argues for a socialist version of the green new deal that aims 'to restore the metabolic interaction between humans and nature through a new, non-exploitative society' rooted in the communal ownership, management, and use of land (2021a, p. 780). Recognising that such a society would have to evolve from within capitalism, he sees food decommodification as a vital part of the transformation process, i.e. not simply a normative goal. In this context, decommodification entails gradually converting food from a commodity to a basic human right. Crucially, this requires root and branch restructuring of the agri-food system, including developing community restaurants, nationalising agro-industrial firms, and increasing access to land for the working classes (2021a, pp. 789–93, see also Huber 2019 and Selwyn 2021b). Hence, fundamental revisions are required to the structures and relations of production to expand and radicalise decommodification, a crucial point that I shall return to in the next section. In reformist variants of the green new deal, decommodification is restricted to the more muted role of selectively providing free or subsidised food (2021a, p. 791). Unlike Brand *et al.* (2020), Selwyn therefore sees a role for decommodification in less radical progressive transformations. However, he also overlooks its place in explicitly pro-capitalist approaches (2021a, p. 791). For example, food banks have become an institutionalised form of decommodified food provisioning in Western societies during neoliberal austerity, and they are likely to remain a central pillar of fervently pro-capitalist responses to the environmental crisis, which seek to protect the corporate food regime (Goodwin 2024).

Decommodification's capacity to equalise class power is what ultimately gives it radical potential, according to Selwyn (2021a, p. 781), which might explain why he considers it to be absent from ardently pro-capitalist transformations. Here, he draws on Esping-Andersen's famous concept of decommodification, which defines it as the degree to which individuals are able to live full lives independently of capitalist markets (Esping-Andersen 1990). Selwyn (2021a, 2021b) suggests food decommodification recalibrates class

power by reducing working-class dependence on capitalist food markets and, by extension, relaxing the compulsion for workers to commodify their labour power. As such, the 'working classes begin ceasing to exist as servants of capital; so too do capitalist classes begin ceasing to exist as masters of labour' (2021a, p. 781). Increasing access to land to cultivate food would support this by reconnecting workers to the means of production and transforming class relations. Selwyn therefore suggests food decommodification has the capacity to support labour decommodification, a crucial point that has been made elsewhere in the literature (see Vitale and Sivini 2017). Yet, while he stresses the need to decommodify 'social life' (2021a, p. 789), he generally restricts decommodification to food, so that its broader role in socioecological transformations is obscured.

The insightful conceptual framework elaborated by Gerber and Gerber (2017) also follows a narrow reading of decommodification. Central to their approach are relations and regimes of property and possession. The authors argue that it is necessary to transcend the very idea of property and 'explore and support ways of going back to a logic of possession through processes of decommodification' (2017, p. 552). Housing cooperatives, forest management, and public land are given as existing examples that move in this direction (2017, pp. 553–54). One merit of this approach is that it zooms in on one core feature of capitalism – property – and reveals the important role it plays in enabling and supporting commodification and accumulation, a point I will come back to below. The downside is that it is too narrow to capture the scale and breadth of decommodification in capitalist societies and socioecological transformations. The authors indicate connections between property, money and labour, but their framework and examples focus on the decommodification of nature, rendering it too restrictive.

The tendency to frame decommodification narrowly is evident elsewhere in the literature. In making the case for ecosocialism, Hickel (2023a), for example, argues that it is essential to decommodify services, such as transport and energy, to establish the foundation for a dignified life for all and create provisioning systems that use less energy and materials and support decarbonisation. The ultimate goal, he contends, is the 'decommodification of the core social sector – the means of everyday survival' (Hickel 2023a; see also Mastini *et al.* 2021). Riofrancos *et al.* (2018) point in a similar direction by arguing for the creation of decommodified energy systems that treat 'energy access as a human right rather than an opportunity for profit' (see also Christophers 2024, Huber 2024, Tornel and Dunlap 2025). To achieve this the authors argue that ecosocialists 'must politicize the grid, and propose alternative visions of ownership and decision-making', indicating, once again, the need to reorganise production to radicalise decommodification (Riofrancos *et al.* 2018). Such demands overlap with debates about universal basic services (UBS), which entail reorientating public services away from markets and profit to shared needs and collective responsibility. Such a shift, Coote (2022, p. 475) contends, 'supports decommodification of needs satisfaction, promotes universal sufficiency, and asserts ecological sustainability as a guiding principle for collective action' (see also Gough 2019, Coote 2022, Konshoj 2023). Thus, as Hickel (2023a) notes, decommodification has a crucial role to play in overcoming the artificial scarcities produced through capitalism (see also Polanyi 1944/2001).

While decommodifying vital services is undoubtedly critical for progressive socioecological transformations, these authors tend to frame decommodification as a normative goal or desired outcome (see also Ajl 2021, Fraser 2022). Hence, it is not entirely clear

what decommodification involves or how it is achieved. Moreover, restricting it to services might create the impression that it is only in this domain that decommodification is necessary, when, in fact, a much wider process of decommodification is required for progressive socioecological transformations. For example, while Hickel (2023a, 2023b) focuses on the decommodification of services, his broader body of work implies a more far-reaching decommodification agenda (see, for example, Hickel 2020). He proposes several policies and institutions that decommodify labour, including living wages, basic income, and job guarantee schemes. Nature is front and centre, and he mentions several important decommodifying measures, such as land reform, public water systems, and community gardens. Money is also singled out as a central part of the transformative process, and Hickel discusses several policies and institutions that have significant decommodifying capacity, including replacing private debt-based monetary institutions with public monetary systems (see also Mastini *et al.* 2021). Notably, the need to link all of this to the transformation and democratisation of production is also stressed. The theoretical framework presented in the next section brings all of these elements together to support the more holistic and comprehensive analysis of decommodification, overcoming the narrow framing of decommodification around services and providing a stronger foundation to analyse the diverse roles it plays in socioecological transformations.

Some critical environmental scholars have already moved in this more expansive direction. Unceta (2014), for example, argues for the importance of decommodification to socioecological transformations based on the principle of *buen vivir* (living well) (see also Acosta 2015, Diniz Nogueira and Cruz-Martinez 2025). Drawing on Polanyi, he claims decommodification is crucial to transcend the relentless growth logic of capitalism and the socioenvironmental destruction it causes. He contends that decommodification supports this process by reducing the domain of capitalist markets and creating space for alternative socioecological relations, methods of production, and forms of work. Dematerialisation and decentralisation are required alongside decommodification to reduce energy and waste and decrease the scale and concentration of economic activities. Unceta posits that decommodification supports various dimensions of *buen vivir*, including liberating people from the need to sell their labour power to satisfy their basic needs, strengthening relations of solidarity and care, and reducing environmentally destructive production for the market.

