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POSTGROWTH FUTURE(S): new voices, novel visions

POST – GROWTH FUTURE(S): NEW VOICES, NOVEL VISIONS

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CONTENT

FOREWORD

The age of growth is behind us, but hardly anybody dares to admit it. Our economies cannot continue down that path, unless they wish to continue the self-destructive race to the bottom. With its single-minded orientation on excessive growth, our economic system not only goes beyond planetary boundaries and ecological limits but continues to increase social inequalities and undermine conditions for wellbeing of generations to come. Yet, the hypnotic repetitiveness of the mantra that *there is no alternative to growth* and that technology alone will help us reach carbon neutrality, along with pretending that redistribution is not a key problem, continues to spread among policy makers in Brussels and European capitals. This denial is irresponsible and dangerous, wasting our precious time to make urgent and necessary policy shifts toward systemic change and against ecological breakdown. A growing body of research provides evidence that the current economic system cannot create conditions for wellbeing of our societies without transforming its very substance. On the contrary, the promises of so-called "green growth" appear to be impossible and based only on wishful thinking of policymakers keeping up "business as usual". Furthermore, voters and citizens across Europe and in the US increasingly state that their key concern is quality of life and not growth itself. Painting a growth-oriented economic model green – without tackling redistribution and social inequalities, as was largely done by the European Green Deal – is a falsification of reality for which we are already paying a high price.

In this publication, we say it loud and clear: growth is past tense. We need to engage now, without delay, in reimagining prosperity and wellbeing beyond growth. Post-growth thinking has been present in our societies for at least half a century but has waited for a very long time to enter institutional politics. While scientists, scholars and activists have been addressing the

need for a post-growth approach – and action! – since the early '70s, it has mainly been the acknowledgement of climate crisis and growing social inequalities that has accelerated it; still, however, without necessary systemic shifts. This slow unfolding and opening of the debate within spheres of policy and political action has been burdened all along the way with significant hesitation or outright reluctance from political actors at national and EU level. Yet, the long journey from the margines to the political realm is gradually ending. Along with climate emergencies and their devastating impacts across the Old continent, post-growth thinking is, despite growing geopolitical uncertainties, taking a more central stage, demanding a radical transformation of our patterns of production, resource distribution and social inequalities.

With these developments we entered 2023, a year that marked if not a breakthrough, then a key milestone in the trajectory of international post-growth. The *Beyond Growth* conference organised in May 2023 in Brussels by the European Parliament and many partners from academia, civil society movements and trade unions across Europe drew not only thousands of participants, but also the attention of European institutions. A few months later, the 9th International Degrowth Conference entitled *Planet, People, Care – It Spells Degrowth!* and held in Zagreb, on the European semi-periphery, with an outstanding number of young people and more than a hundred academic sessions, was instrumental in both localising and globalising these debates and bringing them closer to policy and politics.

We used these two major events in 2023 as an opportunity to reach out to new changemakers engaged in post-growth thinking. The Institute for Political Ecology, Green European Foundation and Heinrich Böll Stiftung – all three organising or taking part in both events - have joined forces to share visions and voices of this new generation, which, in many ways, can easily think of the future beyond growth. A future that is just around the corner - if we take a sober and responsible stand regarding our present wellbeing and the wellbeing of future generations. Acknowledging that there is a new, upcoming generation of thinkers, politicians and activists who easily identify with the concept of post-growth, we invited them to share their insights and ideas about imagining our lives beyond growth. Having in mind that post-growth thinking has already been marked and framed by seasoned scholars, activists and practitioners, we offered a younger generation from various corners of Europe space to share their insights and visions. Translating post-growth ideas into policies, practices and actions will hopefully remain their life's work.

Hereby we present a collection of papers, essays and articles organised in three sections: vision, policy and politics, aware that there are still some gaps between these three dimensions.

In the first section, authors based in Italy, Sweden, Czech Republic and Serbia share their visions of life beyond growth, basing their imagining on philosophy of hope, potential for emancipation and future-proof policy-making that surpasses the extractivism of our current economic model. Section two brings us the excitement of discovering how our visions and ideas could be translated into policies. Contributions from authors based in Belgium, Spain and Germany which connect ideas of post-growth with agroecology, resource use, social welfare and intriguing complexity of policy-making at the EU level prove that post-growth thinking is entering the policy sphere. In the third section, focused on the political realm, authors based in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium share their views on political change induced by post-growth thinking, related to the care sector and municipal level, but also transforming governance models and political institutions.

With this collection we wish to present new voices and novel visions as the driving force of systemic change inspired by post-growth thinking. Opinions and views collected in the publication arrive from various corners of Europe and from different fields of action. That gives us hope that the seeds of post-growth thinking, while still fragile and young, are planted across diverse sectors through which they will be able to make a difference and necessary shifts. We wholeheartedly thank all authors for their commitment to join us on this path, hoping that these contributions will spark new debates and lead to new important milestones in which post-growth becomes our reality.

We also want to acknowledge the important individual efforts without which this publication would not have seen the light of day. We thank Lana Pukanić from IPE for her thorough and meticulous editorial work on the publication, Sien Hasker from GEF for her persistent support and collaborative spirit, and Annette Kraus from HBS Berlin office for her profound diplomatic skills, benevolence and patience. Big thanks also goes to IPE's Tina Tešija for her conscientious care about finances and to *Klasja Zita & Andrea* for their awesome work on the publication design.

On behalf of the publishers:

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01

VISION

WHERE IS HOPE?

Oxana Lopatina

Imagine we have abandoned the fantasy of infinite economic growth and profit accumulation, and have left behind the economy of exploitation, destruction and alienation. Imagine we have built a better, more sustainable, equitable and caring socioeconomic system. How would we feel in such a different world? Hopefully, more connected, safer, freer, more meaningful, more playful. In a word, different from how most of us feel under capitalism.

Most likely, we would also think differently — both about simple and complex things. Would food, home, clothing, relations, mobility, health, money have the same meanings in our lives as they do in our capitalist today? For example, could time appear to be the same if there were no more pressure of producing and delivering non-stop, if communication did not have to happen as fast, or we did not have to or could not anymore get from one place to another so quick? Probably, not, since how we interact with and make sense of each other, ourselves, the material and immaterial reality around us today happens via and is facilitated by the logic and practices of capitalism. It would not be possible to bring our current mentality shaped by capitalism and pursuit of growth into a post-growth world. Neither would it make sense or be useful. A capitalist mentality would not survive there, and neither would we if we stick with it. But how can we move from our current way of thinking shaped by the capitalist reality with its speed, politics, technology, values and very particular relationality to a completely different one? Degrowth calls for unthinking capitalism and its power, or for decolonising our imaginary (there is disagreement on the appropriateness of using the word 'decolonisation' in such a sense; for critique of the term 'decolonisation of the imaginary', see, for example, Deschner & Hurst, 2018). For the purpose of deconstructing the idea of capitalism as a viable system, degrowth has been challenging the myths capitalism and capitalistic growth are based on, such as the possibility of infinite growth on a finite planet, the suitability of GDP growth as a measure of improving wellbeing and the centrality of economics in social functioning. The fact that in the past few years the number of publications and debates related to degrowth arguments has grown significantly, including in spaces dominated by mainstream economic thinking, shows that the degrowth movement has been quite successful at overturning the dominant economic narratives and spreading a post-growth utopian vision.

Can we say though that this effort made by degrowth at decolonising the imaginary has been sufficient? In quantitative terms, of course, the degrowth narrative has not reached everyone and more work needs to be done at communicating further that growth-sustained capitalism is not feasible in the long run and that neither is it desirable. And in qualitative terms? Namely, does the degrowth effort of decolonising the imaginary go deep enough?

At the 9th International degrowth conference in Zagreb, together with Viviana Asara I conducted a survey aiming to look at how the idea of 'a good life for all', which is a common slogan of the degrowth utopia, is understood within the degrowth community. One of the questions was: *How likely is it that a good life for all as per the degrowth vision will be achieved?* The respondents could choose among five options: very unlikely, somewhat unlikely, don't know, somewhat likely and very likely. To our surprise, only the minority (less than 25%) of the respondents thought that a good life for all as per the degrowth vision can be achieved.

These results run at odds with the story degrowth is aiming to tell. They suggest that, while degrowth advocates for unthinking and undoing capitalism, members of the degrowth community themselves do not seem to be convinced that realising its utopian vision of a better world is possible. This begs a number of questions, including: What is the power of utopia without hope? And specifically, what is the power of degrowth as a movement, utopia and political project if there is no belief in its feasibility?

In the following paragraphs, I would like to reflect on how in the case of degrowth this is more than a question of blind belief in relation to the unknownness of future. The lack of belief and hope in a system change-oriented community such as the degrowth movement is a deeply political matter and should be taken seriously as an indication of an important issue. This issue, in my opinion, is the Western-centrism of degrowth. And the remedy for its Western-centrism, as well as the identified hopelessness, is one — decolonising the movement and its imaginary.

Before delving into the argument and as an introduction to it, I would like to elaborate on the choice of the term Western-centrism over the more common eurocentrism. While also problematic and limited as a term, the former appears more preferable to me in this case as, instead of assuming the Western-European reality as representative of all of Europe, it allows problematising the non-homogeneity of Europe (and this way maybe also helping to see that some answers could be found closer than we tend to think). As an Eastern-European, I find that the term eurocentrism, on the other hand, more often than not excludes and silences Eastern-European experiences.

A number of decolonial thinkers have pointed out the tendency of Western thought to universalise the European/Western reality and judge the entire variety of human experiences through the Western-centric lens (which often comes with a white, male, well-off lens as well) (see, for example, Burkhart, 2019). This means that in the Western eyes, even benevolent ones, the Western reality tends to appear as representative of the ultimate truth about human experiences and human condition in general. I argue that the same process of universalising the Western-European experience takes place within degrowth, and it is this Western-centrism and the inability to take on a broader, ideally global, perspective that lies at the root of the degrowthers' lack of belief and hope.

There is this popular quote by Frederic Jameson: "It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism". I invite you to do a small thought experiment. First imagine yourself in the centre of a big European city full of crowded shops, banks, offices, people in suits. Think of that quote. Probably, it will sound very convincing. And now imagine you are in a completely different place, for example, a remote village (somewhere in Eastern Europe, for example) where people do not have gas and rely on their plots of land and fishing for sustenance. Think again of that quote. Does it sound the same? Does it have the same power? I bet it does not.

UNDOING AND
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What we think is possible is shaped by what we know and see around us. If the only thing we have known is capitalism and the Western standard of development, then imagining something completely different seems like an almost impossible task. While today capitalism has reached almost every corner of the planet, shaping the lives of most people, it would be a stretch to say that it is equally present everywhere. Not everyone lives in the comfort of a Western-European city, even in a Western-European city. To put it differently, not everyone benefits from capitalism the same way. Such ideas as simple living, frugality and self-limitation — that degrowth promotes and that to many Westerners make it sound like a call to return back to the caves — is actually common sense and everyday reality to the majority of the people living on this planet. Mind that this is not meant to suggest simplistic interpretations as if degrowth has already been achieved and we do not need to do anything; of course, the existing structures of power and resource distribution are very real and need to be challenged. The point I want to make here is that undoing and unthinking capitalism might seem like a particularly daunting task when we are looking at it through the prism of the Western, especially middle-class Western, experience.

Although ideas similar to the main precepts of degrowth have been expressed in many cultural contexts (Kothari et al., 2019), degrowth as a movement emerged in and still remains to be largely confined to Europe and predominantly Western Europe. As has been pointed out by a number of authors who have looked at degrowth through the decolonial lens (Dengler & Seebacher, 2019; Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019; Abazeri, 2022), the movement's europeanness continues to shape its agenda and the solutions it puts forward. These authors invite degrowthers to think how the movement itself reproduces coloniality. For example, Bonelli et al. (2023) suggest that the movement should build stronger alliances with movements in the majority world.

I would suggest that the decolonial work of the movement should also include more serious work on the imaginary. First of all, degrowth needs to be aware of its positionality and of the contexts and privileges that might be shaping its narratives. Second, degrowth needs to engage more with non-middle class, non-Western-European, non-urban and other imaginaries. For example, Eastern Europe could also offer interesting perspectives. Overall, having a global take that is informed by the tapestry of human experiences and ways of being and thinking can empower degrowth and help get out of the lock-in of the capitalist imaginary. For degrowth, finding hope does not need to be about convincing ourselves, it is also about recognising that the reality is not uniform and not limited to the Western ways of being and thinking. In this sense, hope is not only instrumental to achieving a more sustainable and equitable future, but is also deeply political.

So far, the task of decolonising the imaginary has been taken rather lightly in degrowth thought. 'Decolonisation of the imaginary' has been more of a buzz expression than an actual process. Of course, degrowth should continue putting forward practical solutions for the transition, but it is important not to forget that the cultural dimension of systemic change is as important as the practical one, and the latter is not possible without the former. Decolonisation of the Western imaginary should go deep. We need to look at our perception of ourselves, human life, human relations, history, time, crisis, nature, etc. And while looking at ourselves, we should not forget to also look around and see the diversity of experiences existing in the world. It is this diversity that shows that there is always more than one way forward. And, hence, there is always hope.

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OVERCOMING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY FOR EMANCIPATORY DEGROWTH FUTURES

Pierre Smith Khanna

"We cannot fight for climate and environmental justice in name only, without addressing implicit racism and sexism in practice. Exposing and challenging how hegemonic masculinity operates within the environmental movement is an important place to start."
(Chan & Curnow, 2017, p. 84)

INTRODUCTION

Of the many fields in which degrowth scholarship has engaged, critiqued or drawn inspiration from, masculinities remains an under-developed area of study (Paulson, 2017; Salleh, 2017; Hultman & Pulé, 2019; Pulé & Hultman, 2021; Smith Khanna, 2021; Eversberg & Schmelzer, 2023; Pease, forthcoming). At the same time, degrowth has long held that feminist critiques of growth and the sexual division of labour lie at the heart of any degrowth project and that, as such, any objectives sought on the degrowth horizon would be incomplete if they did not include gender equality and a thorough re-evaluation of the sexual division of labour (Demaria et al., 2013; D'Alisa et al., 2014a; Kallis et al., 2020; Schmelzer et al., 2022). Elsewhere, I have offered an explanation for this discrepancy between embracing aspects of feminist analysis while shying away from others (of which masculinities would be a part), as reflecting an unconscious fear of change by male proponents of degrowth (Smith Khanna, 2021). Here, I would like to extend this work by drawing attention to the scholarship and initiatives engaged with masculinities and

the environment which, I believe, can help us better define the post-growth futures we dream of and the pathways to achieving them.

A crucial starting point is Raewyn Connell's analysis of hegemonic masculinity (1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and her pioneering work on masculinities and environmental activism (1990). According to Connell, "Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (2005, p. 77). Hegemonic masculinity is mutable and changing across time and space, adapting to individual societies as well as to changes within those societies. As such, it is difficult to make a blanket statement as to what characteristics best define hegemonic masculinity although we might say that heterosexuality, economic success, emotional stuntedness, leadership and sexual prowess feature as some of the most prominent aspects of hegemonic masculinity in many contemporary societies (Ricciardelli et al., 2010; Pascoe, 2017).[1]

In her pioneering work on male environmental activists in Australia in the 1980s, Connell argued that the environmental movement proved to be a fertile ground for positive transformation amongst men given the characteristics of environmentalism which were at odds with hegemonic masculinity: a practice and ideology of equality; emphasis on collectivity and solidarity; an ideology of wholeness and organicism (1990). And yet, despite over six decades of environmental activism, there continues to exist a vast disparity between those most likely to care about the environment and engage in activism (women) and those who are most likely to undertake environmentally destructive behaviours and deny climate change (men) (Paulson & Boose, 2019; Anshelm & Hultman, 2014; McCright & Dunlap, 2011).

More worryingly, when men do join environmental causes, they tend to be overrepresented in positions of power, replicating the very same hierarchical, dominant and hegemonic patterns of behaviour degrowth and other emancipatory climate justice movements stand against (Chan & Curnow, 2017; Buckingham & Kulcur, 2009; MacGregor, 2010). Connell, we would do well to recall, had the foresight to posit that the ethos of the environmental movement alone would be insufficient for catalysing significant change *without the added influence and impact of feminism amongst men* (1990).[2]

This raises important questions for the degrowth movement which perceives itself to be aligned with feminism – embracing as it were anti-extractivist, anti-imperial, a variety of feminist and decolonial perspectives - while at the same time falling short on delivering the goods in practice (Smith Khanna, 2021; Eversberg & Schmelzer, 2023). Could it be that Connell's point is relevant to degrowth and that feminism hasn't yet made its presence truly felt within the movement? Whereas many have already contributed to this discussion (Barca, 2019; Najman, 2007; Gregoratti & Raphael, 2019; Bauhardt, 2014; Harcourt & Nelson, 2015; Löw, 2015; Muraca &Schmelzer, 2017; Barca et al., 2023; Perkins, 2010; Pérez Orozco & Mason-Deese, 2022; Perkins, 2019; Saave-Harnack et al., 2019; Salleh, 2017; Mehta & Harcourt, 2021; Abazeri, 2022), where are the men amongst them?[3]

Synergies and Ways Forward

It took over two decades for Connell's work to be used for empirical research in the environmental

field (Hultman, 2013) and today this research connects, resonates and also amplifies the degrowth agenda both in terms of degrowth's critique as well as its emancipatory project. In particular, it allows us to better understand the strong mainstream resistance to degrowth while outlining practical transformations that can be welded to degrowth's more structural proposals. First of all, degrowth's social, anthropological, technological and environmental critiques of economic growth are aptly embodied by the notions of industrial/ breadwinner and ecomodern masculinities proposed by Hultman and Pulé for whom such masculinities "carry the primary responsibility for humanity's global social and ecological problems"(2019, p. 42). What degrowth identifies as the hegemony of growth, these scholars describe as patterns of gendered behaviour that confer power onto men who are then unwilling to give it up.

More extreme forms of these masculinities deeply welded to the fossil-fueled growth-paradigm have been analysed by Daggett (2018, 2022) and Anshelm and Hultman (2014) whom posit climate action as existential threats to these mens' own sense of selves and to the structures and institutions they benefit from and identify with. These include ecomodern variants of hegemonic masculinity, of which Elon Musk is a prime example, and whose worldview and proposed 'solutions' to the climate crisis are unequivocally dismissed as dangerous fallacies serving only to perpetuate gender inequalities and the unabated extraction of 'inert' nature (Daggett, 2022; Hultman & Pulé, 2019).

Dismantling the hegemony of growth would thus entail dismantling those reactionary masculine identities and practices that most defend it. Or, in other words, the more we challenge hegemonic masculinity, the likelier it is people will warm to degrowth ideas. What is missing from degrowth scholarship then, is a vision for what such a project would look like, what other masculinities could take over from the hegemonic models described above. Hultman and Pulé's book (Hultman & Pulé, 2019) and anthology (Pulé & Hultman, 2021) can help us here, as well as the many other proposals grounded in contesting extractivist ontologies and foregrounding posthumanism, feminist new materialism, indigenous scholarship and queer eco-masculinities among others (though these don't directly mention degrowth see Gaard, 2022; Salleh, 2017; Mellström & Pease, 2022; Pulé & Ourkiya, 2022).

In Connell's analysis, the locus of personal change lies in renunciation of masculinist privilege/practices, and the cultivation of new qualities such as connectedness to one's emotions, and ability to express them and to care for humans and nonhumans alike (1990, pp. 467-468). This decision to move away from hegemonic masculinity by opting for *passivity* has recently been taken up by Eversberg and Schmelzer who warn against degrowth's emphasis on caring practices as being an insufficient strategy for transformation for "they do not necessarily touch on the very fundamental taboo of male, growth-oriented self-relations, namely the reality of one's own dependence and mortality" (2023, p. 11).[4]

To them, the most radical path to undoing hegemonic masculinity may well lie in "[e]xperiencing oneself as passive, as dependent, as *needy* (rather than desiring)" (2023, p. 11) precisely because it goes against the core precepts of what masculinity stands for while acknowledging an important facet common to all human existence. This would seem to point towards men taking on what have been considered more traditional 'feminine' characteristics as a viable strategy for transformation - what could also be seen as the flip-side of constructing a traitorous identity:

that is to say, once we recognise our participation in hegemonic masculinity and identify aspects of it within ourselves, we can turn against that side of ourselves and refuse to partake in the worldviews we as men are expected to hold (Pease, 2010, pp. 175-176; Hultman & Pulé, 2019, p. 203).

Here it is important to note the practical work being conducted by various organisations seeking to catalyse change: organisations such as RIMA (Latin America), Equimundo (USA/International), MenEngage (International), MÄN (Sweden), Plural Centre de Masculinitats (Catalunya) and Emancipator (Netherlands) among others, have developed educational materials and workshops aimed at visibilising male privilege and deconstructing hegemonic masculinity through embodied and transformative learning. Of particular interest to degrowth are those working with ecopedagogy towards gender equality and a sustainable future (Hultman, ; Hedenqvist et al., 2021).[5]

Such changes will of course not go unchallenged - to overcome these, they must be acted on both individual and structural levels. As Bob Pease notes, while the former won't be sufficient to address structural forms of oppression, "Understanding how our practices in the world either challenge or reproduce these relations of domination helps us to realise how changing our participation in these relations can impact on the wider structure" (2010, p. 170).

At the same time, and as Eversberg and Schmelzer have noted, the kinds of structural changes that would accompany these are some of the very same policies that degrowth already calls for – from a shorter working week to breaking up the gendered division of labour both of which would free up the space for "different and more diverse experiences and can thus help in establishing connectedness and mutual dependence rather than separateness and supposed independence as a basis of subjectivity" (Eversberg & Schmelzer, 2023, pp. 10-11). The emphasis on challenging hegemonic masculinity at an individual and societal level is therefore key, for it breaks down the invisible barrier that keeps a whole segment of society away from embracing these caring, relational and convivial policies and changes that degrowth calls for.

Along with an opening up towards building stronger alliances with feminist, decolonial, trans, queer and movements fighting against all forms of oppression, such a project will, I believe, give us a much better chance to swing the scales and sway degrowth from a vision to a practical emancipatory reality.

[1] It is important to note that this concept is closer to an ideal-type than to reality: while many men do not embody the ideal of hegemonic masculinity (perhaps best characterised on screen by heroes the likes of Sylvester Stalone, Arnold Schwarzenegger and James Bond) most men tacitly uphold it, benefitting from the advantages it confers onto them over other men and women (Connell, 1987, pp. 184-185). That hegemonic masculinity subordinates not only women but other 'lesser' forms of masculinity is important to note, for it highlights how challenging hegemonic masculinity also involves re-valuing these other masculinities and bringing them to the fore.

[2] Indeed, despite the plethora of possible explanations for the gender divide in environmentalism, one interesting one is that gender is not as important for explaining environmental concern as is a feminist orientation (see Somma & Tolleson-Rinehart, 1997; Smith, 2001).

