



# POST-GROWTH



from international  
planning  
perspectives

Digital roundtable on the future of  
planning in a post-growth world  
Monday, 17 February 2020, 5.30-7.00  
pm

#postgrowthplanning  
#postwachstumsplanung

Dortmund Conference 2020  
@TUDortmundUniversity

## MODERATORS

Christian Lamker (Groningen, Netherlands),  
Viola Schulze Dieckhoff (Dortmund, Germany),  
Kim Carlotta von Schönfeld (Wageningen, Netherlands)

## GUEST SPEAKERS

Anitra Nelson (Melbourne, Australia),  
Christian Schulz (Luxembourg),  
Jin Xue (Ås, Norway),  
Yvonne Rydin (London, UK)

## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

This roundtable aims to continue towards an international discussion of post-growth and planning. It builds upon initiatives to delineate cornerstones of post-growth planning in Germany and Europe. The digital roundtable brings important international perspectives together to Dortmund without overstraining our environmental impact as responsible researchers. This digital format supports lively discussions with renowned experts in the field of connecting post-growth thinking into planning research and practice. The focus will be laid upon Western and industrialised countries whose economic and social model is deemed unsustainable and especially damaging – of course, participants are invited to bring in further perspectives.

There are different answers to post-growth challenges across countries. The German debate has been condensed by Lamker/Schulze Dieckhoff (2019) into six propositions that will serve as a starting point to think through potential futures of post-growth planning:

- Post-growth planning needs new criteria for success as a basis for action!
- Post-growth planning means just and democratic decisions!
- Post-growth planning triggers major transformations through small-scale interventions!
- Post-growth planning needs experimental and artistic actions!
- Post-growth planning must learn from failures!
- Post-growth planners are all of us!

Acting according to global forces and global responsibilities – and without focusing on economic competition – needs more shared perspectives on the European and global level. This roundtable aims to identify core issues that planning research and practice can effectively target soon. It looks across specific conditions to identify common ground from international planning perspectives. Such an approach leads towards identifying planning theories and tools that function in a post-growth environment.

## STATEMENTS

### Christian Lamker / Viola Schulze Dieckhoff / Kim Carlotta von Schönfeld

The debate on post-growth perspectives for society, economy and space is accelerating. Post-growth thinking and acting is no longer only something for small communities, for local neighbourhoods for islands of alternative thinkers and doers.

What might post-growth planning be? A planning in which growth is neither a necessary starting point nor a goal that must be achieved. One that does work on change, but not on growth. One that works on quality of life, but not with more of the same growth solutions. One in which planners engage and motivate.



## Christian Schulz (Luxembourg)

I'm an economic geographer at the University of Luxembourg, Department of Geography and Spatial Planning. I have been working on post-growth economies for about eight years now, I and get more and more interested in how post-growth-thinking could be translated into planning practices.

**Post-growth planning for me means not only questioning the notion of growth as such, but also challenging our established concepts, methods, indicators, and – not least – terminology.**

Current conceptualisations of regional or local development, of socio-economic success, of well-being and wealth, and many others, they all need to be interrogated as to their underlying framings, values, objectives and tacit understandings. Our rather narrow understanding, for instance, of what “the economy” is – essentially a market based exchange of goods and services provided by formal organisations (i.e. firms) – implicitly limits our imagination of how societal wealth is produced, measured, and evaluated. Only a wider understanding of the economy, including a recognition of all sorts of common good oriented activities such as family care work, volunteering in community initiatives etc., could help to reconsider development indicators and to redefine development targets. Simultaneously, planning is asked to conceive and provide suitable infrastructures, buildings and other framework conditions for new life styles and ways of production and consumption.

## Jin Xue (Norway)

Department of Urban and Regional Planning  
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

### **Post-growth planning needs ideological and structural transformations which should take place both within the planning field and at the societal level.**

If planning is going to be the vanguard of social change, it has to be transformed from inside in the first place. That includes an ideology dimension and a structural dimension.

*Ideology* constitutes our dominant belief system that in turn shapes what we value, aim for and what we do to achieve the aims. Planning is “the ideology of how we define and use space” (Gunder, 2010, p.299). Thus, the ideological commitment of planning has a significant consequence to the purpose of planning in a specific context and the choice of planning strategies. Planning’s ideological belief in neoliberal capitalism fortifies a neoliberal growth society. A shift from the belief in growth to well-being will considerably change the formulation of planning goals and actions.

Apart from subverting mainstream planning ideology, *structural changes* within the planning field have to be done. This includes revising legal framework (such as planning law and regulations), transforming planning procedures (towards democracy, participation, alliances building), inventing alternative planning methods (e.g. scenario planning to replace the growth-oriented CBA, traffic model).

However, planning is located within the wider dynamic political, institutional, economic and cultural contexts. These contexts define the structural position of planners and shape their power, opportunities and limitations. Being positioned within the growth-oriented political and economic landscape, planning’s action space for transformative practices are constrained. E.g. planning’s dependence on the growth model in urban development is a result of the institutional setting of land and property ownership as well as the political ideology of neoliberalism that deregulates the market. Therefore, an ideological and structural problem at the societal level conditions planners’ potentials for pursuing a post-growth society. On the other hand, it is precisely because of this inside position of planning in the political setting that planners are advantageous in confronting directly the established practices and values. Based on strengths attached to planners’ structural position, planners can engage in strategic interaction with other corporate agents to build alliances in order to attain joint or mutually compatible goals.