Parrique (2019), who also draws on Polanyi, makes a similar argument in relation to degrowth. For him, decommodification is a fundamental ingredient of degrowth as it involves reducing or eliminating capitalist markets and 'turning commodities into gratuities' (2019: 301). Decommodifying commodities reduces economic growth and, as such, 'degrowth is decommoditisation' (2019: 289, see also Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2022, 2025). Significantly, he explicitly argues that decommodification should include fictitious commodities – land, labour and money – 'things that should not be managed by the market' (2019: 294-5). In doing so, he identifies important linkages between various dimensions of decommodification. For example, decommodification often involves 'some form of participatory planning, which is time-consuming, especially if conducted via direct forms of democratic deliberations' (2019: 584). Hence, building decommodified provisioning systems along the lines proposed by Hickel (2023a, 2023b) is important to free up time for meaningful democratic engagement (which is one reason why ruling elites oppose them). However,

while Parrique and Unceta offer important insights into decommodification, they both imply that it necessarily reduces economic growth, which is problematic as some forms of decommodification support commodification and accumulation (see Dale 2016, Gerber and Gerber 2017, Goodwin 2018, 2022, Konshoj 2023).

The new theoretical framework presented in the next section captures this contradictory side of decommodification while also indicating its progressive and radical potential. Providing a comprehensive framework to analyse decommodification, it goes beyond merely framing decommodification as a normative goal to explaining its various forms and effects. In doing so, it encourages close, contextual analysis which is sensitive to diversity and variation and recognises the challenges of decommodification in post-colonial and settler colonial settings, especially when organised through the state. Thus, the framework provides a stronger theoretical footing to analyse the various roles of decommodification in socioecological transformations across the centre and periphery of the capitalist world economy.

A new theoretical framework to analyse and strategise the roles of decommodification in socioecological transformations

The previous section showed that decommodification is widely considered a key feature of the societies that critical environmental scholars hope will emerge through progressive socioecological transformations. Yet it also indicated that it is a core element of the neoliberal capitalist societies that they seek to transcend. That decommodification plays a significant role in neoliberal capitalism indicates its contradictory character, i.e., while it reduces commodification, it can also support it (Dale 2016, Goodwin 2018, 2022). In this section, I will present a critical Polanyian framework that captures the slippery and contradictory aspects of decommodification while also showcasing its progressive and transformative potential. The analytical and political task is to determine the characteristics, functions, and effects of the multiple forms of decommodification that exist in capitalist societies and understand how they block or advance progressive socioecological transformations. Imagining and constructing new forms of decommodification is also vital. The framework presented below is designed to support such critical and creative thinking and allows for a deeper understanding of the complex and contextual relationship between decommodification and socioecological transformation. I will start by briefly explaining the theoretical underpinnings of this framework, before describing its core features.

Fictitious commodities and disembedded economies

The starting point for a Polanyian approach to decommodification is the recognition that capitalism is built on the fiction that labour, land, and money are commodities.[2] Polanyi (1944/2001) sees this as one of capitalism's congenital weaknesses and identifies this trilogy of 'fictitious commodities' as key sites of struggle and transformation. His critique of the incorporation of land and labour into capitalist markets is particularly stinging. How could their fate be left to markets when they are so fundamental to human existence? The existential threat that this presents means these commodification processes are never allowed to run entirely freely and are always accompanied by some form of

decommodification, either through or outside the state. This is also true of money, which is also too important for the functioning of capitalism to be left entirely to market forces. The commodification of money requires significant regulation and intervention, including central banking, which decommodifies it to varying degrees.

Polanyi shows that decommodification is essential to avert the dislocating and destructive tendencies of fictitious commodification, but he also shows that it can impede the functioning of capitalist markets and generate profound political crises. Indeed, he argues that this contradiction, which is captured in his famous concept of the 'double movement', ultimately led to the collapse of classical liberal capitalism and created conditions for the spread of fascism in the 1930s (Dale 2016, Goodwin 2025). A crucial factor that explains this contradiction is the institutional and ontological demarcation of the economic and political spheres in capitalist societies. Polanyi (1957) refers to this institutional form as the 'disembedded economy'. From the early nineteenth century, the economy started to become institutionalised and conceived as a distinct sphere within society, which was expected to run according to the logic of capitalist exchange and production. With the bulk of economic decisions left to the private owners of the means of production, the political and democratic control of the economy was severely restricted, preventing the resolution of economic crises, and supporting the expansion of fascism in the 1930s (Polanyi 1944/2001). The historical evolution of capitalism since the early twentieth century has shown that the institutionalisation of the disembedded economy varies across time and space and 'boundary struggles' between the political and economic spheres have become a core domain of capitalist and environmental politics (Fraser 2022, see also Goodwin, 2022, 2025). Decommodification is central to these struggles and has the potential to both support and challenge the disembedded economy, further indicating its contradictory character.

Going beyond Polanyi

The fictitious commodity concept provides deep insight into the structural causes of crisis and transformation in capitalist societies. However, it has some important limitations. Here, I focus on three issues.

First, Polanyi (1944/2001) only offers a basic conceptualisation of the commodification process itself. Of central importance to him is the integration into and exchange of fictitious commodities in interlocking systems of price-making markets. The supply-demand-price mechanism is thus key to his understanding of the commodification process. Here, Polanyi follows the neoclassical theory of the market too closely (Gemici 2015), leading him to overlook important features of capitalist markets, such as the capacity of firms to use monopoly and oligopoly power to dictate prices (see also Selwyn and Miyamura 2014, Dale 2016). Moreover, his narrow focus on the price mechanism leads to a rather reductive view of the commodification process. Things do not necessarily have to be exchanged at market prices to be commodified. Water, for example, has become extensively commodified, but it is only openly traded in markets in certain forms, such as bottled water. The other mechanisms through which water commodification occur are diverse, including the privatisation of water services and infrastructure, the incorporation of irrigation water into commodified food regimes, and the extensive use of rivers and aquifers to support industrial mining. Hence, while water is an 'uncooperative commodity' (Bakker 2007, p. 442), it is still possible to commodify it through diverse channels.

