Chapter 9
Economic Geographies of Post-Growth

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Recent debates around accumulating "crises" in the fields of climate change, energy supply, biodiversity, forced migration, and (not least) food security—partly marked by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and certainly reinforced by the war in Ukraine—have led to a new dynamic in growth-critical discourses. Although dating back to the late 1960s/early 1970s, the latter have gained traction over the past decade, both in political and mediatic realms as well as in the scholarly literature. In the English-speaking context, for example, a series of seminal book publications starting with Tim Jackson's (2009) "Prosperity Without Growth*"* and continuing with Kate Raworth's (2017) "Doughnut Economics", Jason Hickel's (2020) "Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World" and (once more) Jackson's (2021) "Post Growth: Life After Capitalism*"* have not only challenged orthodox economic thinking and neoliberal policy making. The authors have also made it to public arenas such as TV talk shows, keynotes, and roundtables at major business events, or into documentaries, and have provided activist movements with compelling and substantial evidence and arguments regarding "the case for degrowth" (Kallis, Paulson, D'Alisa, & Demaria, 2020)—that is, a pledge for a fundamental change needed to overcome the growth-fixation of the prevailing capitalist economy.

More recently, the "Beyond Growth Conference 2023," a cross-party initiative of 20 members of the European Parliament held at its premises in Brussels in May 2023, included a large variety of stakeholders in search for alternative pathways for a currently unsustainable economic system and made the post-growth debate more visible in mediatic and political realms. The conference can be seen as an initiative dissenting with the goals and means of the European Union's Green Deal (European Commission, 2019), criticized for both its growth-fixated belief in the mere technological feasibility of sustainable production as well as for its partly low

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transformative ambitions. This latter deficit is most obvious in the realm of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which essentially perpetuates conventional and industrialized farming practices (Schulz, 2022).

Those engaging in post-growth thinking challenge the assumptions of the ecological modernization policies which over the last four or more decades—despite some progress in reducing environmental impacts—have largely failed to decouple economic growth from material and energy consumption (see below). Simultaneously, the social benefits of an ever-growing economy have proven to be unequally distributed—to say the least. Other than being aspired for in the trickle-down hypothesis of GDP-growth oriented policies, little advantage (if any) accrues to large parts of today's population, whereas other social groups profit considerably more from an unbalanced benefit allocation—both within single national economies and at the global scale.

Against this backdrop, the notion of post-growth provides compelling avenues of how to rethink the economy more fundamentally. Over the past decade, it has been increasingly taken up by social sciences interested in sustainability transition (D'Alisa, Demaria, & Kallis, 2014; Kallis, 2018; Lange, Hülz, Schmid, & Schulz, 2022; Schmelzer, Vetter, & Vansintjan, 2022). Economic Geography, a sub-discipline of Human Geography, shall serve as a disciplinary case here, whereby much of the following can be generalized for, or easily adapted to, other disciplinary perspectives. The particular curiosity of economic geographers seems to be driven by at least two different motivations: a) the recognition of the physical limits to growth and the impacts resource scarcity and ecological imperatives will have on the spatial organization of the economy, and b) the observation that emerging post-growth practices can transform places and spatial patterns as well as create new spaces of economic exchange, knowledge creation, and wealth production. Both aspects imply the need to reconsider some of the established conceptual assumptions as well as methodological practices of our discipline.

My aim in this paper is twofold: On the one hand, I seek to assess the conceptual and empirical potential of post-growth research, starting from a self-critical reflection on the growth-fixated perspective of mainstream economic geography models and concepts. On the other hand, I discuss possible modes to operationalize post-growth principles for the purpose of regional development and innovation research. That is, I will not provide a concrete imaginary of a hypothetical post-growth future. Rather, I aim to access and understand trends and building blocks of ongoing or emerging post-growth-oriented transition trajectories. Assuming that the prevailing economic system will need to undergo a profound transformation towards more ecological and socially just principles, I may equally challenge core assumptions, reference systems, and (not least) methodological perspectives.

This chapter's structure unfolds as follows: First, I will elaborate on the terminology around notions of degrowth and post-growth and further comment on the concept's uptake in economic geography and cognate disciplines. I will then discuss illustrative examples of how economic geography models and their ontologies—implicitly or explicitly—remain anchored in infinite growth logics, and where their concepts and terminology may need to be adapted to alternative understandings of

economic wealth and societal prosperity. I will thirdly outline two recent approaches that may help to translate post-growth ideas into a new framework to assess regional development trajectories or the dynamics and transformations within single industries or firms. Finally, I will critically reflect upon the normativity and positionality of much of the current post-growth literature.