[3] Of the few males who have contributed to this debate, Matthias Schmelzer and Giacomo D'Alisa can be said to be those who have done so most consistently (Schmelzer & Vetter, 2019; Eversberg & Schmelzer, 2023; Kallis et al., 2020; D'Alisa et al., 2014b)

[4] Indeed, greater attention to how care is to be centered in degrowth societies is of paramount importance so as to ensure it is distributed equally in challenging the sexual division of labour (see Wågström & Michael, 2023; Bauhardt, 2014; Mellor, 1992; D'Alisa & Cattaneo, 2013).

[5] See also the ADAM-n model proposed by Hultman & Pulé (2019) and used as a frame of reference for data collection by Hedenqvist (2020).

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ON THE WAY TO DEGROWTH, WE NEED TO CHANGE NOT ONLY THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM BUT ALSO TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY

Tadeáš Žďárský

Through demands for the shrinking of the fossil, automobile and meat industries, the degrowth movement not only challenges capitalism, but also significant symbols associated with traditional masculinity. If we want to create a sustainable and just future, care must be at the center of not only a different economic system, but also the basis of new masculine identities.

Despite the fact that my childhood and teenage memories are rather dim, I remember with crystal clarity how I continuously tried to fit into the heterosexual box. Direct questions about my sexual orientation always made me blush and want to change the subject as quickly as possible. So I subconsciously spent my teenage years trying to minimize any expressions that might lead to the suspicion that I was gay.

The situations when I refused to eat meat during family visits were all the more difficult for me. I was told that if I don't start eating meat, I will never become a proper man. When dressing, I always looked at myself through the eyes of my classmates and took off anything that might look too feminine. I didn't carry canvas bags, even though I liked them, because I was afraid people would think I was a gay. These patterns were so deeply ingrained in me that even a few years after coming out, before meeting my friend's hypermasculine father, I completely unconsciously hid my canvas bad, so as not to lose his respect at first glance.

The Ecological Footprint of Gender

A few years ago, I came across an American study that confirmed to me that my experience was not unique. Researchers asked 960 American men and women to rate specific environmentally friendly practices - including drying clothes on a line, sorting waste or carrying a reusable bag - as "masculine" or "feminine". The results showed that men who perform these activities were actually seen as more feminine or even gay by other men and women. Other research also consistently shows that men use more energy than women, emit more emissions, sort less waste, eat more meat and drive, or feel less guilty about a lifestyle with a high environmental impact. Men in wealthier countries are also less likely than women to view climate change as a serious problem.

While a dominat marketing approach tries to rebrand all sorts of environmental behavior as masculine and get rid of its feminine connotations, this approach is problematic because it often just reproduces traditional gender roles and essentially reproduces the assumption that men should avoid anything traditionally associated with the feminine.

Looking at degrowth transformationthrough a gendered lense

The degrowth movement calls for the reorganization of our Western economies in a way that allows us to come back to planetary boundaries while fulfilling people's basic needs. It calls for reduction of material and energy use through shrinking of specific economic sectors, such as the fossil, automotive, meat, and armaments industries. Not only are these sectors primarily employing men, but they are also closely linked to a traditionally masculine identity.

On the contrary, many more financial resources should be invested into the care sectors, especially health and social care, to education, child rearing, care for the elderly or care for ecosystems. In patriarchal capitalism, these sectors are not only feminized and primarily employing women and often migrant women from Eastern Europe or countries of the Global South, these sectors have also been financially undervalued for a long time – despite the fact that they are absolutely crucial for the basic functioning of our society and have much smaller negative environmental impacts compared to industrial sectors. Such a transformation of the economy suggests that also men would have to care more.

I dare to say that the topic of degrowth is sparking such a tense debate in wider society not only because it challenges the mantra of growth, which has mistakenly become synonymous with progress, but also because the it implicitly challenges the symbols of traditional masculine identity and, by extension, the patriarchal order of our society. Thus, the feelings of insecurity that men experience during discussions of the degrowth transformation may be perceived as a threat not only to their economic situation, but also to their gender identity and patriarchal order of our society.
While the degrowth scholarship and debate has so far focused on discussing policy-measures that could prevent the feelings of economic insecurity such as green jobs guarantee, shorter working hours, universal basic income or universal basic services, threats to men's masculinity may be much more complex to deal with, especially since the degrowth movement has hardly discussed this issue so far.

While sufficiency policies of significantly scaling down of car or meat industry are hardly ever discussed in wider society, if they were, there are signs which suggest that it would likely stimu-

late men's resistance. One such demonstrative example can be the effort to introduce Meatless Monday in Norwegian army as a way of reducing environmental impacts of the Army which has been unsuccessful also because it threatened the masculine identities of men in the Army.

The possibility of threatening masculine identity should be taken seriously, as it has political consequences. An American study shows connection between fragile masculinity and political support of the far-right. What's even more surprising is that it's not just a questions of conservative men. If masculinity of liberal men is threatened, it increases their political aggression, defined as attitudes or behavior that communicate toughness, strength, or force.

Hegemonic masculinity as a path to power

Traditional masculinity in the Western societies has been constructed within a gender order that places it in opposition to femininity. A man is perceived as masculine if he avoids everything coded as feminine - emotions, vulnerability or interdependence. According to patriarchal ideas, a masculine man is supposed to rely only on himself, be competitive and strive hard to achieve the highest possible status in society. He should have everything under control and dominate – over nature, women, non-binary people, but also other men.

Of course, there are men who do not fulfill these ideals, or even define themselves against them - therefore we speak of different masculinities. However, the term hegemonic hegemonic masculinity presents the superior form of masculinity over other types of masculinities and it embodies the stereotypical assumptions about what it means to be a "real man." Although for most men this ideal is unattainable, it represents a kind of model to which men consciously and unconsciously gravitate and against which their surroundings also measure them.

Since achieving hegemonic masculinity is key to gaining power, its hallmarks are not only borne by men in our society, but also by women, or anyone else who wants to succeed in the current system. Just think of successful female politicians, such as Margaret Thatcher, Marine Le Pen or Giorgia Meloni. On the contrary, the departures of top politicians such as Zuzana Čaputová or Jacinda Ardern, who have not adopted the signs of hegemonic masculinity, show how demanding and tiring it is to maintain one's position in the capitalist patriarchy.

According to masculinity researcher Niall Hanlon, a rarely mentioned but important feature of hegemonic masculinity across cultures is not only its relationship to power, resources and status, but also to caregiving, which is stereotypically perceived as feminine. Caregiving practices associate dependence, passivity or vulnerability and can thus be seen as incompatible with the power, recognition and admiration that men compete for in the public sphere. While Hanlon speaks about care towards humans, in the times of climate crises, men's care also towards the non-humans becomes ever more urgent.

From industrial to ecological masculinity

Sociologist and masculinity theorist Raewyn Connell claims that a specific form of masculinity cannot be analyzed in a vacuum, but always in the context of a given socio-economic arrangement. The efforts to transform masculinity must therefore also have two levels, personal and collective. Unfortunately, most discussions of masculinity changes are limited to the first of them.

Masculinity theorists Paul Pule and Martin Hultman came up with a typology of industrial, eco-modern and ecological masculinity, where each is compatible with a different type of socio-economic arrangement.

Industrial capitalism has been characterized by "industrial" and "bredwinner" masculinities, where men hardly care and directly benefit from the destruction of nature, although to a different extent. As representatives of industrial masculinities, we can imagine executives or shareholders in the sectors of fossil fuels and extraction of natural materials, managers and bankers. Breadwinner masculintes are subordinate to the industrial masculinities by their class positioning, as they work in coal mines, on production lines, in industrial agriculture or mineral mining, yet they are still materially tied to the environmentally destructive labour, as they depend on it to feed their families.

With increasing environmental threats and the need to reform industrial capitalism, a type of "eco-modern" masculinity is beginning to take shape. Just as the ideology of green capitalism assumes that economic growth can continue indefinitely, but that we can rid it of its negative environmental impacts with the help of technological innovation, eco-modern masculinities combines toughness, strength and profit-seeking competition with care, vulnerability and the promotion of gentle technologies. While care as a value exists in these eco-modern masculinities, it is nevertheless still subordinated to profit, status and power, which remain to be their priority.
A good example of this type of masculinity can be techno-optimist and the world's richest man Elon Musk, known not only for Tesla electric cars, but also for his "innovative plans" to colonize Mars. These heroic attempts to save the planet are a good greenwashing PR strategy of becoming the "good guy", but in reality these solutions often simply replace the dependence on cheap fossil fuels and replace it with dependence on endless amounts of cheap energy and materials with its neocolonial consequences, as most of the reserves are located in the Global South.

The third type is "ecological" masculinities, which are characterized by the effort to abandon relationships of dominance and replace them with relationships of partnership, relationality and care, which is deepened and extended to other people and nature. Since dominance often manifests itself through the suppression of emotions, the denial of emotional needs, and the active rejection of signs of vulnerability, wholeness is key to ecological masculinity, and thus the acceptance of emotions, which are no longer considered a weakness, but an integral part of a whole person. It is precisely this type of caring masculinity that would seem to be compatible with a post-growth economic system.

Overcoming capitalist patriarchy and deprivileging of men

The fact that men are structurally privileged in our society also means that that they feel entitled to patriarchal benefits. The demand for their greater involvement in paid and unpaid care can evoke strong emotions. Why would they want to do work that is usually unpaid, undervalued and considered unproductive? For the question of whether men are prepared to truly participate equally in the care of our nature and society hides the deeper question of whether men are prepared to give up their privileges.
bell hooks in her book The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love (2004) stresses that overcoming patriarchy can be also in the interest of men themselves. According to her, the first violence that men encounter in patriarchy is not

that which they do to others, but that which they do to themselves—through the violent suppression, or even death, of the emotional part of the self. It is this type of violence, which prevents men from being fully human, that precedes all other types of violence. The much higher rates of suicide, alcoholism, loneliness and unfulfilling relationships with their close ones are some of the impacts of such patriarchal masculine socialisation.

bell hooks emphasized that patriarchal ideology brainwashes men to believe that their domination of women is beneficial for them when it is not. She also stresses that the usual narrative is also often being perpetuated by many feminists when they describe men exclusively as powerful individuals without mentioning the hurt that patriarchy inflicts on them.

In that light, I think that the growing discourse of "toxic masculinity" and regular pointing out the power of white, rich and heterosexual men does little to increase the awareness of the internalized violence that men undergo and that they are usually unaware of. Often, even the progessive men limit their declared feminist position to paternalistic expressions of alliance with women without interrogating the construct of masculinity and realizing how it is constraining them personally, nor how they can liberate themselves from such oppressive construct. Working towards ecofeminist post-growth transformation will require finding a balance between naming men's structural power and demanding their greater involvement in care and, at the same time, recognizing the wounds of patriarchal capitalism on men themselves.

Transformation of the economic system towards care

Transcending the capitalist patriarchy, however, can never take place only through individual transformation of masculine identities and its relationship to care. These identities are to a large extent encouraged and strengthened by the larger structure and institutions which have the masculine values of power, competition, control, expansion and independence inscribed in their modus operandi. Although the exploitation of people and planet is most often enacted through male's CEOs and managers who have been socialized to prioritise socio-economic primacy over the relational selves, the social-ecological exploitation within capitalism cannot be personalized.

It's systemic, structural and institutionalized, meaning that actors in the supply-chain, from consumers to salespersons to managers of factories, do not have to have the intention of being exploitative in order to participate in exploitation. It is precisely the profit-seeking at all costs that leads to externalization of environmental and social costs. Jennifer Hinton who focuses on post-growth businesses states that: "It is not via flukes, mishaps, or evil intentions that businesses are driving sustainability problems, but rather businesses that are acting rationally in a system that defines profit-seeking as rational behavior and profitability as success." If exploitation is structural, we must make care structural too.

On the level of businesses, the real prioritization of care means above all the transition to democratically run not-for-profit businsess with a social or environmental mission that reinvest all of their surplus to fulfilling that mission, whether that's caring for people or the planet. Examples of non-for-profit companies can be found all over

WORKING TOWARDS ECOFEMINIST POST-GROWTH TRANSFORMATION WILL REQUIRE FINDING A BALANCE BETWEEN NAMING MEN'S STRUCTURAL POWER AND DEMANDING THEIR GREATER INVOLVEMENT IN CARE AND, AT THE SAME TIME, RECOGNIZING THE WOUNDS OF PATRIARCHAL CAPITALISM ON MEN THEMSELVES.

the world - good example could be a not-for-profit energy cooperative Som Energia in Spain. Such not-for-profit businesses can counter the deeply ingrained masculine aspiration to instrumentally use nature and people for personally defined ends and success and rather present the possibility of deriving contentment directly from practices of determining and catering to shared needs and desires together with others.

However, significant change is also needed at the macro level. The degrowth movement promotes a significant redistribution of wealth so that we can redirect existing resources into the care sector as part of unconditional basic services and by doing so, prevent further privatization of the care sector by extractive "caring" corporations whose main goal is not to care, but to earn profits. Similarly, shortening the working day, another degrowth proposal, is shown by research to be an important prerequisite for a more equal distribution of care among parents.

While this article focused on the question of changing masculine subjectivities, it's important to stress that it's not only masculine socialisation that stands in the way of degrowth project. The previously mentioned proposals on how to change the economic system go against the interests of the richest parts of our society, and therefore cannot be implemented without building greater political power of the working classes and increased efforts to connect them with the ecological or feminist movement. For in a society with free public transport and other universal basic services; with local, organic and largely vegetarian food; with fairly shared care and leisure, and with plenty of deep relationships and freedom to be oneself, everyone can be better off. Even the white heterosexual men.

A STORY FROM THE FUTURE: HOW WE CREATED A SUSTAINABLE AND LOW-CARBON TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM WITHOUT USING LITHIUM

Predrag Momčilović
& Tatjana Avramović

In 2023, lithium was considered one of the key metals for the green transition to a low-carbon economy. And then the institutions, guided by scientific data, and under the pressure of citizens who protested against the degradation caused by the exploitation of lithium, one by one began to change and to give up such a paradigm of development.

The scientific evidence was clear, they showed that no lithium ore or other critical metals were allowed to simply shift the entire transportation stock from fossil-powered vehicles to electric vehicles. At that moment, there were about 1.5 billion cars in the world, and in order to switch this number of cars to electric drive, unimaginable amounts of lithium, copper, cobalt, nickel and other metals were needed.

Periphery and semi-periphery countries, which were intended to be so-called green sacrificial zones, were the first to abandon this type of development due to pressure from their citizens, and other countries soon followed. The Balkan region was one of the pioneers in a different transport policy, developing a new travel paradigm using experiences and knowledge from the socialist and transitional periods.

Railway for the 21st Century

The first steps were relatively small. Initially, the existing railway infrastructure was renewed. The Balkans once had an extensive rail network, but due to its degradation during the time when change began, it represented a part of Europe where trains traveled the slowest, and although they're not much faster today, no one pays attention to it anymore because there is no longer pressure to reach the destination quickly.

Railway lines between Belgrade and Zagreb, Athens and Budapest, Istanbul and Venice were restored. Apart from connections between major cities, lines between small towns were also restored, allowing rural residents to rely on rail transport instead of expensive and unreliable bus lines.

Night trains with sleeping cars were introduced to distant cities in Western and Central Europe, reducing air traffic. Alongside railway renovations, shorter and then longer air routes were gradually canceled. With faster and more reliable trains, there was no longer a need to fly between Belgrade and Niš or Zagreb and Zadar. Shortly after, taxes on flights under 1000 kilometers were increased, leading to the quick cancellation of flights like Belgrade to Zagreb.

Parallel to renovating sections of the railway, new connections were built, significantly improving Kosovo and Albania's connections with the region, and Bosnia and Herzegovina also regained regular rail lines. Rediscovering and developing the railway attracted many passengers and diverted people from using private cars or planes for long journeys.

The change in paradigm didn't just happen in the transport sector but in all other sectors too, resulting in people suddenly having more free days and longer vacations. At the beginning of 2020, the average vacation at the Croatian coast lasted about 7 days; today, with much more free time, that figure has doubled. Not only has the number of days spent on vacation increased, but the pressure to arrive quickly has also decreased, leading more people to choose slower but environmentally sustainable and comfortable means of transportation.

Redirecting investments from road to rail traffic, which was part of the dominant logic at the beginning of the 21st century, contributed to passengers traveling more sustainably and faster for less money today. Railway stations have once again become gathering places for communities. And when you arrive at the train station, you are offered other sustainable modes of transport for shorter distances.

Transport transformation in cities

Cities in the 20th and early 21st century were exclusively designed for cars, while cyclists, public transport, and other forms of mobility were seen as side effects to be eliminated or minimized. By the end of the 20th century this narrative began changing in some Western European cities. The Balkans underwent this change later, yet, due to a relatively good starting position, it could be swift. In Belgrade, as early as 2015, about 48% of total mobility was by public transport; however, at that time, using public transport was treated from thatcherist point of view, as an indicator of poverty.

Investments in public transport, infrastructure for walking, cycling, and other sustainable modes of transport, along with a shift in the narrative that not owning a private car and using alternative transport methods is not a sign of poverty but rather a new modernity, led to fewer cars on the streets.

The fight to reduce the number of cars on the streets wasn't easy. Initially, there was strong resistance from the car industry and drivers, who

“‘TRAVELITIS’, OR OUR OBSESSION WITH TRAVELING FURTHER AND FURTHER, FASTER AND FASTER, AND MORE AND MORE OFTEN (AND ALWAYS FOR LESS) IS A LARGELY ARTIFICIAL NEED THAT HAS BEEN CREATED BY ‘SUPERMODERN’ LIFE, EXACERBATED BY THE MEDIA AND STIMULATED BY TRAVEL AGENCIES AND TOUROPERATORS, AND IT MUST BE REVISED DOWNWARDS.”

Latouche, S. (2009). Farewell to Growth

constantly complained that targeting cars was an attack on citizens' freedom. It took time to explain to people that owning a car and parking space was not a fundamental human right but a costly privilege. However, the transition significantly accelerated when public transport was sufficiently improved, making it much faster to travel to work by tram than by car. Complaints drastically decreased when playgrounds started emerging instead of parking lots, leading to a rapid increase in green areas in cities, which improved air quality and the overall sense of well-being.

From the start, citizens were involved in this transport but, more importantly, urban transformation. Local citizen assemblies decided to begin redistributing existing infrastructure instead of using additional resources to build new ones. Instead of constructing additional bike lanes, one of the two or three lanes that were until then exclusively used by cars was utilized with minor modifications.

Citizens took control of city planning, enabling a reduction in long-distance travel. The most essential city functions are now within walking distance, some more specific ones are easily accessible by bike, while in larger cities, public transport is still necessary for longer distances. Enabling the combination of public transport, walking, cycling, scooters, and other forms of mobility has helped everyone move faster in the city. Of course, alternatives were provided for those who, for various reasons, cannot use all forms of transport.

Cars have not been entirely removed from cities, but their number has drastically decreased, primarily the number of private cars. Today, taxis or shared cars are only cars that can be seen in cities. Cars and public transport have been electrified, yet this was done by recycling metals that were already in use, so this limited electrification did not impact an increase in demand or the exploitation of lithium and other critical metals.

All of this has led to a reduction in traffic noise and air pollution, significantly improving the physical and mental health of people in cities. The number of traffic accidents has decreased, allowing children and animals to freely roam the cities much more than before.

Changing the entire paradigm

Alongside the transformation of the transportation sector, a significant societal transformation occurred, shifting from fossil fuel-powered operations to renewable energy sources. Today, most devices are powered by electricity obtained from the sun and wind, rather than coal-generated electricity, which was widespread across the Balkans. However, the entire transformation wouldn't have happened if renewable electrification hadn't been accompanied by a significant social change. Only when we realized that electrification and the transition to green energy weren't sufficient on their own, did we open the space for the decolonization of imagination.

These decolonized debates led us to reconsider whether if something is slow, it must necessarily be bad? In many aspects of life, it has been revealed that slowing down actually brings numerous benefits to people's mental and physical health, while simultaneously having a positive impact on the planet, whose physical and chemical processes were disrupted at the beginning of the 21st century.

Slowing down life and therefore travel brought new value to journeys, turning them into a process rather than just reaching a final point. Slower travel led people to contemplate how much travel they truly needed and whether all trips were necessary. Finally, individuals began to appreciate non-commodified moments of travel, especially since social media regulations made it less popular to post as many pictures—a trend

that in the past acted as a significant driver for the desire to travel. Today, people explore their neighborhoods and immediate surroundings much more than world-famous destinations. This has contributed to reducing pressure on those globally known destinations and their permanent residents, allowing even people from Dalmatia to visit Dubrovnik.

The transformation of society, along with the transportation system, occurred without excessive use of the latest technology. In fact, we had the technology for this transformation back in the 20th century; what was lacking was the social moment. The spark of change in the Balkans happened with the rise of green movements to the helm of cities and later states, opening the door to a paradigm shift and experimentation in various fields. Today, everyone looks back in astonishment at that period when growth, speed, and the general rush were considered the greatest virtues of society.

SIMONA GETOVA: OUR POST-GROWTH FUTURES WILL BE INTERSECTIONAL AND DECOLONIAL OR THEY WILL BE BULLSHIT

Simona Getova

It has been over 12 years since Flavia Dzodan's milestone account "My Feminism will be Intersectional or it will be Bullshit." While there have been some strides in the direction that Dzodan has called for in the global feminist movement (though we are not even nearly there yet!), making intersectionality and decoloniality central to our post-growth futures imaginaries is yet to become the norm.

Dzodan's essay came about after witnessing a photograph of a white Slut Walk New York 2011 March attendee holding a racially inappropriate sign reading "woman is the N* of the world," and the insensitive reactions that ensued by "fellow feminists" and march organizers alike when this issue was pointed out by intersectional feminists and women of color. She goes on to identify with such lucidity the underlying problems with the US and global feminist movement. Dzodan's essay touches upon points that she proposes are some of the core values and principles around which feminists would organize: anti-racism, accountability, abolishing call-outs, non-appropriation, intersectionality, empathy and responsibility. By referring to it, I run the risk of reducing Dzodan's ideas to a few keywords, so I feel obliged to encourage you to read the essay yourself.

I found the sentiment of "My Feminism will be Intersectional or it will be Bullshit" very relatable and relevant even for our post-growth imaginaries. As a paradigm, movement and a

scholarly field, degrowth/post-growth - a scientific proposal for a planned and proportionate material use reduction in line with the ecological, economic, social and anthropological limits to growth and well-being - has been criticized for being Northcentric and out-of-touch with the realities of the majority of the world. While some of the criticism is very valid, and helps practitioners, activists and scholars within this paradigm fine-tune the proposals, some of it is based on common misconceptions. It is not unusual that we see "post-growth" proposals being aligned with false solutions such as unproven technofixes; from carbon capture and storage to geoengineering, and market-based solutions; from carbon markets to REDD+, that are put forward by the fossil fuel industry and their loyal supporters. We also witness the rise of ecofascism (see Fridays for Future Germany's zionist inclinations), the 'overpopulation' argument, and support for individual, feel-good lifestyle changes affiliated with degrowth.