To make sense of this we must go beyond Polanyi to conceptualise commodification in more expansive terms. The Marxist framework developed by Hermann (2021) is a useful starting point. The basis for his approach is the classic Marxist distinction between 'use value' and 'exchange value', where the former captures the capacity of a commodity to satisfy human wants and needs and the latter reflects the value of a commodity relative to another commodity expressed in money. Hermann argues that while the use/exchange value distinction provides a solid foundation to conceptualise commodification, it is insufficient as it fails to account for the various techniques capitalist firms use to increase profits through markets, such as marketing, hoarding and speculation. Hermann draws on the less well known Marxist concept of 'market value' to capture the capacity of firms to augment value through the market as well as production. Through this, he defines commodification as the 'subjugation of use value to market value' (2021, p. 25-29). The benefit of this conceptual framing is that it links production, distribution, and value, which is crucial for understanding (de) commodification. It also allows for a more plural approach to value (Benanav 2025). The downside is that use values are anthropocentric and tend to instrumentalise nature; i.e., the value of nature is reduced to its capacity to serve human wants and needs (Gudynas 2019). Hermann is aware of the debates about the limits of use values and recognises the importance of the intrinsic values of nature i.e. the value of nature in and of itself (2021, p. 131). Nonetheless, he argues that reorientating societies around use value and democratic decision-making is the most effective way of simultaneously transforming social and ecological conditions (2021, p. 135-57).

I suggest an alternative approach that incorporates both use and intrinsic values, recognising that the emphasis placed on them will vary in different contexts. From this perspective, commodification is understood as a process that subjugates use value to market value *and* suppresses intrinsic values of nature. Capitalist markets are the main vectors through which market value is generated and commodification is actualised, and the exchange of commodities at market prices is central to this process. Hence, prices matter. Yet commodification is more expansive, encompassing a wider set of processes and practices. Returning to water, commodification occurs when water is primarily put to the purpose of generating profits and accumulating capital rather than toward satisfying (non) human needs. Once commodified, water continues to have use and intrinsic values, but they are relegated to the more dominant objective of profit and accumulation.

Second, Polanyi's formulation of the fictitious commodities concept is notoriously vague and requires specifying with greater precision. To support this, I propose dividing it into two analytically distinct elements: *intrinsic* and *variable* (Goodwin 2021). The former relates to the fundamental characteristics of fictitious commodities that distinguish them from standard commodities, which are produced for sale on the capitalist market. Land, for example, cannot be produced, stored and distributed in the same way as commodities purposefully designed for market exchange and profit-making. The latter relates to the meanings, functions, and values of fictitious commodities that change over time and vary between classes and groups. Labour, for instance, is closely connected to social status; hence, some forms of work are more highly valued by some classes and groups than others, and these change over time. Thus, it is not simply the intrinsic features of the labour power commodity that are important for understanding the unique place it occupies in capitalist societies, but its variable dimensions. Recognising this aspect of

fictitiousness is crucial for understanding the shifting roles of decommodification in socio-ecological transformations. The meanings, functions, and values of fictitious commodities are shifting in the context of the climate emergency and environmental crisis, and this implies changes in the politics and provision of decommodification. I will provide some examples of this below.

Third, the form and scope of the trilogy of fictitious commodities need clarification to support the more precise analysis of (de)commodification. Polanyi (1944/2001) only provides basic definitions of land, labour and money, and his analysis of the commodification of each fictitious commodity is incomplete. He equates land to nature, but understands nature in broad terms, not only referring to the commodification of elements of the natural world, like land and water, but also to the produce of land, especially food, and features of the built environment, such as housing and parks, which ultimately involve the transformation of nature. Labour is conceptualised in narrower terms, focusing on the exchange of labour power in capitalist markets at market prices. Meanwhile, his conceptualisation of the commodification of money is broader, spanning the monetary system, banking, and finance, and focusing on commodity money backed by gold, i.e., the gold standard.

Building on this, I seek to provide greater conceptual and analytical clarity by disaggregating each fictitious commodity into its constituent parts and introducing new dimensions (see Table 1). This supports more fine-grained analysis and provides greater clarity on the scope of (de) commodification, which is vital for understanding socioecological transformations.

Land is relabelled nature to better capture the scope and magnitude of (de)commodification processes in this domain and connect it more clearly to popular and academic environmental discourse. This is not without complications, as it includes elements that are far removed from natural conditions, such as housing, electricity, and processed food. Moreover, nature is a highly contested term, which, among other things, can reinforce ontological and epistemological divisions between human and non-human worlds. Yet it is appropriate in this context, as commodification works to create and reinforce these divisions, even if they are never actually realised and the two remain intrinsically connected. Furthermore, relabelling land as nature strengthens the rigour of this theoretical framework, as it incorporates intrinsic values of nature. In short, commodification implies extracting the maximum amount of market value from nature

Table 1. Disaggregating fictitious commodification.

Nature	Labour	Money
Land (agricultural and non-agricultural)	Wage labour (formal and informal)	Money (coins, paper,digital)
Built environment (housing, offices, parks, etc.)	Micro informal activities (street vending, basic services, street performing, etc.)	Debt (individual, corporate, public)
Natural environment (air, climate, etc.)		Financial instruments (shares, bonds, derivatives etc.)
Agri-food (food, animals, seeds, etc.)		Cryptocurrencies (bitcoin, stablecoins etc.)
Water (aquifers, rivers, seas, etc.)		
Energy (electricity, gas, coal etc.)		
Natural materials (oil, copper, lithium, etc)		

Source: My own elaboration inspired by Polanyi (1944/2001).

across all of these domains, while suppressing use and intrinsic values. Disaggregating this category allows for a more precise analysis of what precisely is being commodified and what combinations of labour, technology, and infrastructure are employed to convert elements of nature into commodities. This framework, therefore, cautions against conceptualising nature in broad terms and recognising considerable variation between different elements (Castree 2003).

Labour is expanded to include micro informal activities, such as street vending and performing, that take place outside formal and informal enterprises based on wage labour. In these contexts, workers do not receive a wage in exchange for their labour power, but their activities can only be understood in the context of the exclusion and scarcity produced by labour markets. Such features of labour commodification are particularly pronounced in the periphery of the capitalist world economy, but they are a universal condition of capitalism, which has become more pronounced and hegemonic during the neoliberal era (Arnold 2024). Micro informal activities are orientated towards market value insofar as their purpose is to secure a profit, but they provide scant accumulation opportunities. Wage labour, both formal and informal, is also geared towards augmenting market values, but for capitalists rather than workers. Hence, the two categories refer to distinct but related labour commodification processes. In both cases, the use values of labour are subjugated to market values. For example, while street vendors might derive some meaning and satisfaction from their work, they are compelled to prioritise the market value over the use value of their labour power to avoid utter destitution.