## Anitra Nelson (Australia)

Hi, my name is Anitra Nelson and I'm an Australian activist-scholar whose work ranges across many aspects of sustainability. I'm affiliated with the Centre for Urban Research at RMIT University in Melbourne, Victoria. I co-edited *Housing for Degrowth: Principles, Models, Challenges and Opportunities* and wrote a book on eco-collaborative housing *Small is Necessary: Shared Living on a Shared Planet*, both released in 2018. Vincent Liegey and I are completing *Exploring Degrowth: A Critical Guide* to be launched at the 7<sup>th</sup> International Degrowth Conference in Manchester in September this year.

### **Post-growth planning needs to apply criteria enabling citizens to live 'one planet footprints', but these are very stringent so Global North planners need to be political and politicising.**

A 'one planet footprint' is a controversial indicator but one of the most highly visible and rigorous indicators on which to base postgrowth futures.

Members of the Zurich 'young' cooperative housing and living projects have created fit for purpose lifestyle calculations based on Swiss national one planet footprint assessments (see <http://o500.org/zurich.html> and 'a proposal', a 20-page pamphlet by P.M. (Hans Widmer)).

'For reasons of ecology and justice', reads page 2, 'a typical lifestyle menu' might look like this:

- # 20m<sup>2</sup> of private living space
- # 2.5m<sup>2</sup> of communal space (shared with others accumulates meaning access to a lot more)
- # no cars
- # no flights
- # 6km train travel per capita daily, within Switzerland
- # a boat voyage of 1000km yearly
- # 15kg meat yearly
- # 20L milk yearly
- # 70L water daily
- # 3 hours Internet weekly
- # 1 printed newspaper daily shared between 50 people

They point out that citizens could make choices, say eating less meat, but enjoying a car trip, reducing living space to make up for a short-distance air flight and so on. They are trying to design housing cooperatives to enable citizens to live as comfortably as possible within such limits.

How much discussion and action within planner and planner research and policy communities address such severe limits, that call for seriously different planning options in urban settlements?

**Postgrowth planning requires planners to cross a bridge leading to an unclear destination and, in many current visions of postgrowth, planners disappear.**



Currently planners are agents of the state constrained by active agents within market-based societies working within capitalist principles and values. Active agents are state-based market-based actors, but both make decisions that need to conform to monetary calculations and market-based forecasts. Ownership or access to private property and non-private property is the foundation of their agency. Markets require growth or capitalist development to operate. Capitalist development is a 'known beast'. Planners are pawns moved and used by other agents. Their agency is low. They are workers for, and administrators of, capital.

'Postgrowth' is an unknown beauty. Envisaged as either state-controlled or state-constrained resource use, most advocates envisage postgrowth as reducing scope for market activity and greater democracy. Instead of money deciding what development takes place 'the people' decide, consciously and conscientiously on postdevelopment. In as much as the state grows its power by controlling or constraining resource use, planners will remain workers and administrators with little agency.

However, some advocates suggest a postgrowth market with community-based management of money and credit through to cooperative and collective production. Greater democracy is mainly seen as greater subsidiarity, central states shrinking as they cede power to local authorities functioning within a more accountable and representative, say 'deliberative', democracy or, more radically using direct power. In this more radical vision, the people become planners. Professional planners disappear.

Whither the planning profession?

## Yvonne Rydin (United Kingdom)

Professor of Planning, Environment and Public Policy  
 Bartlett School of Planning  
 University College London

### **Post-growth planning will require a new kind of knowledge.**

It is widely acknowledged that planning is a knowledge-led activity where expertise of different kinds interfaces with people and organisations' desires and interests. The kind of knowledge that is implicated in a planning system tells you a lot about that planning system. Growth-oriented planning uses growth to deliver on public interest goals and, to do so, it utilises knowledge of the capacities of infrastructure systems and other public sector resources, thereby delivering land, development and (hopefully) balanced economic growth. Growth-dependent planning goes further and prioritises knowledge of market processes and outcomes, of land values and development gains, of supply and demand. It does so in order to pursue a form of growth that is itself seen as dependent on property development. However, neither of these approaches and their associated knowledge sets are suitable in the absence of growth or the absence of the ability to generate growth. Such circumstances demand new forms of knowledge, looking beyond the assumed capacities of the state or the market.

Planning processes have tended to downplay the need to gather intelligence on the capacities outside formal public and economic processes. They have also tended to favour specific forms of such intelligence, such as the aggregate, the statistical picture, and trends. This can be at the expense of looking into the micro-practices of life in localities. In the situations of no-growth that we are considering today, it becomes even more important to understand these minutiae of everyday life as urban transformation through public or private investment is a remote possibility.

The new kinds of knowledges needed in a post-growth world are of three types, I would argue:

- First, deepening the understanding of local social capital and the capacities of NGOs in local civil society;
- Second, appreciating the functioning and capacities of local communities through the skills, time and other resources that are available: and
- Third, tracing the role of local and small businesses in generating goods, services and driving the local circulation of capital.

Such knowledge would provide a new basis for a different kind of planning system, neither oriented to nor dependent on economic growth.

## Further Readings

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