The most striking perhaps is that, at the time of writing, Israel, backed by nations and leadership in the imperial core (you guessed it, the usual suspects: USA, UK, Germany, France, Canada, Australia), is engaged in the most lethal genocide against children and the most severe human-induced medical catastrophe in contemporary history over the Palestinian people in Gaza. The dispossession, displacement, violence, apartheid, and resource and labor exploitation continue to occur in Sudan, Yemen, and the Democratic Republic of Congo in the name of resource extraction and undisturbed capital flow. The silence around these issues by the degrowth/post-growth community has been deafening.

Intersectional visions and praxis for post-growth futures

For these reasons, it is indispensable that we are loud and clear in saying, writing, advocating, and prefiguring[1] that "our post-growth futures will be intersectional and decolonial or they will be bullshit." Nothing short of intersectional and decolonial visions and praxis would do. To paint the visions and praxis rooted in *intersectionality*, I reflect on the work of giants: Audre Lorde (2018 [1979]), bell hooks (2000; 2010), Angela Davis (2016), Patricia Hill Collins (2019), adrienne maree brown (2017), and the critical feminist scholarship of Townsend-Bell (2021), Di Chiro (2020), Tormos, and Einwohner et al. (2019). By *intersectional visions for post-growth futures* I mean futures that are liberated from:

1) Identity- and subjectivities-based power dynamics in any spaces and any relations between each other, and

2) Mutually reinforcing oppressive institutions, structures, and relations that are built on the foundations of colonialism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism.

By *intersectional praxis for post-growth futures* I mean futures where we *always* practice what we currently preach in degrowth advocacy spaces; futures where:

1) Each and every human being is accountable, aware and reflexive of our own positionality and privilege within the context of an increasingly warming climate and uncertainty,

1 "Prefiguration" refers to David Graeber's idea of political action where individuals and groups can embody the values and principles they wish to see in the broader society within their own immediate practices and organizational structures. It involves living out the changes one wants to see in the world in the present moment, rather than waiting for some future revolutionary transformation.

2) Subaltern groups'[2] experiences and demands are front and center in the way we exercise empathy, move about life, build relationships, make decisions, and develop and adopt policies, and,

3) *Difference* and *mutual-interdependence* among humans, and humans and our non-human kin are encouraged, normalized, celebrated, and a source of power, learning, and healing, and the basis of building impactful, lasting relationships.

Decolonial visions and praxis for post-growth futures

When it comes to illustrating the visions and praxis grounded in *decoloniality,* I turn to the ideas and teachings by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), Frantz Fanon (1995), Nêgo Bispo dos Santos (2018), and the lucid deconstructions by Maria Lugones et al. (2022), Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015), Farhana Sultana (2020), and Mariam Abazeri (2022). As *decolonial visions for post-growth futures,* I envision futures liberated from:

1) The continued colonization, exploitation, dispossession, violence on and erasure of MAPA communities[3], their lands, cultures, knowledges, and ways of being and relating to each other and Nature, and,

2) The imposed perception of 'legitimacy' of the West's and imperial core's binaries, common sense, ways of knowledge production and social reproduction, and subjective relations that aim to "modernize" and "develop" the rest of the world.

In that line, by *decolonial praxis for post-growth futures* I mean,

1) An ongoing reflexivity of who we are, where we stand in the context, systems and structures that surround us, and on the ways we might be reproducing patriarchal, colonial, white supremacist, oppressive patterns,

2) Actively unlearning, denouncing, abolishing, and healing from the toxic colonial, westernized, neoliberal ways we see ourselves, each other, and our value and worthiness, and,

3) Actively creating spaces for indigenous worldviews and the different ways of existing, creating, thinking, learning, teaching, analyzing, circularity, paying reparations, and relating to our bodies, each other, our ancestors, our lineage, and the territories that have carried us.

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2 By subaltern groups I mean the first and worst, differently and disproportionately impacted by the capitalist, white supremacist, patriarchal, climate breakdown-inducing system: women, children, LGBTQIA + and non-binary people, people of color, indigenous peoples, immigrants, disabled persons, the elderly, low-income people, and the nonhuman species.

3 "MAPA stands for *Most Affected People and Areas* designating the communities that bear the worst burden of the climate and ecological crises. According to Fridays for Future International, "MAPA includes all territories in the Global South (Africa, Latin America, Pacific Islands, etc.) as well as marginalized communities (BIPOC, women, LGBTQIA + people, etc.) that might live anywhere in the world." https://fridaysforfuture.org/newsletter/edition-no-1-what-is-mapa-and-why-should-we-pay-attention-to-it/

In terms of the latter, centering the ways that are especially coming from across the Global South and the global majority that have been actively silenced, exploited and erased throughout centuries.

Envisioning, or better yet, prefiguring these futures?

Take a moment to envision such futures. *How does it make you feel?* The practice of *imagining/envisioning* is a crucial step in transforming the status quo towards the futures we want to see, in our case, emancipated, just, intersectional, and decolonial post-growth ones. Such practice can be incredibly subversive in itself, as the systems we are surviving in are doing their best to crush even the imagination of any alternative futures where capital accumulation, profit for the elites, and growth for growth's sake, are not the norm.

While envisioning these futures can be powerful, and the work of tracing this by feminist and decolonial trailblazers such bell hooks (2010), adrienne maree brown (2017), Tricia Hersey (2022), and Rebecca Solnit (2010 [2005]) can attest to that, that is not all there is to it. I would also like you to take a moment and *feel*: What are the little ways that you can prefigure these futures today; in the ways that you speak to yourself, and relate to the Earth, your non-human kin, your friends, family, community, co-workers, co-conspirators, and the rest of our fellow Earthlings?

In relation to intersectionality in the feminist movement Dzodan (2011) poses in her essay, "[...] this is not a choice or an abstract concept or an intellectual exercise." That is how I feel about our post-growth futures; they are not just abstract visions we share and see in some far-off futures on the horizon or in a parallel universe. More important than the envisioning, is the *praxis* we put into prefiguring them. Our politics can be impeccable - intersectional and decolonial by the book; however, if our actions are inconsistent with those politics, if we are letting racist, patriarchal, exploitative, and oppressive systems continuously manifest in our every-day lives without challenging them, or even worse, if we are consciously upholding these systems in our degrowth/post-growth futures organizing, as far as I am concerned, our politics - and such post-growth futures - will be bullshit.

Speaking of *praxis,* there are three every-day strategies that can be very telling of our capacity for bringing these intersectional and decolonial post-growth futures to life. These include the ways we practice these futures *today* by (1) liberating our minds, bodies, and hearts, (2) the ways we approach conflict and contradictions, and (3) the power we forge in building transnational solidarity.

Liberating Our Minds, Bodies, and Hearts in Intersectional and Decolonial Post-growth Futures

In the context of post-growth futures from an intersectional and decolonial perspective, our commitment to challenging patriarchal and colonial legacies, manifestations, and narratives, dismantling oppressive structures, and valuing and celebrating diverse views and experiences, would be unwavering. This would take the form of paying attention to what adrienne maree brown (2017, p. 54) calls the *fractals*[4] - the patterns and relationships between small and large:

In a fractal conception, I am a cell-sized unit of the human organism, and I have to use my life to leverage a shift in the system by how I am, as much as with the things I do. This means actually being in

4 "A fractal is a never-ending pattern. Fractals are infinitely complex patterns that are self-similar across different scales. They are created by repeating a simple process over and over in an ongoing feedback loop." (brown, 2017, p. 51)

my life, and it means bringing my values into my daily decision making. Each day should be lived on purpose.

To prefigure the decolonial and intersectional visions for a post-growth society today by minding the fractals would mean liberating our minds, bodies, and hearts from constantly trying to make rational sense of the complex systems at play that bring about the state of the world and manifest in our communities and relationships. Instead of *thinking,* we would practice *feeling.* We would make a ritual out of *feeling* the historical trauma inflicted by patriarchy and colonization, and open space and time to heal, to learn from Nature, the lands, the complex processes of the ecosystems, and to listen to our body - our *cuerpo-territorio* - connecting us with our ancestors and their wisdom.

We are not separate from the land and we are not separate from the harmful systems that I have been discussing. As a fractal, a pattern of a daily practice of liberation, we would question our own positionality and responsibility of how we contribute to the racial, patriarchal, colonial, growth-addicted systems, and the structural, systemic, institutional violence done by these systems in our name. We would feel the pain these systems cause on others, and we would hold ourselves accountable to our smallest actions that contribute to the harm done.

We would also *show up,* day in, day out. We would practice liberation by showing up for ourselves, sacredly reclaiming self-care and rest, and showing up for each other and for our communities in all the ways that would mean prefiguring the caring post-growth futures we want to live in.

Approaching Conflicts and Contradictions in Intersectional and Decolonial Post-growth Futures

In our intersectional and decolonial post-growth futures, we would be experiencing conflict and contradictions as generative forces for impactful connections and expanding possibilities. To practice the liberation of our minds, hearts, and bodies for post-growth futures, we would need to become comfortable with conflicts, being imperfect, making mistakes, and holding contradictions.

To do this, we would build safe spaces to approach conflict and welcome contradictions, and do so without relying on existing, punitive and institutionalized conflict resolution systems. Author Mathura Mahendren (2024) aptly discerns "[...] contradictions cannot be resolved within the realities that gave rise to them." Instead of glorifying cancel culture and "call-outs," we would put our energy into "call-ins" - building a curious understanding of people's views, background, and unresolved trauma that might be affecting their actions.

We would be led by the principles of transformative justice, and provide ourselves and each other with spaces of learning, evolving, and amends. In decolonial and intersectional post-growth futures, these spaces would be liberated from the *either/or* binaries that are imposed on us nowadays, and hold and nurture multiple perspectives, diverse cultural practices and worldviews. All of these would ultimately expand our possibilities and capacities to continue pursuing equitable post-growth futures.

Building a Global Post-Growth Community: Transnational Solidarity in Intersectional and Decolonial Post-growth Futures

In intersectional and decolonial post-growth futures *solidarity* would be a verb. We would actively weave transnational networks of support, collaboration and alliances based on anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-patriarchal principles of global justice. We would be forging alliances based on the interconnectedness of our struggles, and let them connect us and heal us in the process.

Our active solidarity would be at least two-fold; we would provide tangible material improvements for MAPA people and communities, and we would stay vigilant and continuously work on challenging, transforming or abolishing the structural relations that exacerbate injustices and subject the already systemically oppressed, subaltern groups, to harm.

If we don't center intersectional and decolonial visions and praxis in our pursuing post-growth futures, we risk perpetuating the injustices inflicted by a growth-addicted economic system, a system whose foundations are rooted in a racial imperialist patriarchy that affect us all, albeit disproportionately. The speed and the scale at which transformations need to happen cannot be an excuse for not having intersectionality and decoloniality as guiding lights towards post-growth futures.

None of us is beyond these points; not me, not anyone. Our individual and collective commitment to oneself, each other and the already most affected, is all we have, and that should be a commitment to start embodying the intersectional and decolonial post-growth futures today.

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02

POLICY

LILIAN PUNGAS – A good life and an invisible agroecology in the East | ALJOŠA SLAMERŠAK – Green affluence – a misguided path to sustainability: Why the rich are unlikely to do any good in the fight to prevent dangerous climate change | FRANÇOIS DENUIT – Building Postgrowth Futures from within the 'EU Bubble' | MEADHBH BOLGER – A law to reduce the EU's unjust resource use – with degrowth to the heart

A GOOD LIFE AND AN INVISIBLE AGROECOLOGY IN THE EAST

Lilian Pungas

Bioeconomy as a new biobased strategy of economic growth vs. Georgescu-Roegen's 'bio-economics'

On the way towards post-fossil futures various European countries and the EU itself envision the emerging bioeconomy – an economy mainly based on renewable biological resources – to tackle most challenges of the current socio-ecological crises. Bioeconomy as a new circular, biobased economic model is expected to provide everything at the same time – green economic growth, a welfare state with high social standards and environmental protection (EU 2018: 8[1]). Europe, for instance, aspires to maintain or increase its global economic competitiveness and become a global leader in this 'new' and promising economic sector. As such, bioeconomy as a 'panacea for all ills' is centered around expected economic growth, despite its improbability (Eversberg et al., 2023[2]).

Against the background that etymologically bioeconomy was coined by the founding figure of Ecological Economics and post-growth scholar, Georgescu-Roegen, with an explicit understanding of the inevitability of physical and material boundaries, it is almost ironic that even this word seems to have been 'hijacked' by biotech and other growth-oriented agri-food industries (Vivien et al. 2019[3]).

1 EU (2018) A sustainable bioeconomy for Europe. Strengthening the connection between economy, society and the environment: updated bioeconomy strategy.

2 Eversberg, D., Holz, J., & Pungas, L. (2023). The bioeconomy and its untenable growth promises: reality checks from research. *Sustainability Science*, *18*(2), 569-582.

3 Vivien, F. D., Nieddu, M., Befort, N., Debref, R., & Giampietro, M. (2019). The hijacking of the bioeconomy. *Ecological economics*, *159*, 189-197.

Challenging the extractivist biobased economy as a postcolonial and patriarchal continuity

The necessity for post-growth societies to transition from fossil resources fueling the economic throughput to the circular economy based on renewable resources is rather unchallenged. What needs to be challenged, however, is yet another fixation to the economic growth among new post-fossil economic models such as bioeconomy. This essay aims to do exactly that – to debunk and challenge the growth-oriented bioeconomy models as a continuation of postcolonial and patriarchal economic order that will under a new label ('bioeconomy') continue to exhaust biobased resources (particularly in global peripheries) and appropriate the invisible bioeconomic practices (done mainly by women) (cf. Backhouse et al., 2021[4]).

Applying the ecofeminist critique (the Bielefeld subsistence approach) I will demonstrate how the promoted agricultural policies[5] of the EU bioeconomy strategy imply the same structural separation of the economy as the conventional neoliberal economic models and as such, will reproduce and/or deepen/deteriorate the existing injustice, devaluation and invisibilization of certain spheres of economy. To illustrate this argument I will draw more specifically on the practice of Food Self-Provisioning (FSP) which in the Eastern Europe still plays a significant role in local agri-food systems, and is furthermore a vivid cultural practice.

Dominant biobased economy only counts for the tip of the iceberg.

EU bioeconomy strategy emphasizes in its agricultural sector above all the following: modernizing the agri-food industry (p. 4), increasing/strengthening European competitiveness with further investments into innovation and research (p. 4, 22, 27, 48, 73), biotechnology (p.5, 42), cascade utilization and new jobs in agri-food sector. "Promoting sustainable food systems" (p. 12, 46ff, 75) is one stated goal, however this – unsurprisingly – only refers to the agricultural enterprises (cf. EU 2018; Pungas, 2023). "Taking into account all options from cutting-edge science to local and tacit knowledge" (EU 2018: 9) falls short, as the knowledge around sustainable food production originating from the peripheries, as for instance Eastern Europe, does not seem to be worth mentioning (in contrast to the Western or market-based concepts). Furthermore, the whole discourse on the jobs in the agri-food sector ignores different forms of, and extensive 'informal' labor happening outside of wage-labour relations. Examples include housework around food/nutrition (purchasing food, preparing meals, feeding children and elderly) but also the practice of FSP.

Despite constituting the lion's share of food-related reproductive work, it seems to be implied that that this happens 'naturally' and does not need mentioning – thus invisibilizing these forms of labor once again and contributing to persisting patriarchal power relations (Pungas, 2023a[6]).

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4 Backhouse M, Lehmann R, Lorenzen K, Lühmann M, Puder J, Rodríguez F, Tittor A (eds) Bioeconomy and global inequalities. Palgrave Macmillan.

5 As the biggest sector of bioeconomy - food and agriculture are considered the largest sectors of the bioeconomy (in the EU 71% of all value-added bioeconomy and 76% of employ- ment, FAO 2022; EU 2018, p. 29)

6 Pungas, L. (2023a). Invisible (bio)economies: A framework to assess the 'blind spots' of dominant bioeconomy models. *Sustainability Science*, *18*(2), 689–706.

Food Self-Provisioning as a counter-example: a sufficiency-oriented agroecological practice of bioeconomy

Hausknost et al. (2017 REF) have demonstrated there are four different trajectories for bioeconomy models, stretched between contrasting goals such as 1) high-technology and agroecology and 2) growth and sufficiency. Not surprisingly, industries, national and EU bioeconomy models are oriented towards high technology and growth (called 'sustainable capital'), whereas environmental NGOs and institutions' plea for agroecology and sufficiency-oriented models ('Eco-Retreat').

As a contrast to the high-tech growth-oriented agri-food system promoted by the EU bioeconomy policies, FSP serves as an example of sufficiency-oriented, decentralized, and convivial form of agriculture, characterized by mostly agroecological methods and multidimensional socio-economic benefits. However, as it happens beyond the 'formal' market sphere and additionally in the so-called 'private sphere' it goes unnoticed.

Agroecology & Quiet sustainability in the East

Numerous scholars have demonstrated the ecologically beneficial cultivation methods in most household gardens in the Eastern Europe, and emphasized how these practices often resemble agroecological methods regarding humus creation, composting, usage of green manure and traditional remedies (instead of pesticides and herbicides), and thus increase soil quality and its water holding capacity, protect of biodiversity and more (Pungas, 2019[7], 79f; Vavra et al., 2018[8]). The gardeners do not reason their motivation for such cultivation methods with explicit environmentalist concerns but rather with a personal desire to eat healthy, good, and nutritious food. Therefore, Smith and Jehlička (2013[9]) have coined such practices "Quiet sustainability" as they bring along beneficial socio-ecological outcomes, nevertheless.

Since industrial agri-food system contributes up to 30 percentage of global greenhouse gas emissions (Clark et al., 2020; Garnett, 2011[10]), and is additionally responsible for further transgressed planetary boundaries such as biodiversity loss, land use and land use change (LULUC), nitrogen and phosphorus over-usage, the urgency for regenerative agriculture and agroecological methods is more crucial than ever. Against this backdrop, naturally all sustainable agricultural forms and practices should be acknowledged, appreciated, and protected, regardless of their location, or if they happen within or beyond the market.

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9 Smith, J., & Jehlička, P. (2013). Quiet sustainability: Fertile lessons from Europe's productive gardeners. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *32*, 148–157.

10 Clark MA, Domingo NGG, Colgan K, Thakrar SK, Tilman D, Lynch J, Azevedo IL, Hill JD (2020) Global food system emissions could preclude achieving the 1.5° and 2°C climate change tar- gets. Science 370(6517): 705–708. https://doi.org/10.1126/scien ce.aba7357
Garnett, T. (2011). Where are the best opportuni4es for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the food system (including the food chain)? *Food Policy*, *36*, 23-32.

Sufficiency, community orientation and a good life

Going beyond the sustainable cultivation methods, practices such as FSP have also proven to contribute to healthy, decentralized, and resilient local food networks and food sovereignty (Visser et al., 2015; Pungas, 2023b[11]). As the food is being grown for oneself and family's needs, and *not* for the profit maximisation, the practice is built on the ideas of sufficiency.

Furthermore, the social dimension is crucial within the FSP practice as it normally encompasses a variety of social interactions that all strengthen the communities around food. For instance, it is common to share surplus in the autumn, exchange seed(ling)s in the spring, gift self-made delicacies, and enjoy the home-cooked meals from garden produce together (Smith, 2003[12]). As gardening demands highly skilled and at times physically challenging and time-intensive labour, mutual aid and solidarity networks between most gardeners are often a necessity (Sovová et al., 2021[13]).

Perhaps most importantly, however, FSP seems to contribute significantly to a 'good life'. Various scholars from different countries have explored that gardening not only enhances physical and psychological health and resilience, but it also counters the feelings of alienation from nature and offers feelings of self-efficacy, pride, and autonomy (cf. Daněk et al., 2022; Ančić et al., 2019[14]). The emerging field of 'horticultural therapy' encompasses various therapeutic benefits from gardening. Finally, a lot of emphasis is on savoring and enjoying the self-grown and prepared food collectively with friends and family. Gardeners reason growing their own food mostly with the desire to have fresh, and tasty home-grown food that is considered *the* highest quality due to knowing the production process. In addition, home-grown also implies the emotional and physical investment of labor and care into the cultivation process and as such FSP also denotes fulfilling, grounding and meaningful work.

With regard to the meaning of self-made and home-grown, Jeff Smith (2003) has illustrated it beautifully in following words:

"The communist state claimed to provide everything needed in life and therefore *házi* was an insult to the state. Similarly in capitalism everything is in theory available on the market for consumption, and because capitalism is said to be more efficient [...], to do it yourself seems stupid and a waste of time. But *házi* is about dignity, creativity, self-reliance, individuality, and self worth; it symbolises the power [...] to be a human being not a robot-worker, backward peasant, or mindless consumer." (Smith, 2003, p. 180)

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11 Pungas, L. (2023b). Dachas and food democracy —What makes a (good) food citizen? *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 7, Ar4cle 1052298.

12 Smith, Jeff (2003). From házi to hypermarket: discourses on 4me, money and food in Hungary. *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 21(1), 179–188.

13 Sovová L, Jehlička P, Daněk P (2021) Growing the beautiful anthropo- cene: ethics of care in east European food gardens. Sustainability 13(9):5193.

14 Daněk, P., Sovová, L., Jehlička, P., Vávra, J., & Lapka, M. (2022). From coping strategy to hopeful everyday prac4ce: Changing interpreta4ons of food self-provisioning. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 62(3), 651–671. h7ps://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12395 Ančić B, Domazet M, Župarić-Iljić D (2019) "For my health and for my friends": exploring motivation, sharing, environmentalism, resilience and class structure of food self-provisioning. Geoforum 106:68–77.

Post-growth policies to strengthen sufficiency oriented fsp practices?

So which post-growth policies are needed in the agricultural sector as well as in the future policies for bioeconomy in Europe?

Firstly, regenerative agriculture and agroecological cultivation methods require more time and more human labor which leads to the problem of current time policies and patriarchal time regime (cf. Völkle, 2022[15]). Reproductive and caring activities (be it towards family, community, or the soil) are always time-intensive and therefore, as feminist scholars demand, need to be (re) distributed more equally between all members of society. I join scholars that have suggested potential solutions to include policies such as Universal Basic Services (Bärnthaler & Dengler, 2023[16]) and/or concepts such as "4-in-1 perspective" by Frigga Haug (Haug, 2008[17]).