One crucial element that is omitted from this framework is the unpaid labour that occurs outside of capitalist markets and is vital for both social reproduction and capital accumulation (Cantillon *et al.* 2023). The ubiquity of these highly gendered forms of labour indicates that commodification does not fully penetrate all domains of capitalist societies, even if the labour that occurs through and outside markets is intimately connected (Fraser 2022). The exclusion of unpaid labour from this framework shows that it only captures certain features of capitalism. Connecting it to feminist concepts, such as social reproduction, enables a fuller analysis of labour in capitalist societies and its vital role in socioecological transformations.

Money is broadened to include other commodification processes geared towards profit making and capital accumulation, reflecting the growing financialisation of capitalism. The classification includes the commodification of money itself as well as the commodification of debt and the diverse financial instruments that have become core features of capitalism in the twenty-first century, including cryptocurrencies. Each of these has its own peculiarities and performs distinct roles in capitalist societies.

Decommodification across the trilogy of fictitious commodities is vital for progressive socioecological transformations, and the disaggregation of fictitious commodification supports more precise analysis and strategising (see Bärnthaler 2024). However, although fictitious commodification is expansive, as Table 1 indicates, it is still too narrow to capture the breadth of commodification in contemporary capitalist societies and the scale of decommodification necessary to tackle the climate emergency and environmental crisis. Some scholars have responded to this by adding new fictitious commodities to the mix. Christophers (2024, pp. 362–4), for example, posits electricity as a distinct fictitious commodity because it was not originally produced for sale, requires massive and continuous state support to bring it to market, and is highly problematic when treated

as a commodity. Huber (2024) concurs, claiming it is a 'fictitious commodity *par excellence*'. I agree with this, but prefer to integrate it into the existing trilogy of fictitious commodities rather than separate it out, as it is so closely connected to nature, however it is produced (Pirani 2021).

Rather than creating new fictitious commodities, I suggest a *fictitious commodity plus* approach that remains grounded in the (de)commodification of nature, labour and money but adds a select range of services and activities that perform vital social functions and are particularly problematic when treated as commodities, such as health, education, and transport. Moreover, their vital social functions mean that the effects of commodifying them have profound implications. The advantage of this approach is that it retains a critical focus on zones of systemic crisis and transformation – nature, labour, money – while integrating services and activities that are fundamental to social cohesion and everyday life. This provides a broader and stronger foundation to consider the relationship between decommodification and socioecological transformation.

Cutting into decommodification

Building on this, I conceptualise decommodification as a gradational process – commodification and decommodification are located on a spectrum, with the self-regulation of commodification at one end and the absence of commodification at the other. These two processes, which occur concurrently, move in opposite directions along this continuum. Commodification and decommodification are therefore dialectically related rather than discrete processes. The entire process centres on the (de) commodification of nature, labour and money but extends to vital services and activities, as explained in the previous section and discussed below. Decommodification reduces capitalist market exposure, dependence, and domination to varying degrees and has the potential to assuage or reverse the subjugation of use and intrinsic values to market values. In doing so, it creates and sustains alternative forms of organising, relating, and living. Decommodification is therefore not simply a defensive response to commodification but has its own vitality and ontology (see also Tjarks 2025). Humans direct decommodification but it might be triggered by the intrinsic problems of commodifying nature and hence elements of nature influence the process (see Bakker 2004, Castree 2003). Crucially, it takes multiple political and ideological forms and is therefore not intrinsically emancipatory or progressive (see also Esping-Andersen 1990). The challenge for progressive socioecological transformations is to move towards the decommodification end of the spectrum while building relations of plurality, solidarity and reciprocity across society and constructing new cultural norms and practices in the process. In this sense, culture is a core domain of decommodification and it is not therefore a purely material process (see Bärnthaler 2024).

Making sense of the scope and heterogeneity of decommodification is a huge conceptual and analytical challenge. The typology presented below responds to this and supports granular, contextual analysis of decommodification in its multiple forms (see Table 2).[3] The boundaries between the three types of decommodification – *intervening, limiting, overcoming* – are not fixed and the examples listed in the table are illustrative of existing processes. The framework is unashamedly expansive. A wide lens is required to capture the multiple types of decommodification that occur through and outside

Table 2. Typology of decommodification.

Type	Main organising institution	Existing examples
Intervening	States; supranational institutions.	Trade protection; minimum wages; fixed exchange rates; rent controls; energy price caps; capital controls; central banking.
Limiting	States; non-governmental organisations; charities; trade unions; communal organisations.	Unemployment benefits; universal basic income; pensions; solidarity wages; agricultural subsidies; food banks; rotating saving and loan schemes; housing benefits; food stamps; cash transfers; job guarantee schemes.
Overcoming	States; trade unions; social movements; worker collectives; communal organisations; autonomous governments.	Worker-owned factories; social housing; cooperatives; universal basic services; public parks; communal land; redistributive land reform; food sovereignty; squatting; public drinking fountains; reciprocal labour practices; community energy provisioning; public monetary systems; mining bans.

Source: My own elaboration.

the state and to imagine new forms. Understanding the relationship between (de) commodification and other capitalist processes and structures is a key part of this exercise. Typologising decommodification facilitates this task and offers a way of 'cutting-in' to the issue with greater precision (Peck 2024).

Before moving on to discuss this framework in more depth, some important conceptual clarifications are required. The term decommodification might suggest the removal of commodification, like decaffeination removes caffeine from coffee. However, as noted above and below, while decommodification can eliminate commodification, it usually captures an intermediary state between two extremes. Thus, the term is generally employed in this theoretical framework to denote the reduction of commodification so that it moves along the spectrum away from self-regulation, implying that the forms and effects of commodification are modified through the decommodification process. Yet, as noted above, it is not reduced to the role of simply altering and limiting commodification. The framework, therefore, includes things that have not been commodified.[4] For example, prohibiting the extraction of oil is deemed decommodification, even though the oil has never been commodified. In this case, it is located at the extreme end of the decommodification spectrum. Nonetheless, while the oil is decommodified, commodification remains a latent possibility. Preventing multinational corporations or state-owned enterprises from commodifying it requires considerable effort and organisation. A change of law or weakening of organisation might open the door to commodification. Thus, decommodification is conceptualised in relation to commodification and not as a discrete, isolated process. In this sense, decommodification entails the reduction, reversal or prevention of commodification. With this in mind, I will now explain the three main types of decommodification using generic examples to illustrate key conceptual points.