Key Blocks of Degrowth/Post-Growth Debates

Growth-criticism is not new and partly goes back to the early stages of capitalism. Its supporters essentially target the negative social and ecological externalities of a growth economy, and question the systemic growth-oriented logics of the prevailing production, financing, and taxation systems, as well as misleading incentives and subsidies. Moreover, they disagree with how economic development and wealth is monitored and challenge utilizing the GDP as the predominant indicator for its manifest shortcomings (see Schulz & Bailey, 2014, for a more detailed discussion). As indicated in the introduction, this growth criticism has regained momentum over the last decade and has a strong role in the debate around post-growth futures. This recent debate has simultaneously been nurtured by the coincidence of several overlaying crises as it has been triggered by the increasing recognition that hitherto efforts to increase resource and energy efficiency in the production system through technological advances have not led to the aspired decoupling of economic development from resource consumption. At best, a relative decoupling can be observed—that is, the GDP's growth rate is higher than the increase in material consumption. As can be seen in Figure 9.1's global statistics, both rates continue to grow in absolute terms. That is, an actual decoupling as propagated by those promoting international agendas such as "green economy" (UNEP, 2011) or "sustainable growth" (European Commission, 2010) remains unattainable—what Nico Paech (2010) called the "myth of decoupling." Despite all efficiency efforts, some authors even expect a "recoupling" (Hickel, 2020, p. 154). Although too early to judge, there is some reason to believe that the recent EU Green Deal (European Commission, 2019) and its promised twin transition (digital and just) may also adhere to a rather non-disruptive, weak ecological modernization logic (Schulz, 2022).

In other words, the search for increased resource efficiency through technological and organizational change has not provided the expected results, even though efficiency gains could be achieved in many areas. Yet most achievements have so far been outweighed by increased resource consumption elsewhere—known as the Jevons paradox (Jevons, 1865) or rebound effect. The latter can be direct (e.g., a car with a more efficient fuel engine may be used more often or for driving faster) or indirect (reduced heating costs after building insulation may lead to resource-intense expenditures in other areas, such as for an additional holiday flight).

To avoid a frequent misunderstanding, the notion of post-growth does not mean the opposite of growth (decline, shrinkage). Rather, it encapsulates how best to

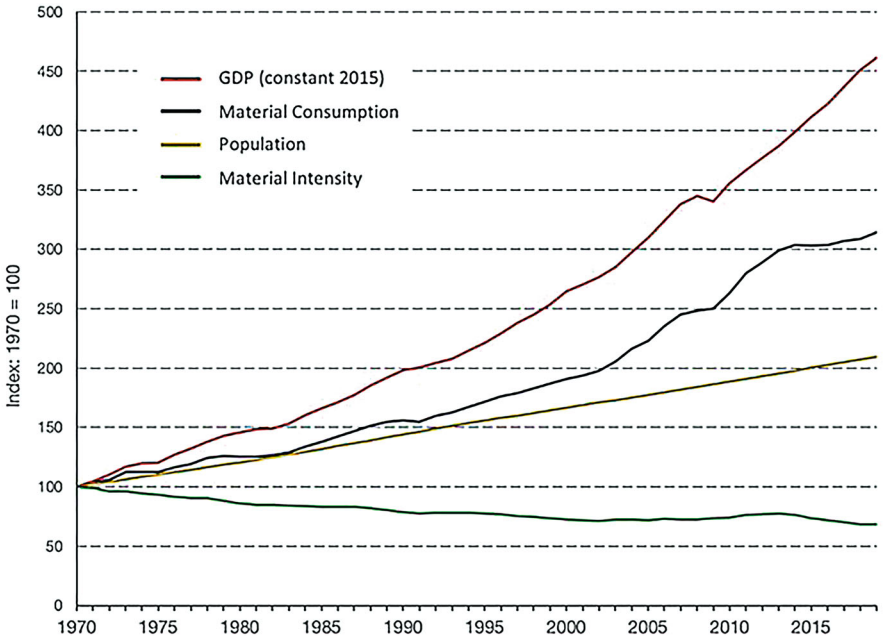

Fig. 9.1 GDP growth and material consumption worldwide 1970–2019. Data source: WU Vienna (2022). Source: Design by author

overcome growth-fixation and create economic value in a sustainable manner. In addition to addressing the question of finite resources disallowing for infinite growth, post-growth comes with an emancipatory critique of growth as a political objective in itself, primarily addressing distributional injustices and systemic disadvantages (e.g., for women) resulting from prevailing structures and practices of the capitalist economy. That is, to support post-growth is clearly to go beyond the resource question and seek an economy that serves both the common good and ecological sustainability.