Secondly, the access to the land has become a rarity and land itself a luxurious good. With regard to real estate, exchange value dominates the use value in most cases, and as such, access to agricultural land is scarce, especially around urban centres. This is another aspect to be addressed by the post-growth policies if decentralized and regional food systems based on agroecological methods are to be expanded. The huge areas under garden cooperatives around Eastern European bigger cities is a rather remarkable example which demonstrates that prioritizing use value for the (urban) population over the exchange value for real estate and investment projects has been historically possible.

Thirdly, household farming and FSP currently still suffer under certain stigmatization – at least so in the East. Postcolonial framings reason the FSP as a mere 'survival strategy of the poor' which is lagging-behind, traditional, outdated and generally inefficient. What is needed here is to counter such narratives with decolonial narratives that visibilize and acknowledge the agency and self-determination of the gardeners and emphasize the manifold socio-ecological benefits of this practice. From the perspective of post-growth, however, care and a simple yet 'a good life' are central values for the gardeners and guide their everyday practice. These characteristics make this example an inspiring one to learn from for post-growth societies.

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GREEN AFFLUENCE – A MISGUIDED PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY: WHY THE RICH ARE UNLIKELY TO DO ANY GOOD IN THE FIGHT TO PREVENT DANGEROUS CLIMATE CHANGE

Aljoša Slameršak

Implications of growing social divide between the rich and poor are typically missing in the established literature on climate change mitigation. This may be a striking realisation, given that empirical analysis clearly affirms existence of a strong correlation between environmental pressures and affluence. Could it be that we have been looking in the wrong direction for solutions to climate change?

Inequalities, the elephant in the room

The world's wealthiest 1% capture more than 20% of global income, which is almost three times as much as the poorest 50% combined (Institute for Policy Studies, 2022). Moreover, the top 1% of the world population owns half of the world's wealth (Credit Suisse Research Institute, 2022). The wealthy also use up much of the global energy generation. The top 1% of individuals use more energy than the 30% of the world's poorest (Oswald et al., 2020). Moreover, the top

1% of the world's population is responsible for 23% of current anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, which is almost twice as much as the bottom 50% of the world population, who emit only 12% of the current emissions (Chancel, 2022). In other words, if the richest 1% were a country, they would pollute more than the EU and the USA combined.

These inequalities are spread across different countries as well as across different social classes. Starting with wealth inequality, the wealthiest 1% in India own more than 40% of the wealth generated in the country, while the poorest 50% only own 3% of the total wealth generated (Oxfam India, 2023). Meanwhile, the average per-capita income in high-income countries tops the average income in lower-income countries seven times over (World Bank, 2023). As for energy inequality, the top 10% of energy users in the UK use more energy than the bottom 50% combined (Baltruszewicz et al., 2023). In fact, the UK's top 10% use more energy each year than the bottom 30% combined just for air travel (Baltruszewicz et al., 2023). Along the same lines, citizens in high-income countries consume more than four times the energy of an average citizens from Africa and Asia regions (Hickel and Slamersak, 2022). In the USA and Canada, the top 10% of CO_2 emitter are responsible for a third of the total greenhouse gas emissions (Chancel, 2022). At the same time, USA and Canada use approximately five times as much as an average citizen in Latin America (Chancel, 2022).

Despite these striking inequalities, most climate policies and solutions proposed in the literature do not consider measures to reduce the consumption levels of rich elites. In fact, the scenarios typically assume that affluence will continue at high growth rates in all countries indefinitely into the future (Slameršak, A., Kallis, G., O'Neill, W. D., Hickel, 2023). Existing scenarios typically approach sustainability from the perspective of developing cleaner and more efficient technologies, but do not consider systemic changes in the organisation of economic production and distribution. Disregard for structural changes in socio-economic drivers compels scientists to assume unprecedented technological breakthroughs. To square the assumption of growing affluence with the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C–2°C, these scenarios must assume unprecedented growth of low-carbon infrastructure, dramatic improvements in energy efficiency and a large-scale use of carbon offsets (Keyßer and Lenzen, 2021; Warszawski et al., 2021). These assumptions outline the conditions for green affluence. However, are they feasible?

Can affluent lifestyles become green?

While affluence has been linked to high environmental impacts (IPBES, 2019; Wiedmann et al., 2020), difference in opinion remains to what degree can the affluence and emissions be decoupled. On one hand, huge present-day carbon footprints in combination with high purchasing power of the rich suggest there is untapped potential in the greening of their lifestyles. For example, the rich have it easy to buy electric cars, insolate their homes, and build auto-sufficient homes powered by renewable energy. The efforts of the wealthy to "become green" may have important downstream benefits, as their lifestyle choices tend greatly influence the consumption behaviour of the rest of the population (Otto et al., 2019).

However, there are several reasons that downplay the possibilities that the rich could downsize their per-capita environmental footprints to the levels consistent with safe planetary boundaries. The first problem with the idea of "green affluence" is that the data show this is far from happening. On contrary, carbon footprints of the wealthy 1% have increased by more than any other part of the global population since 1990 (Chancel, 2022). One could of course argue that

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the shift towards affluent green lifestyles is yet to happen, as wealthy may become more environmentally conscious and with right policy incentives in place. Yet, even if the wealthy would embrace the shift towards green consumption, a fundamental challenge remains in their high consumption volume. That is because substantial emissions associated with affluent lifestyles come from the production and supply of goods and services which are beyond the control of the consumer. Therefore, even if the wealthy decided to use renewable electricity, drive electric cars and purchase recycled products, their footprint would still exceed the footprints of the rest of the population who consume less. This problem is likely to remain, as a complex inter-connectedness of global supply chains makes it difficult to completely disentangle the supply chains of supposedly "green products" from other products. In other words, there are few alternatives to the general decarbonisation of global supply chains, which would lead to a decrease of the emissions across the population.

The problem is not limited to the carbon footprint, as high levels of consumption by the wealthy result in a high demand for energy and materials (Teixidó-Figueras et al., 2016; Wiedmann et al., 2015). This raises a concern that shifting to green consumption, while maintaining high consumption levels, may only shift the problem from excessive emissions to over-exploitation of rare earth minerals.

Recent studies suggest that possible avenues of sustainable transition are fundamentally constrained by availability of these materials and productive capacities of the low-carbon industries (de Blas et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020; Runkevicius, 2020; Valero et al., 2018). Most IPCC scenarios suggest that growth in energy consumption cannot be sustained during a low-carbon energy transition because the speed at which low-carbon energy infrastructure would need to replace fossil fuels is simply overambitious, as it would exceed the current build-up rates by up to ten times (Slameršak, 2023).

If we take these constraints into account, the issue arises that the rich, unless reducing the volume of their consumption, could take up a substantial share of the green energy and green technologies that *can* realistically be produced, leaving less technologies to the rest of the population. For example, if a rich individual makes a mobility shift to an electric SUV vehicle, the amount of lithium used in battery of such car could be used for two and a half batteries in a middle-class hatchback, or eighteen batteries in an electric motorbike, arguably the preferred mobility options for the people for the rest of the population[1].

Concentration of green technologies in the hands of the few would have two detrimental implications for the success of the overall transition. First, the concentration of green technologies in the hands of the rich perpetuates existing inequalities in the access to sustainable goods and services. Secondly, making green technologies less accessible could defer the global energy transition by diminishing the reduction of environmental impacts across the population.

Similar problem arises with carbon offsetting which is aimed to balance out excessive emissions (typically from flying). Less than 10% of these schemes has been proven to result in net carbon removals (The Guardian, 2023). Moreover, carbon offsetting schemes require vast areas of natural land, and can therefore shift the problem of excessive emissions from affluent lifestyles to a widespread appropriation of land (Harper et al., 2018).

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1 We used the battery capacity data for the SUV model Tesla model X (95 kWh), hatchback model Nissan Leaf (40 kWh), and an electric motorbike Silence S01 (5.4 kWh).

Finally, we should address the possibility where emissions, material use, and energy consumption associated with affluence decrease by an overarching shift in consumption choices towards activities that require less materials and energy. While such a shift would indeed be sustainable, it is hard to see how such lifestyles could still be considered affluent, as they would hardly resemble the current lifestyles of the rich.

Shifting from green affluence to equitable sufficiency

Analysis of inequalities that underpin the emerging climate crisis suggests that change of the approach to mitigation is required. Arguably the first step towards this change is recognition that excessive consumption of the rich minority is one of the principle driving forces of global warming. This is not to suggest that there is no need to reduce emissions amongst the bottom 90% of the population. On the contrary, rising emissions from other social classes pose an increasing concern, as they could in the long run nullify ambitious emission reductions of the top 10%. The arduous challenge of reaching net-zero anthropogenic emissions by mid-century is *obviously* only possible if everyone is part of the global mitigation effort. However, as shown by different responsibilities for climate change, it is the rich, the majority of whom live in high-income countries, who ought to reduce their emissions most and at the fastest rate, to keep any chances of avoiding dangerous climate change.

Recognising that excessive consumption of the rich is a problem lends itself a solution, which is to curb the purchasing power of the rich, thus reducing the present-day inequalities in income and wealth. A more equitable economic distribution would can space for growth for the poor classes, who are living below the decent energy and material needs thresholds. Equally importantly, redistribution could improve the social outcomes of the poorest without requiring additional economic growth of the overall economy, thus keeping the environmental pressures associated with economic growth at check.

Recent studies estimate the total needs for a decent life in energy terms at 15–27 gigajoules per person (Grubler et al., 2018; Kikstra et al., 2021; Millward-Hopkins et al., 2020). Currently, the average per-capita energy use equals 54 gigajoules, which means that decent living standards could be provided to everyone with only half the energy currently used globally. Even if we assume a sub-optimal efficiency in the provisioning of basic needs, and introduce some degree of inequality – whereby the top 1% of the population can use three times as much energy as the bottom 10% – , the average energy footprint would still only double to 30–54 gigajoules per person (Millward-Hopkins, 2022), making it possible to provide decent living standards to everyone at the present-day energy use.

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BUILDING POSTGROWTH FUTURES FROM WITHIN THE 'EU BUBBLE'

François Denuit

In May 2023, more than 7700 registered participants gathered at the Beyond Growth Conference (BGC) at the European Parliament, a major 3-days event initiated by MEP Philippe Lamberts and co-organised with 19 other MEPs from five different political groups . Coined by some as 'the Woodstock of postgrowth' and as a 'a tipping point in the battle of ideas', the BGC undoubtedly represented a significant stride in garnering support for the advancement of policies promoting postgrowth futures.

Yet, as the rumblings of transformation grew more audible, so too did the cries of opposition from entrenched beneficiaries of an outdated economic paradigm. Take note of the mounting pushback coming from the right end of the political spectrum against the European Green Deal. Witness also the Council and Parliament's agreement on a reform of the fiscal rules, prioritising debt and deficit reductions over any other policy objective, thereby signing the return of austerity instead of financing a fair ecological transition.

Amidst this dynamic landscape of burgeoning momentum toward an integrated social-ecological agenda and resurging opposition to economic evolution, I, alongside my esteemed colleague Léa Das Neves Bicho, had the privilege of navigating this mandate within the cabinet of Philippe Lamberts, MEP and Co-President of the Group of the Greens/EFA in the European Parliament. In this paper, I offer insights into our endeavours within the 'EU bubble', illuminating our efforts to sow seeds towards constructing a postgrowth future for the EU.

Section 1 revisits the objectives behind the establishment of the Beyond Growth Conference and its primary messages. Section 2 delves into some of its outcomes, particularly in relation to our goal of cultivating new alliances. In section 3, I address the reality check prompted by the assaults on the Green Deal, followed by an explanation in section 4 of our strategy to bridge the gap between the Green Deal's ambitious objectives and the financial means to achieve them. Section 5 examines the financial obstacles hindering investments necessary for the ecological transition, particularly in light of the recent battle over the reform of the EU's fiscal rules. The subsequent section 6 highlights the signifi-

cant impact of economic tools on policy-making and advocates for the integration of models from ecological economics into EU decision-making processes. Section 7 concludes by emphasising the imperative to defend a social-ecological agenda to face the risk of a green backlash ahead of European elections.

1. BRINGING THE BATTLE OF IDEAS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

With the Beyond Growth Conference, our aim was to bring up-to-date scientific evidence to policy-makers, to discuss innovative policy proposals and to build a broad network of like-minded individuals and organisations dedicated to advancing towards a new economic model for the European Union. Hosting a high-level discussion centred on limits-to-growth challenges and policies for a post-growth economy in the forum of European democracy was thus symbolically powerful and offered a meaningful opportunity to increase traction for ideas still disregarded in the EU institutional setting.

Yet, having the Greens alone in the driving seat would not have achieved enough in order to increase credibility for alternative economic thinking. To advance a new narrative and convince top-level decision-makers such as President von der Leyen and President Metsola to engage in the discussion, we needed an ecumenical, transpartisan coalition of MEPs, from the radical left to the centre right. We took the same approach with supporting partners, gathering a wide and diverse network of more than 60 organisations from academia, think tanks, NGOs, political foundations, trade unions and businesses. After all, the more transformative the task is, the larger the number of actors of change needed.

While we chose 'beyond growth' as an umbrella term acceptable to all political families represented - instead of 'degrowth' or even 'postgrowth'-, we made room for all growth-critical discourses. About 150 renowned speakers from across the world rendered the moment unique, receiving standing ovations from a crowd composed of a majority of young people, in a hemicycle that was not used to such a vibrant atmosphere.

The BGC offered a unique opportunity to set directionality for EU policy change and laid the groundwork necessary to bring about a blueprint towards a postgrowth EU. It sent a clear message to EU decision-makers that can be summed up as follows: 'green growth' – i.e. an approach centred on decoupling economic growth from CO2 emissions and material footprint – is not a viable strategy, it is high time to disengage from a socially and ecologically damaging race for growth, and we collectively have the knowledge and know-how to imagine and design new paths towards 'prosperity without growth' .

2. FORGING BRIDGES FOR ENDURING INFLUENCE

The conference surpassed our expectations, sparking numerous initiatives ahead of the event and garnering significant media attention . It also created the right conditions to build bridges across traditional alliances, and to develop a number of initiatives and collaborative networks.

On the first day of the event, the co-organising MEPs joined in a transpartisan call for a new overarching strategy for a European green deal beyond growth and for a policy-making approach relying on beyond GDP indicators, postgrowth macroeconomic models as well as green and gender budgeting tools . They went on to propose that these changes be embedded in new institutional architectures: a new Directorate-General for Sustainability and Well-Being in the European Commission, a special Committee on Beyond Growth Futures in the European Parliament and a ministry for economic transition in each Mem-

ber State. Similar demands were made in an open letter to the European Commission signed by 400 academics, experts and civil society organisations , and then again in a post-conference declaration addressed to the Commission, the Parliament and member states by 1200 participants, who remain in contact up to this day.

Another notable milestone was achieved when we commissioned a study for the conference from the European Parliamentary Research Service, in collaboration with the European Commission's Joint Research Service. This study sets a precedent as an internal document that unequivocally asserts the impossibility of pursuing endless growth while ensuring a sustainable future for all. It underscores that transitioning beyond growth at the EU level will necessitate a revision of the Treaties .

Furthermore, in collaboration with partners, we established connections with various institutional stakeholders. We conducted policy labs with the European Commission and representatives from the Council, among others, focusing on metrics for wellbeing, policies for a just transition, and public finances. Additionally, we organized roundtable discussions with national members of parliament and trade union representatives, with a focus on fostering social-ecological welfare states.

The momentum continues to grow, as several partners have adopted our conference model at the national level. Five 'beyond growth conferences' are scheduled to take place in Italy, Austria, Denmark, Ireland, and France in 2024, with most of them hosted in national parliamentary assemblies .

3. NAVIGATING THE REALITY CHECK: SPOTLIGHT ON THE GREEN DEAL

In the aftermath of the conference, we faced the challenge of harnessing the newfound momentum to drive concrete policy initiatives while simultaneously contending with a return to significant opposition from the right-end of the political spectrum – but not only – on crucial files. We were forced to confront our reality check on multiple fronts: objectively evaluating our current standing in the journey towards a post-growth Europe to bridge the gap, and engaging in struggles not just to push forward but also to stave off further decline of the status quo. This twofold struggle holds significant importance concerning the European Green Deal, as there is a pressing need to transform it into a social-ecological compact while simultaneously defending against efforts to diminish its existing ambition.

With the launch of the Green Deal and its 'Fit for 55' package, the EU embarked on a legislative sprint to reduce CO2 emissions by 55% by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels) and become the first climate-neutral region by 2050. Presented as Europe's 'man on the moon moment' by President von der Leyen at its launch in 2019, the Green Deal pledged to introduce 'a set of deeply transformative policies' aimed at aligning the economy with environmental concerns, reimagining production and consumption practices to better harmonise with the planet while serving the interests of the people .

In reality, the Green Deal presents several challenges, foremost among them being significant policy inconsistency, notably concerning free trade agreements and agricultural policy . It is also particularly ill-equipped with respect to delivering a just transition . Indeed, the EU's main strategy is perceived as inadequately addressing the intricate connections between ecological imperatives and the mitigation of socio-economic disparities.

Critics generally highlight three main challenges and deficiencies. Firstly, the European Green Deal hinges on a green growth-oriented strategy that is overly optimistic in assuming simultane-

ous economic expansion alongside enhanced environmental sustainability and social equity. Secondly, its concept of a 'just transition' is narrowly construed, focusing primarily on social investments with inadequate financial resources allocated for support. Consequently, the Green Deal predominantly relies on a corrective approach aimed at mitigating the repercussions of the green transition, rather than fostering a foundation of social-environmental convergence from the outset. Moreover, it fails to question prevailing industrial labour relations, risking the perpetuation or exacerbation of social inequalities within the EU and globally. Thirdly, its industrial agenda prioritises cost competitiveness and overlooks the promotion of high-quality job creation, equitable working conditions, collective bargaining, and the imposition of social, environmental, and financial prerequisites on EU funding.

For any European strategy to be truly effective and impactful, the EU thus needs a renewed social-ecological strategy – a green deal 2.0 – centred around a 'postgrowth' paradigm that aligns objectives, decision-making tools, governance frameworks, policies, and ultimately, institutions . And to achieve this, the Green Deal provides a foundation upon which we can strive for improvement.

However, while the Green Deal exhibited policy resilience in withstanding the challenges posed by Covid-19 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Commission subsequently concealed setbacks and unfulfilled promises when European leaders and MEPs advocated for a regulatory break on environmental legislation . Disagreements over the nature restoration law, delays in chemical regulation reform, contentious decisions regarding pesticide use, and the recent relaxation of environmental ambitions tied to the common agricultural policy serve as noteworthy examples of the present environmental rollbacks .

4. MINDING THE (GREEN INVESTMENT) GAP

Against this backdrop of a disparity between the EU's ambitious goals and the current status of its policies facing mounting opposition, it is crucial to chart our path forward and reaffirm our commitment to a just transition. We took an important step in that regard with the Greens' commissioning of the comprehensive study "Road to Net Zero: Bridging the Green Investment Gap" . This study engaged over 150 experts and 20 organizations from across Europe and focused on seven countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands, Poland and Sweden) representing about 75% of EU GDP and territorial emissions.

According to their analysis, the transition to a decarbonized EU economy requires substantial investment, estimated at €40 trillion by 2050, equivalent to about 10% of the current EU GDP. Around three-quarters of these funds can be secured by reallocating existing expenditure that is either unnecessary or detrimental to the transition process. Additionally, an extra €10 trillion investment is needed by 2050, averaging around 2.3% of current GDP annually, which is approximately half of what the EU spent on fossil fuel imports in 2022.

To catalyse private investment and finance non-profitable decarbonisation solutions, public expenditure should double from €250 to €510 billion per year. The required public investments are substantial, but it actually amounts to less than EU Covid-19 recovery spending or fossil fuel subsidies, which highlights its feasibility and importance in addressing climate change.

Renovating buildings and promoting modal shifts away from cars and planes should be priority targets for additional public support, although commitment across all sectors is necessary. Delaying these investments will result in higher costs, emphasising the urgency of ac-

tion. Moreover, sufficiency measures are crucial to mitigate costs and risks associated with electrification, while also enhancing energy security and economic sovereignty. Ultimately, these investments will not only accelerate the transition to a greener economy but also create local jobs, increase purchasing power, and yield long-term returns by reducing future public expenditure related to unemployment and climate change adaptation costs.

5. FIGHTING THE OLD GUARD ON FISCAL RULES

However, constraints such as the fiscal rules of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) seriously hinder member states' ability to align financial means with investment needs, and to take decisive action to bridge the gap.

The fiscal rules have been largely discredited for pursuing arbitrary numerical targets devoid of any valid economic justification – such as the 3% deficit-to-GDP and 60% debt-to-GDP ratios – which impose a fiscal straitjacket to national budgets. With the recent social, ecological and geopolitical polycrisis, many were hopeful that the EU would actually put its money where its mouth is and change the rules for the better. The SGP was put on hold in 2020 to permit increased deficit spending amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The pause was then prolonged until 2024 following the surge in energy prices throughout the EU. However, upon releasing its initial guidelines for a reviewed economic governance framework in 2022, the Commission's proposal, while serving as a viable starting point for negotiations, was deemed largely inadequate and failed to adequately address the importance of public investments, despite certain efforts to mitigate criticisms of the 'old rules' .

By contrast, the Greens, spearheaded by MEP Philippe Lamberts as lead negotiator on the reform of economic governance, advocated for a revamped approach emphasising the importance of orienting national budgets towards EU policy objectives such as social cohesion and environmental sustainability . This entails centring the EU's economic governance framework on a long-term and country-specific debt sustainability analysis that incorporates climate-related fiscal risks. As a result, the debt adjustment paths tailored to individual countries should not only aim to decrease the debt/GDP ratio but may also actually necessitate augmenting targeted green expenditure. Such a future-fit framework should also prioritise the quality of public spending over arbitrary numerical benchmarks and offer preferential treatment to social and green investments . Finally, it must be clearly said that national budgets will not suffice to address the needs of a socially just ecological transition: the EU needs a common and permanent central investment capacity (also called fiscal capacity) financed through common EU borrowing to face the challenges ahead. All these measures aim to transition towards a 'Sustainability and Well-being Pact' , facilitating rapid transformation of our economies in the face of ecological crises and promoting social investments in education, health, and housing, among other areas, to advance the quality of life of citizens.

Led by German Finance Minister Christian Lindner's and supported by the so-called 'frugal' countries, the old guard fought back, and the situation has actually worsened since the Commission's initial proposal. The recently agreed-upon text by the European Parliament and the Council introduced new arbitrary and complex rules that are effectively prioritising debt and deficit reduction over key EU policy objectives, such as ensuring a fair ecological transition. This move towards an 'austerity pact', supported by the groups of the Conservatives (EPP) and the Liberals (Renew) with the complicity of the Social-Democrats (S&D), is indeed characterized by stringent budget cuts estimated at about 100 billion for all member states in the first year of its

application alone . In the upcoming four years, countries such as France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands are anticipated to undertake the biggest cuts, ranging from 6 to 26 billion euros annually, to fulfil deficit reduction objectives. Moreover, under these rules, only four countries (Ireland, Sweden, Latvia, and Denmark) would be able to mobilise sufficient fiscal space to practically undertake our 1.5 degree aligned scenario within debt and deficit limits . Finally, the new set of rules places member states in a conundrum, forcing them to choose between social welfare and green spending, a dilemma that could exacerbate social unrest and undermine the necessary transformation of our economies.