Intervening involves directly regulating commodification through direct intervention in capitalist markets and commodification processes. Decommodification of this form generally requires the bureaucratic and political power of state or supranational institutions and largely centres on market prices. Minimum wages, for example, implicitly or explicitly acknowledge that the lowest price for labour power cannot be set purely by market forces and corporate power. The policy is collective rather than individual, indicating

decommodification's capacity to challenge commodification's individualising tendencies and build solidarity. In the context of the minimum wage, labour power remains firmly commodified, but the degree of decommodification varies markedly from one social and historical setting to another. Trade unions often play a key role in setting and enforcing minimum wage regulation; thus, the process is not solely institutionalised through the state. Significantly, intervening forms of decommodification might provide vital social support while being environmentally destructive. Energy price caps, for example, can reduce poverty while supporting the consumption of fossil-fuel generated energy, as is the case in many oil and gas producing countries. Some intervening forms of decommodification are implemented at the subnational level – e.g. rent controls – which indicates the importance of incorporating scalar and spatial dimensions into decommodification analysis.

Limiting, the second type of decommodification, relates to supplementary mechanisms and institutions that reduce exposure to commodification and potentially create alternatives. Such forms of decommodification are connected to market prices but are not directly orientated towards altering them. Food banks, for instance, provide people who are unable to purchase sufficient food in capitalist markets with food at subsidised or zero cost. This is achieved without having a significant impact on market prices or seriously undermining capitalist relations, processes, and structures. Indeed, as the critical literature on food banks has shown (e.g. Lindenbaum 2016), they can support and legitimise the giant multi-national corporations that dominate agri-food markets. Hence, food banks can simultaneously reduce and support commodification. This is true of some of the other limiting forms of decommodification. Universal basic income, for example, reduces worker dependence on labour markets, but it can also promote individual consumption in capitalist markets and environmentally destructive modes of living (Gough 2019, Brand *et al.* 2020, Diniz Nogueira and Cruz-Martinez and 2025). Capitalist class power is one important factor that influences this. Unemployment benefits, for instance, limit the dislocating effects of labour commodification but they are generally designed to ensure firms have a steady flow of living and disciplined workers to employ. Thus, they usually support rather than undermine commodification and accumulation over the long run (see also Konshoj 2023). Meanwhile, cash transfers explicitly support consumption in capitalist markets and are also used to contain social protest and reduce demands for more radical forms of decommodification. Hence, while decommodification can reconfigure or equalise class power, as Selwyn (2021a, 2021b) notes, it can also reinforce existing class relations (see also Esping-Andersen 1990). Nonetheless, limiting types of decommodification are not reduced to this passive role and have the potential to alter class relations, lower inequality, and challenge capitalist logics, especially when combined with other forms of decommodification. Moreover, limiting decommodification occurs at a greater variety of scales and involves a wider range of organising institutions than intervening forms, which creates more space for diversity and experimentation.

Overcoming, the third type of decommodification involves defending, maintaining, and creating mechanisms, institutions, and practices that avert, subvert or reverse commodification.[5] This type of decommodification has the capacity to go further than the intervening and limiting forms by transcending or eliminating capitalist markets altogether. In doing so, it can also alter or transform property relations (see Gerber and Gerber 2017). It is here that decommodification has the greatest potential to reduce or reverse the

domination of market value. Social housing, for example, enables individuals and families to access housing outside of capitalist markets, and market prices cease to be the ultimate arbiter of the distribution and value of housing. Social housing can be allocated based on need rather than income, which has the potential to reduce the massive environmental impacts of commodified housing (Bärnthaler and Gough 2023, Novy *et al.* 2024). The intrinsic and variable dimensions of fictitious commodities outlined in the previous section provide insights into the shifting politics of this process. For instance, low prices and cheap finance might generate widespread support for commodified private housing in some social and historical settings but changes in market and economic conditions, which are linked to the intrinsic properties of nature as commodity, might increase demand for social or communal housing in others. Thus, the meanings, functions and values of housing change over time and this can be exploited for progressive socio-ecological and political ends. The same is true of water. For example, public drinking water fountains have taken on new meanings and functions in the context of mass bottled water consumption, environmental pollution and climate change, creating new opportunities to distribute water for free outside capitalist markets.

Other forms of overcoming decommodification penetrate deeper by directly altering relations and structures of production. For instance, worker-owned factories decommodify labour by prioritising the use value of labour power, giving workers control over the means of production, and enabling them to take collective investment and planning decisions. Similarly, food sovereignty seeks to decommodify food by expanding family, community and cooperative agriculture and giving farmers more control over the production and distribution process, including which crops to cultivate, which seeds and inputs to use, and how and where to distribute the food. Thus, as previously noted, decommodifying food can also decommodify labour, indicating synergies between fictitious commodities (Vitale and Sivini 2017, Selwyn 2021a). In these domains, we more clearly see the capacity of decommodification to challenge and reconfigure class power and relations (Selwyn 2021a). However, while this form of decommodification has the most radical potential, it can still support commodification. For instance, community water systems might decommodify water while supporting capitalist agriculture. In this case, water is not fully decommodified as it is still ultimately put to the service of profit-making and generating market value. Irrigating land through communal water systems can also inflate land prices and stimulate land market activity. Hence, decommodification sometimes has unintended commodifying consequences. If the ultimate goal of decommodification is 'building and enlarging the zone of social life where capital is not allowed' (Huber 2019), critical attention must be paid to these complexities and contradictions (see also Gerber and Gerber 2017). Nonetheless, many forms of overcoming types of decommodification directly challenge or restrict commodification and accumulation, and this helps explain why capitalist states tend to avoid or undermine them, especially in the context of neoliberal capitalism. Consequently, non-state institutions and organisations are generally more prevalent in this domain.

The three categories of decommodification included in this typology therefore have distinct qualities and logics. But a combination of all three is necessary for transformative change at the systemic level. For example, food sovereignty (*overcoming*) would require a raft of supporting decommodification processes to transform agri-food systems, including trade protection (*intervening*), and agricultural subsidies (*limiting*). Redistributive land

reform and the transformation of property relations would also be essential. While this typology supports the close, contextual analysis of distinct forms of decommodification, it is therefore important to consider the broader *decommodification architectures* in which they operate.