Promoting post-growth does not mean denying the need for growth in certain sectors and in certain areas. But it does mean raising questions that are fundamentally different from the mere technology-oriented decoupling approach. Unlike the *how* question put to the fore by those following *efficiency* (e.g., energy and material consumption) or *contingency* (e.g., circular economy) approaches, those supporting post-growth follow a *sufficiency* approach that rather reveals *what* and *why* questions. What kind of manufactured products, what kind of agriculture and food, what kind of energy sources does a society want to use and why? In her intriguing book *Mission Economy*, Mariana Mazzucato (2021, p. 10) framed this "why" question under the notion of the "purpose-oriented economy". These questions are admittedly very normative and lead to further complex questions of democratic participation, legitimacy, and morality, to name but a few. The imperatives of the current crises,

however, provide more than a first taste of how central such normative questions will become in the near future.

Before turning to the challenges resulting from these imperatives, I shall here provide some more terminological clarity around the two—often interchangeably used—notions of degrowth and post-growth. In his recent book *Ralentir ou périr* (engl.: *slow down or perish*), the French economist Timothée Parrique, one of the leading voices in today's degrowth scholarship, makes a compelling distinction between these two terms (Parrique, 2022, p. 15). To him, degrowth is the process of reducing, redistributing, and reorganizing that leads to some kind of steady state economy not consuming more energy and material than can be regenerated, whereas post-growth describes the new regime resulting thereof. However, this distinction is far from widely shared, as Schmelzer et al.'s (2022) or Lange's (2018) terminological debates reveal. Moreover, this semantic distinction may not work in all linguistic contexts—see, e.g., the prevailing notion of post-growth/*Post-Wachstum* in German-language literature, whereas the same term is marginally used in the English language, and its equivalents are rather absent in languages such as French or Spanish. Nevertheless, Parrique's definition conveys two compelling messages.

First, degrowth as a process can be understood as both an object of analysis for degrowth researchers studying a transition process, and as a programmatic notion that provides a legitimation for degrowth activism. Again, degrowth is not to be understood as negative growth, but as a means of reducing the material growth imperative inherent to most capitalist endeavors. The former dimension would be of heuristic use for framing processes and investigating agency, whereas the latter serves more as an agenda or guiding principle for post-capitalist activists. In some parts of degrowth scholarship, the boundaries between these two dimensions are not only blurred, but deliberately entangled as a key motivation for "action research" (see the concluding discussion about positionality further down).

Second, defining post-growth as a future state emphasizes the provisional character of the syllable *post*. It stresses the uncertainty about how exactly a future that is not fixated to a growth paradigm may look. And it conveys a certain openness towards diverse articulations of post-growth as an emerging ontology. In this paper, I therefore do not understand post-growth as a concept, a theoretical model, or policy program; rather, I will use it as a lens for focusing on phenomena, practices, and organizations that contain elements of post-growth orientation. Dimensions that could be addressed include:

- Goals and motivations of corporate, civic, or public enterprises;
- Production modes independent of growth imperatives that allow for a steady state;
- Organization and governance (e.g., ownership and corporate democracy);
- Work organization and labor relations, going beyond traditional categories of paid/unpaid labor;
- A look beyond the narrow (GDP) understanding of the economy.

Post-growth ideas are increasingly inspiring scholars in economic geography and cognate disciplines. To date, researchers have focused on emerging practices and spaces for "nowtopias" rather than on questioning the notion of growth, and how the

latter still marks contemporary economic geography thinking. Empirical contributors provide sectoral insights, for example in the realms of food/agriculture (Davies et al., 2017; Rosol, 2018), energy production (Klagge & Meister, 2018), maker spaces and fab labs (Lange & Bürkner, 2018; Schmid, 2020), housing (Nelson & Schneider, 2019; Jarvis, 2017), finance (Dörry & Schulz, 2022), or labor (Seidl & Zahrnt, 2021). Moreover, urban geographers and urban studies scholars have started addressing urban economies from a post-growth perspective (Sánchez Hernández, Nicolás Penela, Alonso Santos, & Moro Gutiérrez, 2017; Savini, 2021; Savini, Ferreira, & von Schönfeld, 2022; Schmid, 2022). Aside from these mostly idiographic research endeavors, a few more conceptual contributors have "spatialized" post-growth for its adoption in our discipline (Krueger, Schulz, & Gibbs, 2017; Schmid, 2019; Demaria, Kallis, & Bakker, 2019; Lange et al., 2022).

Admittedly, besides the explicit post-growth scholarship, there exists a long-lasting skepticism towards neoliberal economies, expressed in a diverse literature ranging from early Marxist geographers over feminist scholarship to post-colonial development studies—these strands often being combined with one another.

On the Implicit Growth Fixation of Economic Geography

Although the number of scholars discussing post-growth perspectives and practices is increasing, it seems appropriate to here take a self-critical view at mainstream concepts and models within economic geography. As emphasized earlier, in light of the fact that many social sciences are facing similar challenges, economic geography can stand in as just one disciplinary example. In particular, several of the key terms discussed hereafter are presumably framed in a similar way across other disciplines. My humble attempt at self-criticism must be preceded by two disclaimers:

(a) I am well aware of the plurality and diversity of economic geography scholarship (Barnes & Sheppard, 2009), and I recognize that viewpoints as to what is "mainstream" may differ. In the following, I therefore give examples and discuss terminology that is widely acknowledged within our discipline (e.g., by the fact that they are used throughout textbooks);
(b) Secondly, this section is admittedly far from a systematic analysis or in-depth screening of the recent scholarly literature in our field; rather, I am trying to illustrate avenues of thought that deserve further exploration.