Certainly, some argue that what cannot be funded through debt could be financed through taxing the super rich. Implementing a wealth tax is undoubtedly a crucial policy measure to restore fiscal equity and fund a socially equitable transition, potentially generating up to 273 billion euros annually at the EU level if accompanied by additional measures to combat tax evasion . However, if the reform of EU economic governance proceeds, a significant portion of the revenues from a wealth tax may be used to offset the reductions resulting from fiscal regulations. Moreover, considering that other challenges, such as defense policy, will necessitate public funding, relying solely on a wealth tax would prove insufficient. In essence, we still require debt as a financing mechanism.

As of the drafting of this paper, the agreement is pending final approval in the European Parliament scheduled for 23 April 2024. And based on previous votes in the Committee of Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON), it seems likely that a majority will support this bad deal. In our evaluation, this signifies a significant setback: these new rules not only fail to address the recognised shortfall in green and social investment but also impede any significant potential advancements.

6. CRACKING OPEN THE MODELLING BLACK BOX

It is important to note that the austerity-based model and the green revamped model we advocated for both rely on different methodologies, each with their own set of assumptions and variables. The Greens' position, for instance, is based in part on a postgrowth macroeconomics model, called Eurogreen, that simulates policies and scenarios for low-carbon transition and social equity. This model has been developed by researchers of the University of Pisa with the support of Philippe Lamberts and other Green MEPs since 2017 .

This example alone shows how the use of modelling tools is itself dependent on political choices and how it can significantly influence European policy-making. This is why, in collaboration with two researchers who examined the economic models employed by the European Commission , we launched another initiative: a call from economists backed by more than 200 signatories, including prominent names like Mariana Mazzucato and Tim Jackson, advocating for a renewed modelling toolbox to provide efficient guidance to public decision-makers in driving the ecological transition required by the European Union .

Central to this call is the recognition that the choice of economic models is far from neutral. Current traditional Dynamic Stochastic General Equilibrium (DSGE) and Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) models used by the Commission often tend to favour market-based solutions over regulatory approaches and may discourage expansive policy measures crucial for achieving carbon neutrality and addressing pressing social issues. The call therefore highlights the necessity of incorporating models from the field of Ecological Economics into decision-making processes. These alternative models offer insights into complex interdisciplinary questions, such as the redistributive effects of transition policies,

the integration of social inequalities in green policy design, and the management of financial risks associated with environmental degradation and transition.

Developing a pluralistic approach to economic modelling is also a matter of accountability and democracy. While models wield immense power in shaping decisions, their underlying assumptions and ideological preferences remain opaque to many, sometimes even to policymakers. By shedding light on this 'black box' of public decision-making, the call thus aims to spark a democratic debate on the choices inherent in these supposedly 'neutral'.

The call has sparked a fruitful dialogue with the Commission, but any meaningful change will require that such an important matter finds its rightful place in the context of the ongoing electoral campaign.

7. FACING THE GREEN BACKLASH WITH A SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL AGENDA

Discussing the upcoming EU elections, as was already hinted at above, there is a tangible concern about a potential backlash against environmental initiatives post-election, which deserves serious attention . Presently, the prevailing discourse is characterized by demagogic anti-environmental rhetoric, primarily emanating from liberal, conservative, and far-right political factions. These groups exploit the cost-of-living crisis and economic hardships faced by farmers to advance their political agenda of scaling back ecological measures.

However, their stance contradicts the aspirations of EU citizens. A European Barometer survey conducted six months prior to the EU elections revealed that the top three priorities for EU citizens include combating poverty and social exclusion, improving public health, and addressing the climate crisis, alongside support for the economy and job creation . Consequently, a majority of Europeans advocate for action on both social and environmental fronts. Nonetheless, many citizens express concerns about their diminishing standard of living and anticipate worsening conditions in the future, both personally and for their national economy.

Recognizing environmental and socioeconomic issues as complementary rather than conflicting is crucial not only to address the concurrent challenges of inequality and ecological crises but also to align with the desires of citizens who bear the burdens of a faltering economic system.

In conclusion, Eloi Laurent rightfully warned us during the BGC that in order to turn the 'Woodstock of postgrowth' into a tangible and lasting success, we need to build 'EU postgrowth institutions', that is, to present a credible path towards a social-ecological transformation at EU level . As I explored throughout this paper, with Philippe and Léa, we did our bit from within the 'EU bubble' to contribute to this objective, to provide a hopeful and rigorous approach to the design of a future-fit economy. Of course, much is still in progress or yet to be launched .

The forthcoming EU elections will be pivotal in shaping the trajectory of the next mandate. It falls upon political candidates to establish credibility regarding their social-ecological agenda, offering it as a viable alternative to the right-wing opposition to economic transformation. They understand that it aligns with the views of the majority, but they must summon the courage to demonstrate its desirability, feasibility, and fairness. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of citizens to decide whether they endorse those advocating for a future focused on their well-being within the constraints of planetary boundaries.

A LAW TO REDUCE THE EU'S UNJUST RESOURCE USE – WITH DEGROWTH TO THE HEART

Meadhbh Bolger

Nine years ago, I started working in the then-called 'resource use and consumption' programme at Friends of the Earth Europe, the largest grassroots environmental network in Europe. We wanted to look beyond the classical 'carbon tunnel vision' which many environmental and other organisations perpetuate and which many policies are founded on.[1] We based our EU policy work on the 'four footprints' approach. This means looking not only at the increasing carbon emissions and the impacts from that, but looking at our overall resource consumption across the economy – including materials, land and water, and its impacts.

The need to look beyond carbon emissions

The evidence is clear: 90% of global biodiversity loss and water stress, 50% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and over 30% of air pollution health impacts are caused by resource extraction and processing. Mining to extract resources is one of the deadliest industries for those who oppose it. The injustice is blatantly obvious – the 1.2 billion poorest people account for just 1% of the world's consumption, while the one billion richest account for 72%.

The four footprints – material, land, water and carbon – look at resource use from a holistic, consumption-based viewpoint. This means taking a life-cycle perspective and accounting for the indirect (or embodied) resources of imported and exported products. This approach allows one to capture a country or region's total final consumption and the environmental (and social) pressures it may be putting on other countries or regions for its own consumption. For example, the material footprint of a smartphone does not just include the final weight of the metals in the phone itself, but the weight of the metal ores mined to get those final pieces of metal. For metals like copper, to get 1 tonne of pure copper, on average 200 tonnes of rock have to be dug up. This means significantly more weight and associated environmental impacts of extraction.

European economies were built, in large part, through the colonisation of the Global South, channelling natural resources towards Europe. And in fact, this process never ended: even today, the EU continues to exploit resources and labour from poorer countries and regions, while it has been consuming more than its fair share, and beyond ecological limits, for decades. With respect to environmental impacts from resource use, the EU uses between 70% and 97% of the 'safe operating space' available for the whole world. This means the EU alone is close to exceeding the planetary boundaries for resource use impacts, beyond which the stable functioning of the earth's biophysical systems are in jeopardy, despite only making up 6% of global population.

The focus on material footprint

Friends of the Earth Europe and allies, decided to focus our advocacy work in the past several years specifically on the material footprint. The data on this is more robust than on land or water footprints and has been measured by Eurostat – the EU's official statistics agency – for more than 20 years.

The material footprint is the total amount of fossil fuels, biomass, metals and minerals consumed, including those embodied in imports and excluding those embodied in exports, by a country or region. It is weight-based (usually defined in the EU in tonnes per capita). Because it is weight-based, however, it can lead to a simplification of complexities, as different materials have vastly different impacts, depending on their makeup, how they are produced, etc. Nonetheless, the material footprint indicator is still proven to be a good proxy of overall environmental damage caused.

What are the current trends? At the global level, under current patterns of production and consumption, the extraction and use of primary materials are expected to increase globally, from 89 gigatonnes in 2017 to a staggering 167 gigatonnes in 2060. In contrast, experts suggest that a sustainable global level would be around 50 gigatonnes. At the EU level and measured per person, the EU's material footprint currently stands at an alarming 14.8 tonnes per capita annually, more than double the threshold deemed sustainable and just.[2] This trend is set to keep rising unless decisive action is taken. Imports from outside the EU account for 20% of its material consumption.

How does material footprint reduction link to degrowth and post-growth?

Knowing that it is a good proxy for overall environmental damage, reducing material footprint is a core degrowth policy and is vital in transitioning to a post-growth future where the material footprint is equitable and within planetary limits. Tackling material consumption means tackling the EU's growth-based economic system. Research shows that a 1% increase in GDP (which is lower than most governments aim for) can increase resource extraction between 0.3 and 0.6%, whereas carbon emissions could slightly fall. Of course reducing carbon emissions gets the primary attention of most Western governments and societies and in dominant narratives as it does not risk shaking the status quo too much – growth can still happen!

EU policy perspective

The EU states that one of its objectives is to achieve "living well within planetary boundaries". To do that in a comprehensive and just manner, we know it is absolutely necessary that the EU addresses its unsustainable consumption of resources. The EU Climate Law and the

European Green Deal have been major steps towards making the EU more sustainable. However, both are based on the myth of 'green growth' and many key parts are subject to the 'carbon tunnel vision' mentioned above and do not adequately address the systemic links between the climate crisis and other worsening global crises such as biodiversity loss, pollution, resource depletion, human rights violations, rising inequality and stagnating levels of wellbeing.

The European Commission has already introduced several resource and consumption reduction targets. The Energy Efficiency Directive includes that Member States shall collectively ensure a reduction of total energy consumption of at least 11.7% in 2030 compared to the projections of the 2020 EU Reference Scenario, and the proposal for a revision of EU legislation on Packaging and Packaging Waste introduced reduction targets for packaging waste. Yet these and similar measures focus on specific products, sectors, or types of consumption, and most of the targets are not in line with the ambition needed for consumption to be at a sustainable and just level. Furthermore, GDP growth risks bringing this target out of reach altogether: one of the core focuses of the European Green Deal is the Circular Economy Action Plan, yet research shows that GDP growth increases resource extraction four times more than the savings achieved by circular economy initiatives.

There are some encouraging signs of change however. The European Parliament has called for the "urgent need for an overall reduction in resource extraction and use" in its 2015 own-initiative report on resource efficiency, and in 2021, it has called for "science-based binding 2030 EU reduction targets for material footprint and consumption footprint" in its opinion report on the EU Circular Economy Action Plan. And some EU Member States are becoming frontrunners in target setting, such as Austria committing to reduce material footprint per capita by 80% by 2050.

But what would a new, comprehensive and coordinated approach to, and laws on, resource management and reduction at the EU level look like?

A new EU Legislation on Sustainable Resource Management

More and more civil society organisations working at EU policy levels are beginning to advocate for a new EU Legislation on Sustainable Resource Management to tackle this. It would be made up of:

- **A Directive** which sets a legal objective for the Union to reach sustainable levels of resource consumption in relation to its biocapacity. This includes a clear delineation of the EU's and each Member State's role in reducing material footprints (fossil fuels, biomass, metals, minerals). The Directive would give flexibility for Member States to implement the laws at the national level in a way that works best for their political, social, economic and cultural contexts, also taking into account their specific biocapacity, current progress and historical contributions. Integral to the development of this Directive will be citizens' and workers' involvement, i.e., EU and national level citizens assemblies, workers' representation and involvement of grassroots movements.
- **Targets and caps** to drive clear and measurable action. These include a binding reduction in EU material footprint (raw material consumption, as measured by Eurostat) to 5 tonnes per capita by 2050 (a 66% reduction compared to 2022 levels of 14.8 tonnes per capita), with mid-term reduction targets of at least 20% by 2030 (11.8 tonnes per capita per year) and at least 50%

by 2040 (7.4 tonnes per capita per year).[3] National targets for each Member State to reach should subsequently be developed, indicated in tonnes per capita rather than a percentage reduction, and taking into account specific Member State contexts, biocapacity, historical responsibility and more. As above mentioned, a limitation of the indicator is that different materials have vastly different impacts and for example, this becomes apparent for regions that might have a strong need for construction materials for more housing, or for regions that might rely on a large forestry sector. Targets could be supported by binding caps on domestic raw material extraction and on imports to the EU.

- A commitment by the EU and its Member States to develop **sufficiency strategies and legal requirements** to support the achievement of the targets with a focus on reducing resource use in high-consumption sectors such as transport and construction and developing sector-specific roadmaps with binding sub-targets. For example, national and urban net-zero strategies should be in congruence with resource use reduction targets and circularity (reuse, remanufacture and recycling) targets to ensure a holistic and coherent approach to addressing environmental challenges with the resource justice objective and to prevent burden shifting through a narrow focus only on material substitution. Strategies should also ensure a just transition in line with the International Labour Organization guidelines to less environmentally and socially harmful industrial production for essential industries, with greater state spending on research, development and support for these sectors. There should be a strong global element embedded in all strategies and policies.

Addressing social equity and a just transition

Social justice should be at the core of the legislation. This means ensuring material resources in Europe (within the overall limits set above) are (re)distributed fairly, massively reducing the gap between the largest consumers (nations, industries, people) and the smallest. The aim should be to meet the basic needs of all in society (in the EU in 2022 22% of the population were at risk of poverty or social exclusion) within the limits of the planet. This means that the new directive has to be accompanied by measures taken by Member States that address inequality and luxury consumption, such as redistributive taxes and social programmes.

Furthermore, addressing resource-intensive sectors requires a just transition, which acknowledges the inevitable shifts in industries and strives to make them fair, ensuring that no worker is left behind. The legislation on sustainable resource management must work hand-in-hand with relevant legal frameworks and social policies and guarantee that workers' rights are upheld throughout the process. This includes ensuring fair wages, social protection, safe working conditions, retraining initiatives, and protection against discriminatory practices. The enforcement of current, and the expansion of social dialogue legal rights, is required to ensure that vulnerable workers are consulted at all stages of the transition process.

The 7 Benefits of an EU legislation on Sustainable Resource Management

1. **Tackling the ecological crises:** Limiting damage to the climate as well as land and sea ecosystems will be impossible unless resources are used at sustainable levels.

2. **Transitioning to a true circular economy:** A fundamental shift toward strategies to reduce unnecessary consumption, move to socially useful resource consumption and move to toxic-free production are paramount for a truly effective transition to a circular economy.

3. **Achieving strategic autonomy:** Security of supply is central in the EU debates on the energy crisis and on raw materials. Reducing the EU's dependence on resource and energy imports makes it easier to preserve its independence and strengthen its resilience to potential future conflicts.

4. **Fostering global peace and security:** Implementing measures to reduce resource consumption can mitigate risk factors that may lead to conflicts and contribute to fostering global peace and security.

5. **Delivering resource justice and mitigating EU's impact on the Global South:** The people and nations who consume the least pay the highest price, including women and indigenous peoples and other marginalised groups. Reducing resource consumption in Europe will provide the necessary biophysical space for low-income countries to exercise their right to development and meet the needs of people in the Global South through a more fair global distribution of natural resources.

6. **Respecting human rights and workers' rights:** Less resource overproduction and overconsumption means less extraction and the potential to slow down value chains, retrain workers in socially useful and environmentally safe work, reduce working hours, and give greater space to ensure respect for human rights and workers' rights while creating a more circular wellbeing economy.

7. **Stimulating change towards social equity, health and wellbeing:** Prioritising societal needs and non-material values can actually improve various aspects of subjective wellbeing and mental health, including a greater sense of community, life satisfaction, and life purpose.

People want to live in a post-growth future!

Recent surveys and data have indicated that a significant number of European citizens support the idea of a post-growth future. They believe that a shift towards a more sustainable, equitable, and low-carbon economy would not only benefit the environment but also improve their quality of life. One such research study of more than 10,000 people in 29 high-income and middle-income countries found that 70% believe that "overconsumption is putting our planet and society at risk" and 65% believe that "our society would be better off if people shared more and owned less." Many European citizens have developed concrete initiatives that are already putting such a future in practice, such as repair cafés and eco communities. It is time for the EU to follow suit and set the right policy context for such initiatives to flourish and contribute to an EU within planetary boundaries.

[1] carbon tunnel vision: advocating for and designing laws with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, without considering any of the other ecological impact factors

[2] Based on best available research described within supplementary information 2.6 of: O'Neill, D.W., Fanning, A.L., Lamb, W.F. *et al.* A good life for all within planetary boundaries. *Nat Sustain* **1**, 88–95 (2018). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-018-0021-4

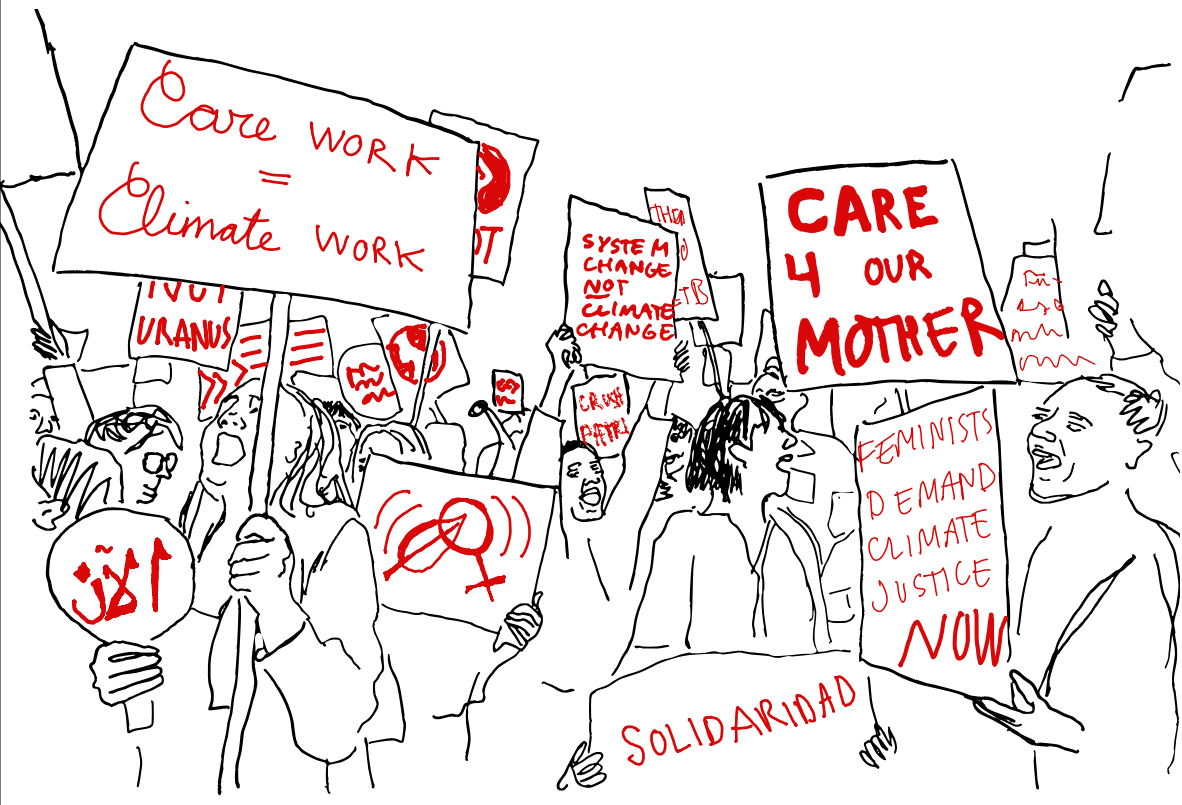
[3] The necessary targets are calculated using the above mentioned research from O'Neill, D.W., Fanning, A.L., Lamb, W.F. *et al.* and assume that reductions are easier to attain in the beginning (low hanging fruit) and harder to attain over time as the material footprint decreases. (a reduction of 0.59t/cap/yr per year between 2025-2030; of 0.44t/cap/yr per year between 2030 and 2040; and of 0.24t/cap/yr per year between 2040 and 2050). It is assumed the reduction starts in 2025 at the 2022 footprint of 14.8 t/cap/yr.

03

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICS

CARE IS MORE THAN A TAGLINE: PRACTICING AN ETHIC OF CARE FOR POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION

Clara Dallaire–Fortier
& Christie Nicoson



Imagination is a muscle that, for many of us, will atrophy if we don't use it, especially under the pressure of constant fear.

ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN

As we struggle in our daily lives to find meaning and create livable spaces for ourselves and our communities, a promise of post-growth societies provides a glimpse of hope. Post-growth and degrowth movements, practices, stories, and scholarship help us picture a future where communities of humans and more-than-humans care for each other. Degrowth stands apart from other approaches to sustainability, making a fundamental connection between the social and environmental, between people and planet.

These ideas focus our energies on the need to transform high-income countries and extractive ways of living: tackling the problem from within the cycles of violence perpetuated in and by Global North systems. Growing numbers of people, especially across Europe, question a growth-based economic model and call to transform societies by centering other key values and principles: Modes and models of production and consumption that enact a frugal abundance, reducing excess yet maintaining sufficiency for all to live a good life; participatory decision-making that redefines what democracy looks like and how it works for the people; and conviviality that guides social and material infrastructure, where networks of care and cooperation enable life to thrive.

As momentum grows, calls strengthen for degrowth processes and post-growth societies that are feminist, anti-colonial, and anti-racist. Degrowth fosters alliances with other movements like *buen vivir* or *ubuntu* and, increasingly, we see initiatives inviting in artists, workers, and marginalized voices together with more traditional holders of power like politicians and academics. These efforts present a multitude of visions for how transformation might look and work, broadening who is invited to the table. Yet, as movement continues, there are risks that our aspirations fall into old patterns.

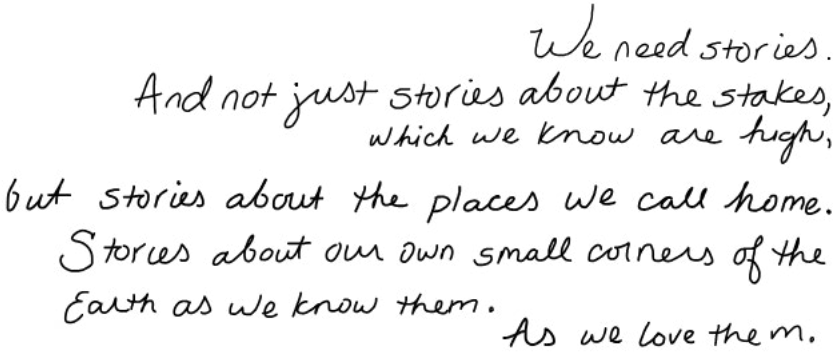
How will degrowth be decolonized within a discussion centered on academic voices? How will degrowth be feminist in the architecture of current society and the echo chamber of the movement? How will degrowth move beyond androcentrism within the confines of social inequality? How will degrowth be anti-racist in Europe and settler nations, within centuries of colonialism?