Decommodifying all the way down

Situating all of this within evolving structures and relations of production is crucial, especially for thinking about the place of decommodification in socioecological transformations. Decommodification is linked to production as well as exchange and this has important implications for thinking about progressive routes through and beyond capitalism (Goodwin 2024, see also Bärnthaler and Gough 2023). Creating the conditions for transformations that minimise or transcend the socially and environmentally destructive tendencies of capitalism requires decommodification processes and architectures that support the orientation of production toward use rather than market values. Coming back to food banks, they generally simply reallocate food produced for the capitalist market i.e. to generate market value. Distributing them for free or at subsidised prices gives them decommodifying capacity, bringing vital support to individuals and communities and building relations of care and solidarity. However, if food banks controlled food production, their decommodifying power would be significantly enhanced. Food production could be more clearly orientated toward use values and the producers, distributors and consumers involved in the process would have more influence over what food to produce and how to produce and distribute it according to prevailing ecological conditions. Decommodified community restaurants could be a key part of this process, establishing 'regenerative hubs for communities battered by austerity, poverty, and rampant individualism' (Selwyn 2021b, p. 242). Such a shift would imply food banks moving from the limiting to the overcoming category and, most likely, being renamed in the process. Notably, reorientating production to use values through decommodification can also be achieved without direct control over production. State agencies or local governments might, for example, mandate that free school meals only use ingredients produced by local, small-scale agroecological producers, thus providing them with the potential to expand production, reduce the circulation of highly commodified food, and limit the environmental impact of capitalist food and agriculture.

Working through the connections between decommodification, production and value is important for other core pillars of progressive socioecological transformations. UBS, for instance, decommodify vital services by providing universal access regardless of the purchasing power of the user (Coote 2022). In doing so, they can perform crucial socioecological functions, including strengthening sustainability and solidarity and reducing inequality and poverty (Gough 2019). Yet, to understand their transformative potential, more critical attention must be paid to the production processes behind the services and the degree to which they support the decommodification of fictitious commodities. Imagine two different forms of UBS. The first provides services for free, but is based on the use of materials, technology and infrastructure that are produced for profit making and capital accumulation and highly commodified forms of labour power. The second also provides services for free but is rooted in the use of materials, technology and infrastructure that are produced primarily for use values rather than market value and largely

decommodified forms of labour, such as job guarantee schemes and reciprocal labour practices. Both achieve the same result – services are provided universally independent of the ability to pay – but the second type implies a more radical transformation as it cuts into production, decommodifies labour, and challenges the subjugation of use to market values all the way down. In this sense, decommodification becomes a fundamental element of the transformation process rather than merely a desired outcome or normative goal. Conceptualising (de) commodification as a gradational, dialectical process is helpful as it highlights the multiple degrees and combinations of (de) commodification across different services.

This example demonstrates the importance of reconfiguring and overcoming the disembedded economy through socioecological transformation. Hence, boundary struggles are a fundamental part of the transformation process, as Fraser (2022) argues. Escalating decommodification while leaving decision making over the bulk of production in the hands of a small number of individuals and firms will do little to tackle the climate emergency and environmental crisis (Benanav 2020, Hickel 2023a, 2023b). Decommodification must therefore be orientated towards democratising the economy and bringing it under social and political control, which implies transcending the disembedded economy.

Decommodification, (post) colonialism, and peripheral capitalism

This already challenging political task is further complicated by the uneven historical development of capitalism and legacies and ongoing conditions of colonialism. Due to the unequal structures and relations that have emerged through this historical process, decommodification takes distinct forms and generates diverse effects across the centre and periphery of the world economy (Goodwin 2024). A full explanation of this is outside the scope of this article, but a few examples indicate the importance of this insight for socioecological transformations. In post-colonial and settler colonial settings, decommodification can sometimes operate as a form of dispossession, domination and violence, especially when organised through the state, which might be experienced as a colonising force by some sectors of society. For example, national parks can restrict Indigenous access to land while decommodified housing delivered through the state can undermine collective Indigenous practices. The public control of water can also challenge communal water organisations, causing intense political conflicts. In each case, vernacular socioecological practices and knowledges can be undermined through state-centric forms of decommodification.

The general traits of peripheral capitalism – e.g. widespread labour informality, limited fiscal capacity, subordinate trade and financial relations – further complicate decommodification in these settings. For instance, the degree of labour decommodification produced through truncated welfare regimes in the periphery is significantly below the level achieved in the capitalist core, especially in Europe. Similarly, the coverage and quality of public services are also generally much lower. Public transport, for example, is typically far less extensive, while marginalised sectors of society often only have limited access to electricity. The challenge of providing universal access to vital services and decommodifying the fundamentals of everyday life is even more daunting in these settings, suggesting alternative approaches are required. Hence, it is crucial not to project decommodification from the centre on to the periphery and ensure

decommodification is tailored to the task and context. In doing so, it is important to recognise that the structures and conditions of peripheral capitalism bring opportunities as well as challenges. The restricted decommodifying capacity of peripheral states creates more room for non-state actors and more space for experimentation and creativity. For example, as previously noted, decommodification is a fundamental pillar of *buen vivir*, a vernacular form of socioecological transformation that emerged in Latin America in the wake of neoliberal capitalism (Unceta 2014, Acosta 2015). In this context, communal institutions become more prominent in the delivery of decommodification while intrinsic values of nature are fundamental to the transformation process. New state forms have also emerged in this context, including the plurinational state, which seeks to transcend liberal state institutions and has the potential to support the deepening of decommodification, especially if connected to the transformations of productive structures and property relations.

Recognising decommodification takes distinct forms and generates diverse effects across the centre and periphery of the capitalist world economy is therefore fundamental to understanding socioecological transformations on a global scale.

Conclusion: Building decommodified futures across the centre and periphery

Decommodification is widely considered a central pillar of progressive socioecological transformations, but it has been insufficiently problematised and theorised. I have attempted to overcome this by elaborating a new theoretical framework that illustrates its limits and contradictions while also showcasing its progressive and radical potential. This framework is based on a dialectical, gradational reading of (de)commodification – commodification and decommodification are located on a spectrum, with the self-regulation of commodification at one end and the absence of commodification at the other. Commodification is conceptualised as the subjugation of use value to market value and the suppression of intrinsic values of nature, while decommodification is understood as the reduction, reversal or prevention of this process. However, decommodification is contradictory as it sometimes supports commodification. It can also bolster reactionary responses to environmental crises and is not therefore intrinsically progressive. Fictitious commodities – nature, labour, money – are central to this framework, while a select range of services and activities that perform vital social functions and are problematic when treated as commodities, such as education and transport, is also included. This *fictitious commodity plus* approach provides a more expansive framework, which is necessary to capture the multiple roles that decommodification performs in socioecological transformations today. I have argued that the relationship between decommodification, production and value is central to this process, and the three-way decommodification typology I have presented helps map and analyse these linkages.