Our futures are limited by what we can imagine, and our imaginations are limited by our embodied knowledge. To truly foster transformative political systems and institutions, we need more

than words. Care needs to be more than a tagline. If the beautiful visions we put forth for anti-patriarchal, anti-racist societies are truly desired – as we believe they are! – then the ways to build them must break the norms. We need to practice these ways of being and doing as we walk, not wait for them to appear at the end of the road. Too often in history, revolutions have discarded issues of intersectional oppressions in the name of tackling some so-thought grander problem. It is time to walk the talk - to embody now the care that degrowth upholds in its banners.

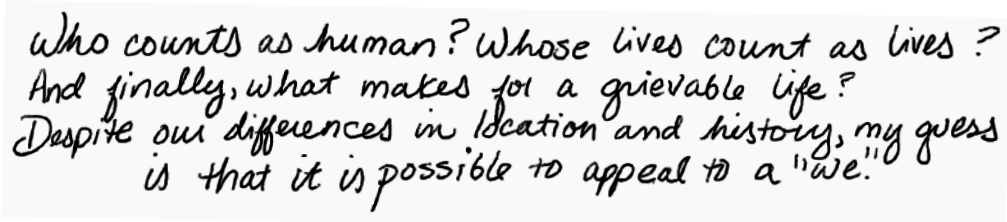
As degrowth-ers have demonstrated time and again, 'new' ways do not always have to be invented from scratch. As we look around, we find inspiration and examples that center care more as an ethic or value, not an add-on. In this text, we - Clara and Christie - sample lessons based on ethics of care as a living foundation upon which post-growth futures can take root and thrive. Ethics of care theorizes five phases of caring values and practices that sustain lives and relationships while tackling oppressions and violences (Tronto 2013). And as we follow this theory, we find examples of people, movements, and spaces that transform political systems toward our desired post-growth futures. We share stories - some going on around us, others from past days - that centralize care and illustrate how each phase of caring might look.

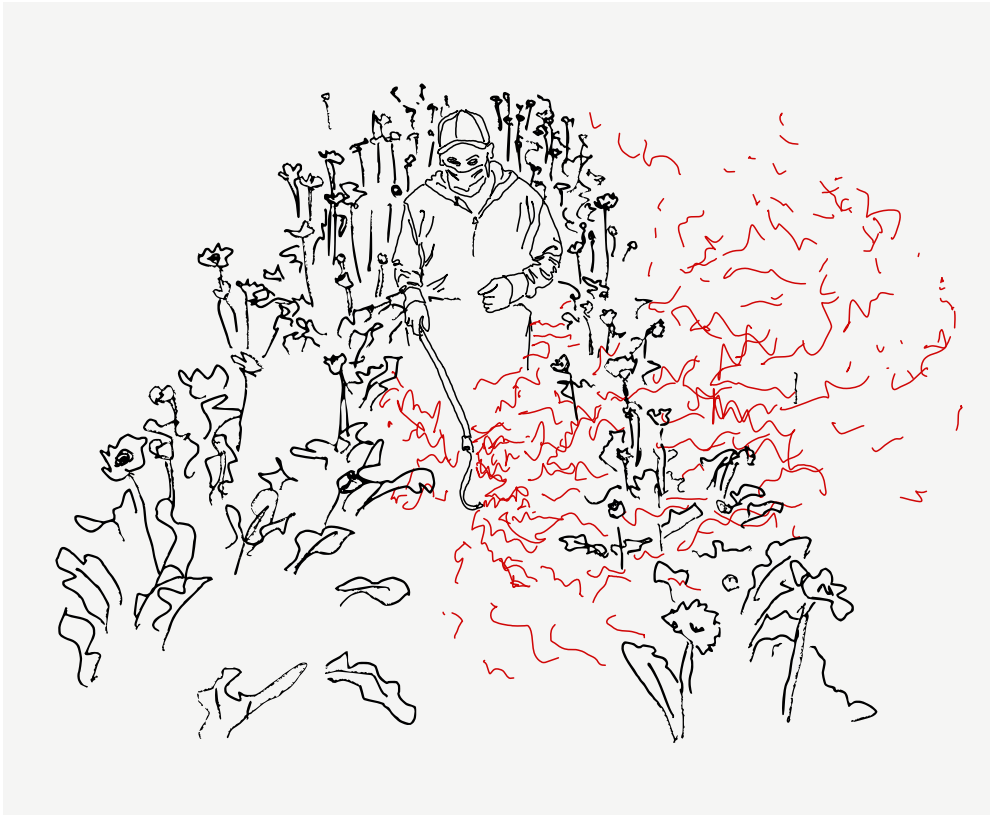
The first phase is *caring about*. Who identifies a care need? Among some of the most anticipated or commonly talked-about impacts of climate change is the story of sinking islands – that as sea levels rise, some islands, particularly those in the Pacific and Oceania, will simply disappear. The 'care' for those who live on these islands is complicated – with suggestions to move them,



purchase land in other countries, and so on. Yet the reception of this care is another matter entirely. Speaking from Guam in the Pacific, one of the territories still held as a colony of the US, Julian Aguon (2021) puts forth a call for stories centering narratives of 'frontline communities' facing climate change. "To hell with drowning." This is a response as much as proclamation - a response to the status quo of outside interests and power-holders who find the re-placement of entire countries and peoples easy enough. A proclamation that communities know what they need and what they desire to be done differently. Listen to the loud peoples' protests at international climate summits, see displays of traditional techniques and performances at cultural festivals; hear and join peoples' protests against increased militarization and development that only contribute more to the production of greenhouse gasses driving climate change; take note of the needs people have as they cope with change in their own way. A political system with *caring about* not only listens to these expressions, but centers around whether, how, and for or by whom care needs are fulfilled.

Second, *taking care of* is the act of recognizing and taking responsibility for needs. Judith Butler's words on grievable life remind us well of what recognition implies. She states (2020, p. 20) that, in light of the current violences, one should start by questioning:





In our struggles for climate justice and radical transformation, a broad definition of *we,* an inclusionary *we,* is at the heart of a democratic endeavor. *We* need to recognize broadly. The *we* of imagining post-growth must go beyond the current self-declared poster kids of the movement. Climate change reaches beyond the well-read hipster city-bikers in European metropolises who smile, self-assured after dumping their organics on the collective compost box invaded by clouds of flies. The mere symbols of sustainable living should not belong to nor be defined by intellectuals or activists only. The degrowth movement must embrace those who worked in the coal mines, those who (like us) have experienced pride from the materialistic joy of first possession, the people who drive big trucks, and *we*-s who make a living from capitalism. This implies recognizing and including the stories and hopes of people with pasts rooted and intrinsically connected to extractivist modes of living - whose isn't? Sustainability will have billions of faces: it is a community with its complexities and paradoxes. Politics in post-growth societies must take care of all. After all, Butler finds the possibility for an inclusive vision of grievable lives *by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies* (ibid, p. 20).

Third, *care giving* entails someone or -thing taking responsibility for recognizing and meeting needs. This is not the same as deciding what is needed but doing what needs to be done. We find an example of this in some anti-racist white allyship from the Black Lives Matter mobilization of 2020. It happens when white folks listen to the call from Black activists to participation that goes beyond performance. For instance, by recog-

nizing the privileges of white bodies, Black Lives Matter evolves a strategy in which white people at protests give direct care by moving their bodies between protesters and the police. This goes against the expression of white anger through acts of violence that escalate and expose Black bodies to further harm. This example demonstrates politics of care-giving attuned to oppression as well as privilege and centers around the needs of those at most risk of harm. Beyond the body politics, allyship must enable the creation and expression of Black narratives, impossible with performative white reappropriation. The strategy embodied in this example of BLM protests was an act of physical as well as emotional care. This does not rely on emancipation given through louder expressions of White grief, but rather, Black liberation taking safer physical and emotional spaces for black bodies.

Fourth, *care receiving* involves someone or something responding to care they receive and assessing whether it meets their needs. Here, good intentions are not enough. It is essential to engage with the other to understand adequate means and ends to care. This act of communication requires trial and error, and dialogue. The experiments of a feminist group in Quebec, Canada provide an interesting example (Mélissa Blais 2008). Ten years ago, feminist men offered their help for the organization of a conference. Women would take a front seat, covering the logistics and hosting the discussions while men helped backstage in the kitchen by doing the dishes. Yet, the latter received praise as participants lined up in the distant corridor next to the kitchen to thank them. It raised the question of whether this empowered or disempowered the women doing the conference's heavy lifting. Good intentions were there and men were knowledgeable of feminist theory; nevertheless, some patterns from mainstream society reemerged. Tensions emerged also as men presented themselves as spokespersons to the media. *Care receiving* implies a continuous search into how the energy of allies can be adjusted to the repetitive pattern of mainstream domination. How to avoid performative *care*? By listening to the care-receivers. Here, the women's care needs are forefront, the reception of care is what matters. Later a new pro-feminist group was created, the women asked for occasional support from the men - for example, they hung posters and applied for funding.

Fifth, *caring with* entails a process between care providers and receivers that keeps them connected, in relations of equality and justice. An example of this as transformation in political systems – from politics in the streets to formal institutions – we turn to the Combahee River Collective. Although the Collective has dissolved (1974-1980), their work in Boston demonstrates a concrete approach to coalition politics, to solidarity politics. The Collective pushed for an anti-capitalist reorganization of society, incorporating everyday experiences of oppression Black

women faced in the US – from homes to schools and health care centers. They called for political change grounded in identity politics. Members were also active in different ways – protesting segregation by organizing Freedom Schools for educational justice, starting the Kitchen Table Women of Color Press to publish Black women authors, and actively protesting police brutality and violence against women. This example demonstrates a *caring with* through the transformation of politics towards relations of equality and justice, in balancing relations among care-givers and -receivers.

We read these examples with a mix of hope and procedural curiosity. You may reflect, as we have, that none of the five phases of care ethics are simple, nor ever fully achieved. However, they root our struggles toward post-growth futures - directing our gaze toward the communities and rivers we wish to know, toward the friends and sea we wish to cherish.

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GOVERNANCE AND TRANSFORMATION: NAVIGATING POLITICAL SYSTEMS TOWARDS POSTGROWTH SOCIETIES

Halliki Kreinin & Pia Mamut

Addressing the socio-ecological crises requires profound changes in economic and social structures towards postgrowth welfare systems, yet how this transformation could come about is still uncertain. In this essay we will consider some of the topical debates in degrowth scholarship around environmental governance, political systems and institutions, and the transformation to post-growth societies, focusing on the glass ceiling of the environmental state, the deadlock between the responsibilisation of the state and responsibilisation of members of society as "consumers" and "citizens", as well as state-sanctioned violence. We will then cautiously highlight a few transformation pathways debated amongst degrowth activists and researchers, including focusing on existing strong common sense ideas around fairness and justice that can be the bases of alternative good sense narratives.

Unravelling the common sense of growth

Breaking free from the relentless cycle of production and consumption under capitalism not only requires challenging the power of elites and vested interests, but also prevailing common sense ideas (shaped by elites) around progress, modernity, achievement, and emancipation as industrial development and consumer culture (Blühdorn, 2022; Buch-Hansen, 2018). As Stoddard et al. (2021: 677) explain: "(R)edirecting the rising trajectory of emissions toward Paris-compliant rates of decarbonization brings to the fore questions highly challenging to the dominant paradigm of 'progress'. The almost uncritical pursuit of economic growth, piecemeal politics, and a narrow, techno-economic rationality are fundamental characteristics of this paradigm."

In Gramscian terms, the societal "common sense" around the benefits of a growing sphere of production is "not only a unison of economic

and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity" (Gramsci, 1971: 181, cited in Buch-Hansen, 2018: 158), as material wealth, freedoms, rights, values and high-consumption lifestyles are currently deemed non-negotiable imperatives for democratic legitimacy and stability (Blühdorn, 2019; Buch-Hansen, 2018). This societal common sense is not just based around a false consciousness or belief, but also lived in everyday practices through a "material core" (Gramsci 1996: 1567, in Brand 2018:149). The acceptance of the common sense is thus deeply ingrained in economic, political, and cultural practices and norms, even though the prevailing conditions make this material core unsustainable (Brand 2018).

Environmental action or critique which explicitly goes against the common sense has historically been portrayed as a matter of peripheral interest or lifestyle choice, relevant to environmentally conscious groups, hobby-gardeners, as well as the weak, feminised or racialised (Foster, 2005; Lamb et al., 2020; Keil & Kreinin, 2022). Worldviews and perspectives that offer alternatives to the dominant growth-based development pathways have been "marginalized, undermined, or otherwise ignored" (Stoddard et al., 2021, p. 677). Ignoring and not addressing the existential threat to long-term societal welfare, the reframing of the crises as marginal has only provided short-term societal relief from politicisation, while allowing for continued elite capital accumulation.

A paradox currently exists in environmental governance, where heightened scientific understanding coexists with a commitment to maintaining high-consumption lifestyles (Blühdorn, 2022). Current sustainability governance emphasises adapting to "sustained unsustainability" rather than reversing the prevailing logic, resulting in greenwashing efforts to minimise the ecological impact of consumer capitalism (Blühdorn, 2019).

As is well known, this paradox is also highly visible on the micro level. High-income earners with tertiary education, who view themselves as sustainable and profess to care about the environment, generally contribute more to socio-ecological crises than lower-income peers, since income is a better predictor of environmental impacts than pro-environmental views. While people who strongly identify with pro-environmental values express an intention to engage in environmentally responsible behaviour, their focus is on actions that yield marginal ecological benefits, while not giving up comfortable, more convenient, or higher-status high-impact behaviours, such as owning a car and flying (Moser and Kleinhückelkotten 2018). Existing societal narratives around minor individual actions (changing light bulbs, buying a bike, installing a bee hotel, recycling) not only oversimplify the acute socio-ecological crises, but also undermine the need for more ambitious and comprehensive *political* measures to address deeper unsustainable structures (Maniates 2001, Mamut, *forthcoming*).

In this context, studies suggest that lifestyle choices requiring some level of financial investments but also yielding personal benefits, such as resource conservation, generally gain broader acceptance (Vadovics et al., forthcoming). On the other hand, options that necessitate significant behavioural shifts and have a substantial impact on CO2 reduction, like switching to a vegetarian or vegan diet, or using public transport instead of one's car, frequently encounter more substantial opposition (ibid.). The emphasis on "magical thinking" perpetuates and reproduces the existing common sense around progress and emancipation, with "greener" forms of material consumption around lifestyle environmentalism (Maniates 2020). This downplays the fact that individual efforts can only make a limited impact on a larger transformation. It also overlooks significant structural obstacles, such as inadequate infrastructure, a lack of government regulations, and unsustain-

able economic conditions, which remain unaddressed (Vadovics et al, forthcoming; Hirth et al. 2023).

This highlights not only our collective problems with the "halo effect" (of thinking of ourselves more sustainable than we are and celebrating minor changes), but also the problems with depoliticised individual consumer-focused environmental discourses, lifestyle environmentalism, and the need for structural, power, and class considerations of analyses of the multiple crises – and answers to it (Brand, 2018).

The state, civil society, and responsibility

There has been considerable debate about the role of the state and its institutions in the socio-ecological crises, as well as in ways of resolving the crises (D'Alisa and Kallis 2020; Koch 2020; Buch-Hansen 2018). Certainly, the capitalist market and capitalist state contribute to the hegemony and common sense of the growth paradigm (Brand, 2018). State-civil society relations are interlinked, "complex and contradictory, and subject to change via political organization", especially via pressure from movements and civil society (Koch 2022, 7). Yet, if hegemony in civil society and overcoming the common sense of the growth paradigm must be achieved before the state can be won over, this poses a chicken-and-egg hurdle for transformation.

The space for needed societal discussions around socio-ecological transformation and more radical climate policies, are increasingly crowded out by depoliticised and shallow "sustainability" and greenwashing (Blühdorn, 2022). This is exemplified by EU-level "sustainable" policies focused on economic growth and elite business interests, like the "EU Green Deal", which not only reveal a systematic inadequacy in addressing the urgent need for transformation, but undermine the chances for the needed radical changes. Both making it seem like "sustainability" is an elite project focused around unaffordable environmental lifestyles, as well as shaped by business interests, these narratives further alienate large parts of society while confirming the common sense around progress as capitalist growth (Dunlap and Laratte 2022). The notion of environmental policy as elite intervention has reignited climate scepticism and general resistance to environmental policies. Superficial and socially blind "climate policies" are also increasingly being exploited by populist and right-wing parties for their own gain.

The narrative of a "magical thinking" around minor lifestyle changes not only gives piece of mind for individuals, but is also promoted by and used by institutional actors as a way of avoiding responsibility for creating more meaningful framework conditions for sustainability. As the political task and responsibility of a socio-ecological transformation has been depoliticised and become a matter of individual lifestyle orientations, so the state and its institutions can shirk responsibility bringing about meaningful changes (Grunwald 2010).

The question of how society can be made more democratic is key to any postgrowth transformation as "democracy is the precondition for a society which is liberated form the compulsion towards capitalist economic growth" (Brand 2018, 154). Nonetheless, in the context of democracy, the common aspiration that citizen participation and democratic discourse will catalyse extensive changes in political systems is frequently unfulfilled, as widespread consensual and deliberative democratic models tend to sustain entrenched interests and socio-ecological injustices rather than confronting them. A prevalent phenomenon accompanying this trend is the concept of simulative democracy (Blühdorn 2006). Alongside urging individuals in their role as consumers to adopt more climate-friendly consumption habits, (local) governments are also targeting in-

THE PERVASIVE NARRATIVE OF MAGICAL THINKING AND THE OVERLOOKING OF STRUCTURAL INJUSTICES CAN BE SEEN AS OUTCOMES OF A STATE-SOCIETY DYNAMIC WHERE THE GOVERNMENT ENLISTS CITIZENS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS TO ENDORSE A SUPERFICIALLY GREEN APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY.

dividuals in their capacity as citizens. This trend often leads to a superficial form of green citizenship, where individuals are involved in processes with limited and manageable opportunities for real decision-making. Rather than actively advocating for more sustainable social and material infrastructures, citizens are effectively co-opted by (local) governments to endorse a transition that favours a "greener" iteration of the existing status quo, as opposed to authentic transformation.

Many countries have now made environmental management a key part of their government activities as part of the "environmental state", the latest form of the modern capitalist state (Hausknost, 2019). Despite the increasing discourse around "greening" and "sustainability", the "environmental state" has to balance "green" concerns with other imperatives for democratic legitimacy, including internal security, international competitiveness, economic prosperity, and consumer choice (Hausknost, 2019). "Green" or "sustainable" goals are only one of many other goals, and the democratic state cannot enact policies that would go against the non-negotiable imperatives which legitimise the government. While the environmental state can handle local environmental issues and safety concerns well, it cannot make a significant shift towards challenging the socio-ecological crises head on, as the power of the environmental state ends at the limits to any changes to the prevailing paradigm of economic growth and the common sense of industrial progress (Hausknost & Hammond, 2020; Hausknost, 2019).

The non-negotiable imperatives of states face especially stark challenges in the contemporary landscape of international relations, marked by the rise of authoritarianism and the emergence of rogue states (Mathai, 2013). Against the backdrop of geopolitical tensions, environmental concerns have encountered competing interests which reconfirm the common sense of the growth paradigm. The focus on immediate security and threats relegates environmental concerns to the background, while also confirming a more authoritarian stances and the need for more economic growth in the international competitive arena. The shifting international landscape also increasingly introduces a paradox wherein the need for collaborative global efforts to address environmental challenges clashes with the rise of isolationist tendencies and a disregard for international norms.

Furthermore, the intersection of environmental policy with authoritarianism and geopolitical conflicts has additional implications for public perceptions and narratives – both in reconfirming the existing common sense, as well as creating anger towards neoliberally framed shallow climate policies, through framing climate policy as elite interference. As can be seen in COP28, authoritarian petro-regimes also increasingly use environmental concerns as a tool for political leverage or greenwashing, manipulating narratives to bolster their image while neglecting substantive sustainability and social welfare measures, adding to further depoliticization of debates around environmental justice.

Discussing the possibilities of postgrowth transformations, critical social scientists have brought attention to the barrier that different state institutions – especially the police – create to transformations, violently holding up the "common sense" of social order of productivist capitalism even in so-called liberal states (Neocleous, 2000, 2021). The state institution of the police – established for the enforced proletarianization of paupers, and subsistence farmers pushed off the land – has had key role in enacting violence to defend the common-sense "social order", property order, class relations, property rights, and poverty, while enforcing productivity and the morality of a "work ethic" (Neocleous, 2022, 2021). The police have had a key role in constantly "remaking"

the societal common sense through the (threat of) deadly violence. This is visible in the increasing use of systematic physical violence against climate protestors and activists even in wealthy "liberal" states, as well as deadly state violence against indigenous groups and environmental activists elsewhere. The use of state sanctioned violence when defending of fossil industry and private property highlights a very deep barrier to any postgrowth transformation.

Redefining Progress: Fairness and Justice in the Transition to Postgrowth Societies?

In growth critical literature, there is large agreement that resolving the socio-ecological crises requires a departure from the prevailing industrial model and consumer culture, demanding swift, radical action from governing authorities. Most suggest that a deep and politicised crisis of the existing economic system and prevailing growth paradigm is one key ingredient for bringing about change (Buch-Hansen 2018; Brand 2018). To reshape the state for a transition beyond sustainability crises, and to overcome the "glass ceiling" of the environmental state, social and ecological sustainability must match or surpass existing other imperatives – national and internal security, international competitiveness, and consumer choice (Hausknost, 2019). For this to be possible, however, postgrowth ideas must become hegemonic in the power-shaped arena of civil society, and win at least the passive consent of the population (Brand, 2018: 149). Currently, "comprehensive coalition[s] of social forces" ready to wage political struggles to make degrowth or postgrowth ideas hegemonic are still missing in most countries (Buch-Hansen 2018, 162), while any likely transformation requires citizens, social movements, businesses, and interests "vested" in a post-growth-shift to demand it (Blühdorn, 2019).

Currently, degrowth and postgrowth ideas (while becoming more popular) are still relatively unknown to most people, and marginalised. Going against the common sense and dominant ideas of progress, emancipation and freedom, degrowth presents a much more challenging change than the neoliberal revolution of the 1970s (Buch-Hansen 2018).

While always competing with other explanations and common sense narratives, an important avenue for opening up public debate are explicit questions around the extent to which the common sense promises of existing growth based capitalist systems actually deliver on the promises of the good life (Krüger 2020; Brand and Wissen 2021; Buch-Hansen 2018; Hall and O'shea 2013). Cracks in the dominant common sense in the form of social crises or reproduction and strategically leveraging the concept of "fairness" can be used to challenge existing power structures and income inequality.

By emphasizing fairness in a way that resonates with the broader public, these narratives can serve as a powerful tool for social mobilization. Furthermore, as Gramsci's focus on the material aspects of social life aligns with the need to address the practical challenges individuals face, emphasizing the huge insecurity prevalent among those unable to meet their basic needs to become the basis of a shared discourse. Building good sense narratives becomes a means of not only challenging the status quo but also fostering a collective understanding of the material and social conditions that contribute to these challenges (Brand 2018; Krüger 2020).

To address the oversight of structural injustices, one effective approach is to highlight narratives that bring to light stories of injustice and suffering from around the world (Schiff 2008: 112). These narratives can bridge the gap between the disconnection and dissonance felt by individuals, whether in their personal lives or as part of larger

structures. An approach that might initially appear counterintuitive involves distancing from the practice of branding products or methods as "climate-friendly" or "sustainable", instead , focusing on basic material needs and social justice. "Green" or "sustainable" labels lead to greenwashing and, intentionally or not, currently align with dominant green narratives.

The issues highlighted here underscore the need to reinvigorate the state-society debates (Hunold & Dryzek 2005). The pervasive narrative of magical thinking and the overlooking of structural injustices can be seen as outcomes of a state-society dynamic where the government enlists citizens and other stakeholders to endorse a superficially green approach to sustainability. This leads to a persistent trend of depoliticization and the co-optation of social and environmental movements. In response, there is a pressing need to transition towards a state-society relationship that embraces conflicts and confrontations more productively (Ibid.). Such a shift would challenge false and unnecessary antagonisms that only widen societal and political divides, paving the way for more authentic and effective approaches to sustainability.

In a state-society relationship that is more open to conflict, the government should establish more agonistic institutional frameworks within the existing consensus-based and deliberative participation and decision-making processes (Westphal 2019). Meanwhile, citizens should not only aim to reduce their ecological and CO2 footprint but also strive to expand their social and political influence to avoid being co-opted. Citizens can enhance their social and political impact by organizing community awareness campaigns, initiating petitions, participating in public forums and debates, advocating for sustainability criteria, forming strategic alliances , demanding an influential role in political decision-making, lobbying for environmental policies, and engaging in grassroots movements for systemic change.

Although these actions still place a burden on citizens, who may lack the power to alter larger political and economic structures, they are crucial in demonstrating public support for socio-ecological transformation to a government that is part of the very politico-economic complex of unsustainability it aims to change. Existing societal power relations and structures are stacked against any transformation of political, state and governance structures towards democratic post-growth systems. Yet, grassroots movements, mutual aid, community organizations and citizen initiatives already are, and will continue be the lifeline for survival in a future of crises, insecurity, and increasing state-sanctioned violence in the defence of property.

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POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS TOWARDS POST-GROWTH SOCIETIES: HOW TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL MOBILISATIONS CAN INFORM THE EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONS

Arpita Bisht

Over the last decade, the necessity and urgency of political systems and institutions to directly and appropriately address the interconnected global-scale issues of ecological degradation and collapse, labour and human rights oppressions, and socioeconomic inequalities has become ever more pressing. However, even when current systems have attempted to address issues, they have often resulted in solutions leading to unsuccessful outcomes at best, and outcomes that lead to other major problems at worst.

Some recent prominent examples of such unsuccessful attempts include events at recent COPs—which have witnessed the dominance of oil and gas executives and billionaires; statements by leaders denying the linkages between fossil fuels and climate change (CNN, 2023); the continuing lack of international consensus on reducing the global fossil fuel production; and the seriously limited inputs of historic polluter nation states into the loss and damage fund (The Guardian, 2023). Some recent examples of unsuccessful solutions with new damaging outcomes include green extractivism (EEB and Catapa, 2023). One pertinent case here is that of mining operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where people (including children) work under slav-

ery-like conditions to produce minerals that are critical inputs for the global renewable energy transitions (The Guardian, 2021; earth.org). This continuing inability of political institutions to successfully address these issues, are indicative of a combination of lack of political will and the inability of existing systems and structures to deal with ongoing and emerging concerns of the worlds citizenry.

Many branches of critical scholarship—including political ecology, ecological economics, human geography, post-development, decoloniality, among others; deconstruct and present the foundational problems at the core of these interconnected crises. This is the overarching model of global economics—neoliberal economics oriented towards ever increasing economic growth. The neoliberal economic growth agenda is rooted in capitalism and colonialism; it is based upon the creation of cheap human and ecosystem resources (Patel and Moore, 2017); it is founded upon historical processes of exploitation of masses of people and accumulation of wealth produced by small elite groups (Harvey, 2007); and it is propagated through expansion of neo-imperialism of the global North and clientelism across the global South. Post-growth thinking offers a clear pathway towards meaningful solutions away from neoliberal economic growth and its institutions.

Given the relative novelty of the field of study and the idea of the term, it is first important to briefly describe what I mean by post-growth. I use the definition of post-growth derived from (Gerber and Raina, 2018), which is situated in the context of the global South. It calls for transformations towards an economic system which can provide the foundations of socioecologically and culturally viable economic progress for all people, particularly marginalized populations. This definition includes four interconnected and overlapping schools of thought—agrowth, steady state economy (SSE), post-development, and degrowth. Briefly, agrowth is related to GDP growth agnosticism: there can (or cannot) be GDP growth, with the central focus being key indicators of societal welfare; SSE refers to first the upliftment of entire populations to decent living conditions and then a stringent management of further growth to achieve good living conditions but within ecological limits; post-development is an extensive and vibrant school of thought which critically engages with, and provides alternatives to, the problems around hegemonically imposed neoliberal economic growth and development models across the global South; and finally degrowth, which critically engages with economic growth and calls for a material downsizing of the economies of the global North, a socioeconomic 'rightsizing of the economies of the global South, and a cultural breaking through from the dominance of all hegemonic global North based economic projects and ideas (Gerber and Raina, 2018).

The aim of such a post-growth economy, and thus of post-growth transitions, is towards restructuring of economic systems in order to simultaneously dismantle oppressive, extractive and socioecologically harmful projects and activities, whilst building up convivial, liberating, culturally diverse, and ecosocial economic systems. The goal of such a transformation is to move the global human society towards an economic system which is socially equitable; where autonomy of individuals and groups is maximized; where convivial and solidary projects thrive; where cultural diversity across all peoples is enhanced and integrated; where marginalized communities have space to move towards their liberation(s); where ecological boundaries are respected; and where the more-than-human natures have space for their own thriving. Post-growth which includes a holistic critique of current socioeconomic models, and offers meaningful pathways and alternatives based upon the holistic critique, thus has important implications for policy-making, as well as for the transformation of political systems

and institutions towards socio-ecologically, economically, and culturally viable societal progress.

Here, I will briefly discuss five interconnected ways in which political structures and institutions can meaningfully develop, transform and evolve towards post-growth societal transformations.

1. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: The first important mechanism for political systems and institutions to evolve is through serious engagement with the discontents and demands of social movements. Both global and local social movements have a lot to inform us through what they express as their problems. There is a pressing need for political institutions which can directly and transparently engage with the public, movement leaders, and citizens in general. This can greatly aid in the evolution of political systems and their institutions towards enhanced democratic natures. A significant point to note here is about the term 'politics'—politics does relate to formal institutions and structures, but also to the everyday politics of people. In the latter context, we see the increasing awareness of citizens across the world—across class, gender, race and ethnic, religious and national lines.

We are also witnessing the increasing awareness of a large part of the global population regarding issues of intersectionality, as well as of the fact that struggles across the domains of economics, culture, society and ecology are interconnected and need to be addressed in a holistic manner. We have also seen the coming together of vastly different groups of people towards common goals. One pertinent example here is the case of workers and unions in the United States and European Union supporting blockages against production and transport of weapons and arms to Israel—despite explicit approval of the nation state and its formal political institutions for the same. As movements build together, formal institutions need to engage with these solidarities and design systems which can address the multidimensional components of contemporary challenges.

2. THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX: Another important way for institutions to evolve is through the dismantling of certain extremely damaging institutions.

Systems of material accumulation, and thus of economic growth, have historically been operationalized and maintained through violence and armed groups at resource frontiers (both legal and illegal). The military-industrial complex is responsible for previous and ongoing genocides, ecocides, land grabs, extractivism, dispossession, and represents a massive waste of energy and resources. Discussion on militaries and the environment within post growth scholarship go back decades. In his 1971 paper, the prominent ecological economist, Nicholas Georgescue-Roegen, specifies the necessity of dismantling the military. Moreover, activists, concerned citizens, environmental defenders, international NGOs and watchdogs, as well as researchers have long highlighted the need to dismantle the military-industrial complex for meaningful gains in climate/environmental movements (Livingston, 2023).

The interconnections of these issues are becoming ever more evident to the global citizenry. In late 2023—in a time of great political and moral unrest in the world, people across the world have witnessed, and take a stand against, the interlinkages between armed and military conflicts, land grabs and land rights, ecological justice, cultural justice, human rights and labour rights violations, and of the power of global elites and nation states of the global North. This coming together of movements will necessarily have massive political implications, and these transformations within the global citizenry are a significant marker of the necessity of formal political institutions and political systems to seriously undertake the project of moving towards post-growth societies.

3. "ENVIRONMENTAL" ELITE ENCLAVES: Another important way for institutions to evolve is to ensure that 'solutions' do not dispossess, immiserate, and otherwise further oppress marginalized communities.

Several important 'solutions' to the impending climate crisis have been founded upon the creation of enclosures or enclaves. One example of this is conservation and other 'pristine' nature enclaves. The overall idea around such enclaves is to keep certain geographical spaces "protected" for global environmental conservation purposes. However, in reality, these are spaces which are, more often than not, cleared off of native and indigenous populations which are living sustainably with the land (Büscher and Fletcher, 2019). On the other hand, such spaces also sometimes end up becoming zones for consumption by global elite, e.g., the famous case of violent expulsion of the local Maasai Maara indigenous people from their local lands in 2022 for conservation game reserves in 2022 (Mongabay, 2022; Al Jazeera, 2022). Other forms of such enclaves are the Privately Protected Areas across Latin America and Australia, which are large spaces of biodiversity rich lands held by private entities, in a programme supported by the IUCN (Carter et al., 2008; iucn.org). In recent years these solutions have, unfortunately, gained further prominence in global climate change discussions, including in the COP27 with the establishment of the Bezos Earth Fund and specifically its agenda of 30 by 2030—a plan to privatize and enclose 30% of the world's biodiversity rich spaces by 2030. Many of these spaces are protected through militarised conservation strategies which deprive local communities of access to lands.

There is an urgent need to halt and reverse these enclosures and enclaves which dispossess people and privatize existing biodiversity rich spaces. Instead the alternatives are to move towards strategies of convivial conservation (Büscher and Fletcher, 2019; Massarella et al. 2022), and towards reducing high emitting, and ecological destructive extractive projects.

4. SUPERFLUOUS AND LUXURY CONSUMPTION: Another important form of evolution is for political institutions and systems to seriously engage with the limiting, capping, or heavily taxing superfluous consumption.

This applies across all domains of goods and services—infrastructure, energy use, clothing, electronics, etc. the question of what constitutes superfluous or luxury consumption first needs serious consideration. Institutions need to seriously engage with questions of what constitutes superfluous consumption both at international and national levels, so as the ensure context specificity.

Some important issues that need to be engaged with here range from advertising/marketing and production of non-essential goods, e.g., the fast fashion industry; planned obsolescence in the electronic devices industry; and multiple home ownerships and lager-scale ownership of homes in the housing market.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MECHANISMS: Political institutions need to ensure the setup of robust, transparent and fair institutions which will address environmental and climate change related injustices.

The first global institution of this kind is the loss and damage fund. The loss and damage fund, which saw a 30 year delay in its setup, was finally established in the COP27 in 2022. In 2023, in COP 28, the fund received commitments from nation states that are historical polluters and which bear historic responsibility for the climate crisis.

However, there continue to be several problems with this institution. Two prominent ones are: the current management of the fund has been transferred to the World Bank—an institution

under the control of the global North, and which was only agreed to as a major concession by the global South (Reuters, 2023); and at around 700 million USD, it received committed fund much below expectations and needs. It is estimated that losses from climate related disasters in the global South are already at between 100 and 580 billion USD annually, and only expected to rise (The Guardian 2023; Richards et al., 2023).

In the near future, there is going to be an increasing need to develop and implement more such mechanisms in order to address the diverse set of challenges which have been faced by and which will be faced by people suffering from the direct impacts of climate change disasters and ecosystem collapse as well as its indirect impacts, such as conflicts, displacements, loss of access to lands and ecosystems, and loss of employment and livelihoods. These institutions will need to be implemented at multiple levels of governance—from the international, to the regional, the national, the sub-national and local levels. Importantly, unlike in the case of the loss and damage fund currently, it is imperative that the management of such institution be conducted not by the agents compensating for the losses but rather by groups, institutions and peoples who are suffering the impacts of the damages.

These political transformations seem daunting in the face of the massive, powerful and ubiquitous structures of the projects of capitalism, neoimperialism and neoliberal economic growth. However, we are witnessing people across the world: across different languages, cultures, contexts, histories, socioeconomic realities, and forms of oppressions and marginalizations, are coming together to cohesively articulate their discontents against existing structures, and demanding better mechanisms to address global challenges. If this is possible, then it is entirely within the realm of possibility for formal institutions to seriously listen to people, acknowledge their shortcomings, and to design new systems by speaking directly with the discontents of populations. What is needed is political will of formal structures, institutions and individuals.

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TAKING CORPORATE POWER SERIOUSLY

Winne van Woerden

The postgrowth movement calls for putting justice at the heart of our economies rather than economic growth. To this end, it is crucial for degrowth advocates to understand the power structures and corporate interests at play behind the staggering inequality levels that characterize our world today. The super-rich today are not passive beneficiaries of corporate profits - rather, they can influence corporations and governments in such manners that the economy becomes structurally geared towards their private interests. This is what we know as corporate power. Socio-ecological transformation towards a postgrowth economy that services people and planet requires tackling corporate power.

What is the problem?

Today's economy fails to meet people's basic needs while gravely overshooting planetary boundaries. Hundreds of millions worldwide are struggling to make ends meet while prices continue to outpace pay, and after seeing a sharp rise during the pandemic, global poverty remains at 2019 levels. All the while, the world is at the verge of irreversible climate chaos and ecosystem collapse., the already rich are becoming richer and richer. Global North countries represent only 18% of the world population, yet they own 64% of global wealth and are home to 69% of the world's billionaires' wealth. The world's billionaires have witnessed their fortunes double over the past decade, with two thirds of all new wealth ending up in the hands of the richest 1%. Recent Oxfam research shows that the richest 1% own 59% of all global financial assets. The biggest three asset managers together form a finance monopoly controlling one fifth of all investable assets worldwide. The Netherlands - the country where I am based - registered a record number of 51 billionaires in 2023, with the 500 richest individuals holding an estimated accumulated wealth of EUR241 billion. In effect, the richest 1% in the Netherlands own 26% of the total wealth in the country, including a staggering 75% of all shares.

These economic figures are no accident. They are the result of an economy designed to serve the interests of the 1% - those who receive their income primarily from wealth rather than from labor. Crucially, the super-rich today are not passive beneficiaries of corporate profits. Rather, they shape the way corporations and governments behave. An example in the Netherlands

is donations of wealthy individuals to the VVD (right-wing liberals) recent national elections' campaign budget. Or the meeting of 16 CEO's at the prime-minister's office in 2018 to talk about the future of business in the Netherlands. This is corporate power. Creating an economy that serves the interest of people and planet rather than the interests of the 1% requires reining in corporate power.

How have we gotten into this mess?

Two important factors in the increase of corporate power are market concentration and monopolies. Billionaire barons and financial firms dominate the ownership of corporate monopolies, leading to wealth and power being concentrated in the hands of a few. A shrinking number of corporations now has extraordinary influence over our economies, meaning that they can set the terms of market exchange and competition.

Monopoly power is increased and exercised through a range of business tactics, including mergers and acquisitions, collusion in concentrated industries, abuse of IP rights and exclusive dealing to get rid of competition. Private equity firms and asset managers also use their access to finance to uphold monopoly power. Finally, the financialization of corporations plays a huge role in upholding economic power in the hands of a few.

These practices have been rooted in the promotion of a neoliberal economic doctrine since the '80s, when anti-monopoly policies were weakened and redesigned according to a pro-monopoly paradigm assuming that large companies are more efficient and deliver better for consumers. In practice, we know that the consolidation of markets primarily leads to higher prices for consumers – which became all the more clear during recent increases in cost of living fueled by what the economist Isabella Weber has labeled sellers' inflation. In fact, if we take a closer look at the situation today, there are several mechanisms through which corporate power is fueling socio-economic inequality both within and across countries.

REWARDING SHAREHOLDERS AND CEOS

Instead of investing in research & development, climate measures or higher wages, corporations are using their power to suppress salaries and push labor policies in favor of their owners instead of their employees. Due to the conventional ownership structure of 'shareholder governance' within business, profits are moved into capital gains, dividends and bonuses for owners and executives rather than higher wages. This is highlighted by the contrasting trends on shareholder remuneration and wages in the Netherlands: while shareholder remuneration has increased by 500% over the past 20 years, wages only went up by 50% in the same period. In 2022, dividends paid to shareholders increased by 10% in real terms, while Dutch workers took a 6.6% real term pay cut – losing on average 2,791 EUR, an equivalent of working 11.4 days unpaid as wages did not keep up with inflation. Meanwhile, CEOs of blue chip Dutch multinationals tend to earn nearly 100 times the median gross income, effectively being paid in 4 days what the average worker earns in a year.

UNDEMOCRATIC INFLUENCE ON POLITICS

Powerful corporations use their resources and privileged access to seek favorable policies. There are well documented examples of companies using 'revolving doors' between public policymaking and the private sector to influence regulations, being only one example of corporate lobbying. Research in the Netherlands showed that in 2016 at least 25% of all former politicians start a new career as lobbyists. Examples include former minister Cora van Nieuwenhuizen who became head lobbyist for Energy Netherlands – lobbying the same Ministry she was in charge of just days before – and former EU Commissioner

Neelie Kroes, who secretly lobbied for Uber . The Netherlands is the only West-European country with no supervisory authority on 'revolving doors' practice and is continuously criticized by the European Anti-Corruption Organization on its lack of transparency and policies to tackle revolving doors.

REGRESSIVE TAX POLICIES

Corporate power upholds regressive tax systems, including in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is a high-tax country, with workers contributing over 40% of their income for public services and other government costs. To ensure the support and consent of the population to the tax policies needed to fund our welfare state, it is widely claimed that the Dutch tax system is progressive – with the wealthiest in society paying more in taxes while struggling families benefit the most. Contrary to the general belief, in reality the Dutch tax system is regressive with large companies and the superrich paying lower tax rates than the middle class and low income persons. The Corporate Income Tax rate in the Netherlands has been markedly reduced in the past decades in line with neo-liberal economic practices: from a 35% rate in 2000 to currently 25.8%. While Dutch workers are taxed on their wages through Personal Income Tax, the wealthiest in society benefit from lower tax rates as their income is mainly derived from capital gains and retained earnings. The more you earn from shares and business interests, the lower tax rate you pay. As a result, the top 1% enjoys a significantly lower effective tax rate when compared to ordinary Dutch workers. Recent research by the EU Tax Observatory12, funded by the EU, shows that the richest 1% of Dutch residents pay only 30-20% tax, compared to 40% for working class individuals.

UNDERMINING THE PROVISIONING OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Corporate power is hampering the provisioning of essential services accessible to all. Importantly, privatization can take many forms beyond the sale of state-owned firms for example through the purposeful integration of the corporate sector into public policies and programs, via vouchers, outsourcing and PPPs. In the Netherlands, we are seeing examples of perverse privatization in childcare, in social protection provisioning and in healthcare. Privatization locks in financialization of the economy as private equity funds, hedge funds and other major institutional investors are turning specifically to privatized services to generate stable returns. As such, basic needs sectors are becoming massive wealth generators for billionaire owners, service corporate interests rather than that of the public.

Towards an economy for the 99%

Tackling corporate power requires change at least three levels: the state needs to be revitalized, big corporates and their beneficiaries need to be strongly regulated and business needs to be reinvented.

1. Revitalizing the state and the commons: making essentials accessible to all

In a postgrowth society, people need to be able to access what they really need to live decent lives, without relying on rising levels of GDP. For this to happen, essential needs sectors will have to be democratized and privatization in these sectors must be reversed. This calls for a fundamental revitalization of both the public and the cooperative domain – both in terms of governance and ownership. For this to happen, the capacity of public institutions needs to be fundamentally strengthened and increased. In other words, tackling corporate power can be done through collective action alone.

2. Regulating corporates, taxing the rich out of existence

The collapse in corporate tax revenue must be addressed through a new tax paradigm characterized by transparency, strong redistributive policies, meaningful reforms to tax rates and new global tax rules that result from a fair process. Essentially, capital gains and retained earnings enjoyed by the wealthiest should be taxed on the same basis as regular wage income. And crucially, a permanent EU wealth tax needs to be implemented. This would be levied on the stock of wealth of the top 1% wealthiest individuals in the European Union, with a top-up tax on wealth generated from polluting industries.

3. Promoting alternative ownership and governance business models

Injecting democratic ownership and governance into mainstream business would not only help tackle wealth inequalities; it would also drive business decisions that better reflect the issues that matter to society. There is a diverse range of alternatives to the shareholder-first business model – worker and local cooperatives, social enterprises and fair-trade businesses – that are owned and governed in the interest of workers, local communities and the environment. These alternative models need to be nurtured, promoted and scaled.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND HOW DEMOCRATIC PROCUREMENT CAN BE A FACTOR IN BUILDING POST-GROWTH MODELS FOR ALTERNATIVE SOCIETIES

Pablo Sanchez

'There must be something rotten in the very core of a social system which increases its wealth without diminishing its misery'.
Karl Marx

INTRODUCTION

the post growth movement is a myriad of collectives, organizations and other groups that promote and defend a different economic paradigm. It is logical to think that these different approaches view the global economic capitalist system as a foe and not as a friend, but it is less evident what a post growth society will do with the local and municipal governments. What type of local democracy will exist? Whatever this future society will look like, it will need instances of basic local democracy at the local level in something that can resemble today's municipalities. So, there is a certain logic to believe that in any post growth society today's municipalities can be a laboratory of development of this different type of society. What this article intends to argue is that we need to use whichever tools are at our disposal today to plant models and structures of economic production or social production with a different economic logic. In other words, how do we use the spaces that we already have in local governments to foster small (or big) spaces of post growth in order to learn and to be able to scale it up in the future.