By elaborating a novel theoretical framework to analyse and strategise the roles of decommodification in socioecological transformations, this article creates a new research agenda for political economy and environmental politics. Here, I will highlight two of several areas that warrant further investigation. The first relates to the roles of decommodification in socioecological transformations in the periphery of the capitalist world economy. I have hinted at the different forms that decommodification takes in these

contexts and the existing scholarship provides further insight (Unceta 2014, Acosta 2015, Tornel and Dunlap 2025, Zbyszewska and Maximo 2025). But more detailed empirical research is required to understand it at a more granular level and decentre it from its Eurocentric roots. Such research is also vital to reveal the connections between (de)commodification across the centre and periphery of the world economy and identify progressive synergies between countries and regions. For example, what forms of decommodification in the centre support decommodification in the periphery (and vice versa)? The generic examples of alternative approaches to UBS sketched above indicate the importance of this issue. The first might decommodify basic services and improve socioecological conditions in the core while intensifying the commodification of nature and labour in the periphery, whereas the second might create a virtuous cycle of decommodification and socioecological rejuvenation across the centre and periphery, laying the foundations for more profound transformations.

The second research theme relates to confronting the allure of commodification and building popular support for progressive decommodification across the centre and periphery. The current dominant trajectory is towards the amplification of commodification and the selective use of decommodification to defend corporate and oligarchic interests and contain social unrest. Capitalist class power is one crucial factor driving this process and the coercive and repressive capacity of the state is increasingly being harnessed to intensify commodification at whatever cost. Yet commodification cuts much deeper into society and, globally, people's hopes and dreams have become more tightly enmeshed into capitalist markets during neoliberal capitalism. In this context, convincing a sufficient sector of society to embrace progressive forms of decommodification to overcome the environmental crisis and construct more equal, sustainable, and just societies is a huge political challenge (Bärnthaler 2024, Savini 2025). Conceptualising (de) commodification as a dialectical, gradational process, which is both cultural and material, supports such efforts. While it is hard to imagine a revolutionary break between a 'commodified' and 'decommodified' society, it is possible to realise the gradual expansion of forms of decommodification that push in this direction (Burawoy 2020). Nonetheless, understanding how differences between groups and classes are reconciled and cultural practices and beliefs are reconfigured to build sufficiently powerful movements to effect transformative change is an urgent task, especially as reactionary responses to the climate emergency and environmental crisis continue to strengthen and multiply.

Notes

1. I use the term 'progressive' to refer to forms of socioecological transformation that explicitly seek to create more equal, inclusive, and just societies within and beyond capitalism. Authors who have referred to decommodification in this context include Acosta (2015), Unceta (2014), Riofrancos *et al.* (2018), Brand *et al.* (2020), Parrique (2019), Ajl (2021), Huber (2019, 2024), Fitzpatrick *et al.* (2022, 2025), Fraser (2022), Hickel (2020, 2023b), Selwyn (2021a, 2021b), Coote (2022), Mastini *et al.* (2021), Barnthaler and Gough (2023), and Barnthaler (2024).
2. Note, Polanyi (1944/2001) does not use the term 'decommodification'. The concept is thus derived from his work. See Goodwin (2018, 2022, 2024) for a fuller explanation of how I have gone about this.
3. For applications, discussions, and extensions of this framework see Barnthaler *et al.* (2023), Garcia Fernandez (2021), Horowitz (2023), and Arnold (2024).

4. For an alternative perspective on this point, see Gerber and Gerber (2017).
5. I have previously referred to this type of decommodification as 'preventing/reversing' (Goodwin 2018, 2022, 2024). The term 'overcoming' seems to capture these processes more neatly, even if it should not be taken too literally, as this section stresses.

Acknowledgements

This article benefitted greatly from an inspiring workshop – 'Socioecological Challenges and Transformations: A Multidimensional Approach to Extractivism, Waste, and Pollution' – at Exeter University on 26–27 September 2024. Special thanks to Julie Dayot and Stefano Pascucci for inviting me to talk and to the participants for illuminating conversations and insightful comments. This built on earlier feedback I received from my colleagues at POLIS, University of Leeds following a presentation I gave on this topic in March 2024. I am also indebted to Richard Bärnthaler and Richard Sandbrook for their comments on early drafts of this article and Jan Selby for his help toward the end of the writing process. Two anonymous *New Political Economy* reviewers helped me make significant improvements to the manuscript, and I am very grateful for their critical engagement with my work. Any errors and omissions are my own.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Geoff Goodwin is a Lecturer in Global Political Economy at the University of Leeds. His research interests include water, land, infrastructure, and socioecological change, and he primarily conducts research in Ecuador, Colombia, and England.

References

Acosta, A., 2015. El buen vivir como alternativa al desarrollo Algunas reflexiones económicas y no tan económicas. *Política y sociedad*, 52 (2), 299–330.

Ajl, M., 2021. *People's green new deal*. London: Pluto Press.

Arnold, D., 2024. Gramsci, Polanyi and the labor politics of social protection. *Journal of labor and society*, 27 (3), 441–462.

Bakker, K., 2004. *An uncooperative commodity: privatizing water in England and Wales*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bakker, K., 2007. The "commons" versus the "commodity": alter-globalization, anti-privatization and the human right to water in the global south. *Antipode*, 39 (3), 430–55.

Bärnthaler, R., *et al*., 2023. A Polanyi-inspired perspective on social-ecological transformations of cities. *Journal of urban affairs*, 45 (2), 117–41.

Bärnthaler, R., 2024. Problematising degrowth strategising: On the role of compromise, material interests, and coercion. *Ecological economics*, 223, 1–11.

Bärnthaler, R., and Gough, I., 2023. Provisioning for sufficiency: envisaging production corridors. *Sustainability: science, policy and practice*, 19 (1), 1–17.

Benanav, A., 2020. *Automation and the future of work*. London and New York: Verso.

Benanav, A., 2025. Beyond capitalism - 1. *New left review*, 153, 65–128.

Brand, U., *et al*., 2020. Overcoming neoliberal globalization: socio-ecological transformation from a Polanyian perspective and beyond. *Globalizations*, 17 (1), 161–76.

Burawoy, M., 2020. A tale of two Marxisms – remembering Erik Olin Wright: 1947–2019. *New left review*, 121, 67–98.