The purpose of this text is not to discuss and debate the role and nature of the state. This discussion is fundamental to having a general outlook on the future society, and what do we think it should look like. The role of the state (both as a territorial entity and as state machinery – police, army, bureaucracy, etc.) are key for the future of local democracy, decisions about taxation, relationship between local entities and other issues will condition the form of democracy. This has been at the core of the debates between Marx, Bakunin, Lasalle and many others[1]. But before these necessary debates take a concrete nature we need to look what can be done here and today.

Hence, the point of view of this text will be the following: in a period of questioning the current growth model (the current capitalist society as it stands today) we can assume that many municipalities and local governments will explore an experiment alternative in the economic field, but they will find themselves still in the current legal framework and overall economic framework. In a way like what we saw in 2015 with the process of what was called 'rebel cities[2]'.

Many of those who belong to the postgrowth might be in office, managing public funds and obliged to follow in many European countries EU procurement rules. Why does this discussion matter? Because without a fairly good knowledge of the current rules and mechanisms it will be difficult to be able to redirect funds and energy intro different economic models.

The current situation

Many in the progressive, post-growth or beyond growth movement see public administration as a complex and distant field that at best can be kept at an arm's length for the actions of what many call 'commoners. That is a serious strategic mistake.

In reality, the fight over how public money must be a key fundamental battle. In this context the rules on public procurement and concessions are a major battlefield for trade unions, left forces and actors of societal change like the post growth communities (degrowth, beyond growth). Unless the political landscape changes in the upcoming weeks, with upheavals and mass revolutionary strikes, that the author of this text would wish but cannot see happening in the short future, it is important to look on how can we build the basis for a new balance of forces within the existing rules.

Looking at how public money is used and denouncing private interests and exposing corporate wrongdoings to the eyes of the population is a good way to achieve that. Exposing the for-profit logic is a first step to explain and show to broad layers of the population that there is another way to use public funds and way that benefits the 99% of society, to use the expression that became fashionable in the previous economic crisis.

Public procurement

Public Procurement is the process by which public authorities, such as government departments or local authorities, purchase labour, goods or services from companies. Every year, over 250 000 public authorities the EU spend around 14% of GDP (around €2 trillion per year) on the purchase of services, and supplies. In many sectors such as energy, transport, waste management, social protection and the provision of health or

1 Luca Basso. Marx and the common. Haymarket 2016. Pages 155-1889

2 Fearless Cities

education services, public authorities are the principal buyers[3]. If the beyond growth movement could tap into these resources, we could 'demarketise' and de commercialise big chunks of the daily life of millions of European citizens.

In comparison, the entire manufacturing sector makes around 24% of the GDP[4] and is the subject of intense debates at national and European level. Yet we focus very often on debates about cooperatives and others without thinking how of use these funds. So public procurement is like the elephant in the room that we conveniently ignore because it requires a huge amount of concrete energy.

At a grand scale we discuss a just transition and the need to reduce CO2 emissions, what has to be produced and how is it produced. Yet there is hardly any reflection or debate on how public authorities contract out, while this is a major source of revenues for big companies and a massive source of public funds transfer to private companies.

The current public procurement rules at the EU level are 10 years old. [5] The work of several civil society European organisations (such as the European trade unions, fair trade, social services employers and others) has meant that the European rules should not only be based on the cheapest bidder but should be applied in a 'sustainable' way. That is:

- *Respect social and labour law and collective agreements*
- *Comply with environmental standards.*
- *Are honest in their tax and social security dealings and they do not have subsidiaries in tax havens.*
- *Have effective measures in place to prevent fraudulent sub-contracting.*

If applied to the letter these rules could break the power of the big consultancies[6] (McKinsey, PWC, Deloitte…) and also the biggest winners of the EU bids. On the contrary, we witness how even the fossil fuel industry ends up bidding and gaining from COVID recovery funds[7]

According to the European Court of Auditors (ECA), the attractiveness of public contracts for businesses has dwindled significantly, or rather the number of companies accessing these fund as being reduced a bigger cake for less mouths. This decrease in competition, marked by a decline in the number of bidders from an average of 5.7 to 3.2 per procedure between 2011 and 2021, raises concerns about the sustainability and efficiency of public procurement in the EU.

The contrary is actually happening, less actors are applying for more funds and the rules are bent towards these big companies that could not care less about the beyond growth debates.

What can public authorities do?

These developments need a critical analysis, particularly in the context of sustainable procurement practices. Because the rules, as figures show, are not being applied, we aren't witnessing a spring of new bidders and the 'sharing of the cake'. If less companies are accessing these

3 https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/public-procurement_en

4 https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/249078/umfrage/anteile-der-wirtschaftssektoren-am-bruttoinlandsprodukt-bip-der-eu/

5 Streamlining public procurement within the EU for more efficient public spending - Consilium (europa.eu)

6 Consultancies profit handsomely from the EU recovery fund - Follow the Money - Platform for investigative journalism (ftm.eu)

7 Hijacking the Recovery Through Hydrogen | Corporate Europe Observatory

public funds, it means that the myriad of smaller actors doesn't get the funds to produce and to become dry runs for the different economic models that we want to be developed in the first place.

The European Court of Auditors 2023 alarming report underscores a "lost decade" in enhancing competition for public contracts[8]. The trend towards awarding contracts predominantly to the lowest bidder, often overlooking environmental, social, and innovative criteria, mirrors a procurement landscape overly fixated on cost rather than value. Such an approach, while fiscally prudent in the short term, may neglect broader societal and environmental considerations vital for sustainable development.

Local authorities have rich history in advocating for fair labour practices and social justice but lately they are only being creamed off by aggressive capitalist companies to increase profitability and this in the period of expansion of the post growth movement and the possibility in many municipalities to do 'economic experiments' to be prepare for future questioning of the current economic system. Other EU rules, such as the stability and growth pact promote that vicious mechanism.

How to use today's rules for tomorrow

The EU Commission's 2014 reform of procurement directives, intended to make bids more competitive and attractive, appears to have fallen short of its ambitious goals. The procedural complexities, lack of transparency, and increase in direct awards and single bidding procedures have further complicated the landscape.

We need a holistic approach to public procurement, one that integrates economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The promotion of a sustainable procurement should not only assess the immediate cost but also consider the long-term impacts on workers' rights, community welfare, environmental sustainability and how it helps developing democracy. A sort of score board for how much communal this service has become. In the last decade's EU economic plans (the Juncker plans or the Next Generation EU) we see a direct transfer of public money (in the form of debt) to the bigger multinationals and consultancies. We should strive to the contrary.

This means that public authorities should not just award contracts to the lowest bidder but the most sustainable bidder even if the cost is higher in order to anchor public finances to the local economy, what we sometimes call the 'real economy'. This might seem an anodyne proposition, but it dynamites the current economic governance rules that across Europe, including Germany, are making the economy choke and workers to pay for the consequences of the financial and economic crisis and the pandemic.

For instance, a procurement process that prioritizes environmentally friendly products and services can drive innovation and support green jobs, aligning with the EU's broader sustainability goals, or even go beyond. Similarly, considering social criteria, such as fair labour practices and equal opportunities, can promote social justice and equity, core values championed the post growth movement.

Of course, we must pursue the objective of taking out of the market as many services as possible. It is urgent for the post growth movements construct viable alternatives of infrastructure, like broadband or other digital services that today are global monopolies of a handful of shareholders. There is no reason why public authorities cannot

8 EU public procurement reform 'ineffective', find auditors (euobserver.com)

provide services such as food delivery or individual transportation using local apps, defending workers rights and being protective of the environment involving local democracy elements. We need to be clear on this issue, the fact that we have ceased to be ambitious is a major hurdle for bringing about a credible alternative.
We want to create a set of constringent criteria as a launching pad to promote public ownership and taking back sectors from the market and linking up with the non-for-profit cooperative and associative sector that can be allies.

We need to promote a public procurement that protects nature, workers, and society as a whole. If this is done in a meaningful way many in the social and local economy will have a change to use public finances to create different jobs in a different way. This alliance between public authorities, labour and the new cooperative economy must be forged at the local, national, and European level. We need public procurement rules to enhance an upwards convergence not just to transfer money to very same that are at the root causes of the multiple crisis.

The Path Forward: Collaborative and Inclusive Reform

To realize the vision of sustainable public procurement, a collaborative effort should implement proper mechanisms to ensure transparency in procurement processes, allowing for greater scrutiny and meaningful participation, that is to say: open tenders, good information, democratic participation in the public institutions, timely evaluations and citizens' control. All this is easier outside of the market rules that follow a for-profit logic, but in the meantime let's curtail the ability to the big consultancies and multinationals to dictate our way of life.

As the quote that started this article stated, what we need to do now is to identify how public money (money fundamentally coming from workers and taxing working people and indirect consumption taxes can we use to generate local redistributive policies that create non-capitalist, non-for-profit models to move beyond the growth logic.

And start scrutinising and explaining its use, denouncing its abuse as a way to denounce neoliberal and Far Right politicians and also those that manage to pretend to be 'anti-systemic' but they follow the same interests as the companies that are milking the state with this unsustainable public contracts. It is time look at the inner working of governments to show that the market doesn't do it as efficiently as we are told in the pages of the financial press. A burdensome, but necessary, task.

LOCALIZING POSTGROWTH: THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN THE TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE AND JUST CITIES

Jannis Niethammer, Lucia Di Paola, Matthew Bach & Duncan Crowley

INTRODUCTION

The Beyond Growth conference in May 2023 was a milestone for the European postgrowth community. For the first time, concrete policy proposals were formulated, debated and received at the heart of European Democracy, arguably marking an urgently needed emancipation from critique and vision towards the development of viable (policy) pathways and their implementation. It became clear that postgrowth is not narrowly confined with the feasibility of absolute decoupling or viability of GDP as a measure of welfare (the answer to both of which we will not reiterate), but rather has the potential to become a cross-cutting agenda for transformation towards a future of just and sustainable wellbeing, in Europe at least, in times of accelerating polycrisis.

One question that was only marginally addressed in the European Parliament was what such an agenda could mean for cities, and which role local governments and urban communities could play in the outlined transformation. This is despite the fact that local authorities implement a majority of climate and sustainability legislation, are responsible for the provisioning of essential services and infrastructures, such as housing and mobility, and provide a unique opportunity for democratic decision-making to tailor policy to community-needs (ICLEI Europe, 2020). Also, cities are broadly seen as fertile soil for integrative, community-led sustainability initiatives that prefigure alternatives of decommodified living in solidarity (Crowley et al., 2021). Omitting cities in postgrowth approaches

would mean omitting a "strategic entry point" for the institutionalization of postgrowth arrangements at this intersection (Schmid, 2023).

The importance of the urban context and municipal governance level has moved to the spotlight at the 9th International Degrowth conference in August 2023. Amongst others, the host city Zagreb demonstrated that it is possible to harbor political support for more 'radical' forms of socio-ecological policy in moments of "progressive confluence" between civil society and institutionalized politics (Schmid, 2023; Junqué et al., 2019). Practitioners and academics brought forward a range of concrete examples of transformative projects from other European cities, while at the same time highlighting the tensions with reverse dynamics of neoliberal development and the limited political scope of action of local governments. These tensions stand unresolved, but stimulate increased engagement with the "municipal scale" in postgrowth scholarship (Schmid 2023, see also Savini 2021; Jin Xue 2022; Kaika et al. 2023; Khmara & Kronenburg 2023), including the formation of concerted cooperation between researchers, activists and practitioners in the municipal degrowth network[1] and postgrowth cities alliance.[2]

Building on this dynamic, a lot is to be done to translate the findings of the wider postgrowth research community to the local level and build a solid, accessible knowledge base for transformative action. This also relates to the 'right choice' of framework, be it de-, post- or beyond-growth, donut or wellbeing economics, all of which can have their merits and risks in specific contexts and discursive spaces. What these approaches have in common is a vision of just and sustainable cities and a problematization of current path-dependencies of the growth paradigm. Building on this vision and our experience as a network of local governments, we want to offer some perspective(s) to the crucial discussion of the practical implementation of this vision on the local (governance) level.

Cities and (post)growth

A look into the literature shows how strongly cities and the growth economy are currently implicated. In the urban age, cities are in a reinforcing loop of promoting and being driven by economic growth. Pushing (eco)modernist development and commodification of urban resources to compete for mobile capital, cities have become centers of throughput, both in material and financial terms (Savini, 2021). Unsurprisingly, urban dwellers have an over proportionate share of GDP and ecological footprint per capita compared to their rural counterparts (Brookings Institutions, 2015). At the same time, basic services are getting increasingly inaccessible, for instance housing in processes of green gentrification (Angeluovski, 2019). Research highlights that growth drivers and dependencies manifest in institutional arrangement, including zoning law, planning practices and tax-based financing mechanisms (Savini, 2021). These structural dimensions and path dependencies need to be taken seriously when discussing post-growth transitions in, of and with cities.

This poses the question what the alternative could be, i.e. the vision(s) for cities in a postgrowth future and the tools and pathways for this transformation. The postgrowth scholarship is based on the finding that the pursuit of growth in its multiple dimensions is socially and ecologically destructive. In reverse, it imagines alternative values and principles of (re)organization that would allow a life of wellbeing for all within the means of the planets.

A postgrowth city is thus fundamentally 'habitable': It allows its dwellers to live a good life, provides for the material basic needs necessary and does so in a way that is in balance with ecological stability and non-human life. This highlights the intersection of sustainability and justice concerns that are intrinsically linked in this endeavor. On the one hand, the material

and energy throughput need to be selectively downscaled without externalizing the cost to the periphery. The understanding that resources are finite, also on a local level, has strong political implications. It requires decisions to set limits to development projects that are perceived as socially less useful and ecologically destructive and instead redistribute excess consumption.

On the other hand, cities need to build the (social) infrastructures to secure the fulfillment of basic needs and elevate levels of wellbeing for all, but with a focus on the most vulnerable. As urban centers see a high concentration of people with different identities and intersectionality of those identities coming together, it is important to highlight active efforts in promoting decolonization, inclusion, accessibility and power relations while moving forward in implementing postgrowth policies.[3] As Savini puts it, the task is then to "rethink cities as dynamic sites of deceleration, regeneration and redistribution" (2021, p.1091). For flexible guidance in this dynamic process, ICLEI Europe (2022) has developed '17 keys for sustainable and just cities' to accompany local governments officials, and other actors (researchers, community-led initiative representatives etc.) in asking themselves the right questions when implementing policies to critically reflect on whether their policies are addressing both environmental sustainability and social justice concerns.

Because the necessary decisions are deeply political and because there is no fixed vision for postgrowth cities, democratization is an essential pillar of these transformations. A postgrowth city is a process in the making for which community ownership and the active integration of diverse local experiences is essential. Local authorities have a strategic advantage to other governance levels in fostering direct participation in such transformations: They provide an easy access to democratic participation regarding decisions, the effect of which is directly relevant to the can be directly felt in the lived experience of those participating. This proximity brings a potential for democratization. Still, the processes need to be designed in a deliberately inclusive manner to prevent pitfalls of elite capture and the continuation of structural, intersectional inequalities.

Local governments & (post)growth

In terms of the role of local authorities in these processes, here is the good news first: In general, many local governments share the ambition for a socio-ecological transformation beyond growth. In ICLEI Europe's Mannheim Message (2020), for instance, European mayors and decision-makers commit to five core systemic changes to implement just and sustainable local green deals, namely the transformation of infrastructures and systems; local development beyond growth and competition; cooperation, solidarity and inclusion; a lifestyle of sufficiency; and a re-orientation towards the common good.

While there is thus a lot of potential of just and sustainable transformations in, with and of cities, so far there is no 'postgrowth city' as such, in Europe and beyond. As Khmara & Kronenburg (2023) find, "taking into account path dependencies, which still dominate urban development, so far, no city in the world has fully and explicitly embraced a degrowth transition" (p.8). What this means is that, on the one hand, local authorities seem hesitant to explicitly embrace terms of post- or degrowth, which are often perceived as 'missile words' with limited political support. On the other hand, even green 'model cities' like Copenhagen or Amsterdam tend to champion certain bold ideas, while neglecting other dimensions (ibid.). Moreover, the transferability of these approaches is often challenging, as local authorities with fewer resources and capabilities can struggle to help develop and implement innovative approaches.

There are several potential explanations for the hesitation to embrace postgrowth approaches in policy and planning. Firstly, many decision-makers still have a close mental link between economic growth and the wellbeing of citizens. At the same time, most practitioners have experienced situations where what is good for economic development is not what is good for people and planet, for instance in the case of housing commodification. Reversely, many practitioners have first or second-hand experience with "urban shrinkage", which is associated with decline, abandonment and urban crisis (Haase et al. 2014). Similar to the discursive link of degrowth and recession on macro-economic level, convincing narratives are needed that connect selective downscaling (of material and financial throughput, not population or public services) with outcomes of regeneration and wellbeing.

As mentioned earlier, growth dependencies and drivers are also institutionalized in policy regimes, particularly taxation and planning. Research thus needs to be informed by the diverse legal capabilities, competencies and administrative processes, or the "municipal scope of action" (Schmid 2023, p.11), that form barriers and enablers for local postgrowth transformation processes. Transdisciplinary research projects that engage local authorities as important stakeholders in the process could be particularly fruitful to identify leverage points for institutional change.

To return to the good news, cities tend to be frontrunners in embracing transformative approaches. This includes both top-down approaches carried by bold local governments, like the Amsterdam City Doughnut (DEAL, 2020), as well as bottom-up approaches like the Transition Town movement.[4] However, it seems that truly transformative processes are enabled where bottom-up community-led action and top-down governance meet each other in the middle, in processes of co-design and -ownership, mutual empowerment and institution-building.

Practical starting points

In the following, we thus want to explore some starting points and examples of such transformative processes. A useful conceptual framing and rallying point could be the idea of 'urban services', which embeds the concept of Universal Basic Services (Coote 2022; Büchs 2021) in the urban context. The inclusive, sustainable and effective provisioning of services, like housing, mobility, electricity, green space and health, forms the foundation for the kind of just and sustainable wellbeing that postgrowth envisions. The systems that underlie these provisioning activities have also been the subject of research in the fields of socio-technical transitions (Loorbach et al. 2017), provisioning systems (Fanning et al. 2020) and the foundational economy (Hansen 2022). Also, research on sufficiency has recently shifted from a focus on individual behavioral change to building the systems that allow people to choose a resource-light lifestyle.

The specific arrangements that might lead to such inclusive, sustainable and effective provisioning are of course highly context specific. However, some common themes emerge around questions of purpose, ownership, governance and financing. Generally, it seems necessary to counter processes of commodification, privatization, and marketization, and work towards decommodification, community-ownership and democratic governance towards socio-ecological value creation.

In that respect, degrowth scholarship has long pointed to the power of the commons for decommodified living based on values of solidarity, sustainability, care and democracy. Collective ownership structures have shown to be successful models for socio-ecological goals, for instance in collective housing, community-supported agriculture, energy communities or sharing collectives. Such alternative practices co-exist with, in and against the (capitalist) growth economy

and require constant work for their maintenance vis-a-vis systemic pressures. If isolated, they are in danger of ceasing, being coopted, and remain limited in their systemic impact beyond the immediate environment.

To thrive and amplify, community-led initiatives thus need institutional support. This institutional support can come from local government actors that have the capabilities to support, amplify and institutionalize community-led initiatives (ICLEI Europe 2023). This can include the targeted nurturing and support with diverse resources of specific initiatives, co-creative processes and establishing essential framework rules. In this way local governments can tap into the potential of communities to govern their own resources in a contextually effective, democratic and inclusive way.

The support can also come from translocal institutionalization processes, as for instance in the case of the German *Mietshäusersyndikat*. This network organization provides knowledge exchange, financing, as well as legal protection for collectively-owned, self-organized housing projects. Like this, it offers a viable alternative for affordable, shared housing by removing houses from the market. Similar bottom-up institutionalization processes can also be seen in the field of energy communities or community-supported agriculture. Such collective forms of ownership and management do not fit nicely into urban planning and financing institutions, which are more directed towards private or public ownership (Savini, 2021). As such, they also have the potential to "stretch & transform" urban governance regimes (Smith & Raven, 2022).

As stated previously, the best chances for transformative action exist if there is a confluence of civil society mobilization and public policy action. Again, in the German housing sector, the campaign *Deutsche Wohnen & Co enteignen* is a good example where civil society mobilization around a shared socio-ecological policy problem drove bold government action. Even if so far the initiative was not successful, it showed how bottom-up initiative can work institutions creatively for transformative change.

Conclusion

The last year has seen a welcome push to collect and synthesize evidence on existing practices and policies to promote postgrowth transition processes in the urban context. To leverage these, evidence is needed that these measures are working, to understand the diverse drivers, barriers and conditions of success behind their implementation and sketch viable pathways that go beyond local experimentation. The goal is to move from a collection of prefigurative practices to overall frameworks and back. The evidence that such approaches work and can help to solve real policy problems in times of increasing uncertainty can help convince local governments to embrace postgrowth frameworks and funders to use such language explicitly. Cities need the support, moral, political, and financial, to start acting courageous and experimenting with bold policies for socio-ecological transformation beyond the growth paradigm. The perceived urgency and ambition is certainly there.

In figuring the plural pathways towards urban postgrowth futures, networks of cooperation and translocal learning between cities are essential for a collective push towards such bold ideas. It can be challenging to talk about the local level in a uniform way, not just due to different socio-economic situations, but also because there is such variation in the degree of autonomy available to the local level. However, an exchange between different localities can inspire tailored imitation and collective action to mainstream innovative approaches. As our experience at ICLEI Europe shows, cooperative networks can provide dynamics and accountability towards sustainability. Also, the local level is always embedded in multi-level arrangements, which

raises the question what types of institutional environment are most conducive to these types of effort. For this reason, municipalities have called to be more integrated in multi-level governance arrangements, not only to implement but also shape policy on (supra-)national level. Generally, more exchange between research and practice is needed on the mechanisms of "pluriversal" (Vandeventer et al. 2019) and "translocal pathways" (Loorbach et al., 2020), as well as "multi-level" (Durand et al., 2024) and "polycentric governance" (Savini, 2021) approaches to postgrowth transitions.

[1] The "Municipal Degrowth Network" has been founded in 2021 as "a transnational community of researchers, activists and practitioners [...] to discuss issues related to degrowth, spatial planning and settlement development, and transformation strategies," see https://lists.riseup.net/www/info/municipal-degrowth.

[2] The "Postgrowth Cities Alliance" is a platform "bringing together research and practices for a transition to postgrowth cities." It has recently published a manifesto and an ongoing compilation of resources on research and action for socio-ecological urban transformation.

[3] See for instance Farhana Sultana's powerful plea at the Beyond Growth conference. https://www.beyond-growth-2023.eu/lecture/plenary-4/

[4] See for instance their project on municipalities in transition: http://municipalitiesintransition.org/

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