Cantillon, S., *et al*., 2023. *Feminist political economy: A global perspective*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Castree, N., 2003. Commodifying what nature? *Progress in human geography*, 27 (3), 273–97.
Christophers, B., 2024. *The price is wrong: Why capitalism won't save the planet*. London: Verso.
Coote, A., 2022. Towards a sustainable welfare state: The role of universal basic services. *Social policy and society*, 21 (3), 473–83.
Dale, G., 2016. *Reconstructing Karl Polanyi*. London: Pluto Press.
Diniz Nogueira, L.D., and Cruz-Martinez, G., 2025. Universal basic income from the 'Buen Vivir' decolonial perspective. *Alternautas*, 12 (1), 32–60.
Esping-Andersen, G., 1990. *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Fitzpatrick, N., *et al*., 2022. Exploring degrowth policy proposals: A systematic mapping with thematic synthesis. *Journal of cleaner production*, 365, 1–19.
Fitzpatrick, N., *et al*., 2025. Exploring the degrowth movement: A survey of conceptualisations, strategies, and tactics. *Energy research and social science*, 124, 1–13.
Fraser, N., 2022. *Cannibal capitalism*. London: Verso.
Garcia Fernández, R., 2021. South America in the twenty-first century: twenty years on a roller coaster. *Journal of economic issues*, 55 (2), 306–17.
Gemici, K., 2015. The neoclassical origins of Polanyi's self-regulating market. *Sociological theory*, 33 (2), 125–47.
Gerber, J.D., and Gerber, J.F., 2017. Decommodification as a foundation for ecological economics. *Ecological economics*, 131, 551–5.
Goodwin, G., 2018. Rethinking the double movement: expanding the frontiers of Polanyian analysis in the Global South. *Development and change*, 49 (5), 1268–1290.
Goodwin, G., 2021. Fictitious commodification and agrarian change: indigenous peoples and land markets in Highland Ecuador. *Journal of agrarian change*, 21 (1), 3–24.
Goodwin, G, 2022. Double movements and disembedded economies: a response to Richard Sandbrook. *Development and change*, 53 (3), 676–702.
Goodwin, G., 2024. Uneven decommodification geographies: exploring variation across the centre and periphery. *EPA: Economy and space*, 56 (3), 883–904.
Goodwin, G. 2025. Radical (re) readings of Polanyi: Splitting hairs and building bridges. *Globalizations*, 1–12 https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2025.2456401
Gough, I., 2019. Universal basic services: a theoretical and moral framework. *The political quarterly*, 90 (3), 534–542.
Gudynas, E., 2019. Value, growth, development: south American lessons for a new ecopolitics. *Capitalism, nature, socialism*, 30 (2), 234–43.
Hermann, C., 2021. *The critique of commodification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hickel, J., 2020. *Less is more: How degrowth will save the world*. London: Penguin.
Hickel, J. 2023a. Universal basic services: the power of decommodifying survival. Jason Hickel Blog. 4 August 2023.
Hickel, J. 2023b. The double objective of democratic ecosocialism. *Monthly Review*, 1 September 2023.
Horowitz, L.S., 2023. The double movement and the triple-helix: divestment, decommodification, and the Dakota access pipeline. *Environment and planning A: economy and space*, 55, 1337–1354.
Huber, M., 2019. Ecological politics for the working class. *Catalyst*, 3 (1). https://catalyst-journal.com/2019/07/ecological-politics-for-the-working-class.
Huber, M. 2024. For a green transition, decommodify electricity. *Jacobin*. 23 May 2024.
Konshoj, K., 2023. Social policy in a future of degrowth? challenges for decommodification, commoning and public support. *Humanities and social sciences communications*, 850 (10), 1–11.
Lindenbaum, J., 2016. Countermovement, neoliberal platoon, or Re-gifting depot? understanding decommodification in US food banks. *Antipode*, 48 (2), 375–92.
Mastini, R., *et al*., 2021. A green new deal without growth? *Ecological economics*, 179, 1–9.
Novy, A., 2022. The political trilemma of contemporary social-ecological transformation – lessons from Karl Polanyi's The Great Transformation. *Globalizations*, 19 (1), 59–80.

Novy, A., *et al*., 2024. Greening Red Vienna: lessons for social-ecological housing provision. *Sustainability: science, practice and policy*, 20 (1). https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2024.2312674
Parrique, T. 2019. *The political economy of degrowth*. Economics and Finance. Université Clermont Auvergne.
Peck, J., 2024. A place to start. *Environment and planning A: economy and space*, 56 (5), 1569–76.
Pirani, S. 2021. How energy was commodified, and how it could be decommodified. *People and Nature*, November 2021.
Polanyi, K., 1944/2001. *The great transformation: the political and economic origins of our time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
Polanyi, K., 1957. Aristotle discovers the economy. In: K. Polanyi, C.M. Arensberg, and H.W. Pearson, eds. *Trade and market in the early empires*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 64–94.
Riofrancos, T., *et al*. 2018. Ecosocialism or bust. *Jacobin*. 20 April 2018.
Savini, F., 2025. Strategic planning for degrowth: what, who, how. *Planning theory*, 24 (2), 141–162.
Selwyn, B., 2021a. A green new deal for agriculture: for, within, or against capitalism? *The journal of peasant studies*, 48 (4), 778–806.
Selwyn, B., 2021b. Community restaurants: decommodifying food as socialist strategy. *Socialist register*, 57 (1), 1–12.
Selwyn, B., and Miyamura, S., 2014. Class struggle or embedded markets? Marx, Polanyi and the meanings and possibilities of social transformation. *New political economy*, 19 (5), 639–61.
Tjarks, D. 2025. Great urban transformations. Exploring 'Offensive Countermovements' in Polanyi's Instituted Economy. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, early view.
Tornel, C., and Dunlap, A. 2025. Towards a pluriverse of transitions: an editorial introduction to anti-colonial and insurrectional energy transformations. *Human Geography*, early view.
Unceta, K., 2014. Poscrecimiento, desmercantilización y buen vivir. *Nueva sociedad*, 252, 136–52.
Vitale, A., and Sivini, S., 2017. Return to the land: decommodification of local foods in south Italy. In: K. Polanyi, ed. *Research in rural sociology and development*. Leeds: Emerald Publishing Limited, 265–81.
Zbyszewska, A., and Maximo, F., 2025. Narratives of sustainable work in mining-affected communities: gleaning a decolonial concept. *International labour review*, 164 (1), 1–20.