Two examples of approaches from contemporary economic geography may serve as illustrations of a (conscious or unconscious) adherence to capitalist phenomena and mechanisms taking for granted, coming together with a rather narrow understanding of "the" economy.

First, Economic Geography researchers have a long-standing interest in understanding innovation processes and the spatial and institutional contexts thereof. The model of Regional Innovation Systems (RIS) has particularly resonated in the spatial sciences as well as in the political realm. RIS serve as a heuristic framework to map

the relationships between, and to scrutinize the agency of, various types of actors within a region, determining or fertilizing innovation processes in the corporate or public sector. Analytical dimensions include public and private research infrastructures; higher education and training environments; cluster initiatives and other strategic platforms; funding schemes; moderating functions of public authorities; development agencies; business associations; and—in particular—the practices of interaction and collaboration between these actors.

Despite its holistic view on actor groups and regional institutional contexts shaping innovation processes, the concept comes with some limitations obscuring the view towards alternative futures. Most authors of RIS literature deal with mere technological innovations and the regional institutional context they emerge from, are embedded in, and thus contribute to. Although they may also address organizational and procedural (governance) aspects, less is known about social innovations or the role of civil society actors. This blind spot may have to do with the rather reductionist concept of the firm or enterprise, usually understood as a formal organization, one listed in trade registers and participating in market transactions (see below). In addition, analysts tend to evaluate and monitor the success of RIS against the backdrop of conventional metric indicators such as regional GDP, job creation, submitted patents, and R&D expenditures, whereas alternative wealth indicators are rarely used. Overall, the RIS concept tends to equal a particular form of innovativeness with regional progress and prosperity, its utilizers rarely questioning either the assumed trickle-down of benefits and the actual socio-ecological impacts of an RIS.

Second, the concept of Global Production Networks (GPN) seems a suitable example of a well-established textbook model inspiring many scholars and students in economic geography and beyond (Henderson, Dicken, Hess, Coe, & Yeung, 2002; Yeung & Coe, 2015). Those using the GPN approach partly dissent from, but also build upon, the more linear Global Commodity Chain or Global Value Chain (GCC/GVC) perspectives (Gereffi & Korzeniewicz, 1994). Whereas those adopting the latter focus on single commodities tracked along their value chain, mainly revealing power relations and interdependencies between the firms involved, those using the GPN framework not only apply a more comprehensive view of all auxiliary services and supporting industries, but spatialize Global Production Networks along both their international and regional/local dimensions. That is, they not only look at interactions and interdependencies on the global level, but also with regards to the regional embeddedness of nodes within global networks. In addition, GPN scholars increasingly value resource questions and environmental threats as uncertainties that mark risk-minimization strategies of global firms (Schmitt & Schulz, 2016). And Bridge (2009, p. 1231) concedes that hegemonic powers within GPNs have "the capacity to produce highly differentiated resource geographies."

Notwithstanding, most GPN scholars rely on an unspoken core assumption of capitalist growth logics and uncritically foreground rather conventional performance indicators of major global industries, rarely problematizing issues such as distributional injustices or the neo-colonial articulations of "extractivism" (e.g., lithium mining in South America in relation to automotive battery production). On a

different note, it remains to be seen how current deglobalization trends will challenge the GPN model's conceptual underpinning.

With the limited space available here, I cannot give a more detailed assessment of contemporary economic geography thinking. Similarly to the two concepts addressed here, many of our discipline's textbook models share both normative assumptions and a vocabulary that needs to be challenged against the backdrop of post-growth imperatives. This starts with the conventional understanding of a core research subject—the *corporate firm*. Although usually defined as an organization formally recognized as a registered business, paying taxes and participating in monetary market exchanges, this understanding misses a possible wider understanding of the term *enterprise*. The latter could include all other (non-commercial) undertakings of societal relevance, for example, as indicated in the literature on diverse or community economies (Gibson-Graham & Dombroski, 2020) or discussed under the notion of hybrid organizations and their transformative potential (Nicholls & Huybrechts, 2014; Becchetti & Huybrechts, 2007).

In a comparable manner, the prevailing understanding of the term *innovation* as mere technological or organizational (e.g., logistics) advances in the production system rarely allows for incorporating other notions of innovation. In particular, social innovations as found in collaborative consumption endeavors (parts of the "sharing economy") or in participatory governance practices are rarely scrutinized, partly because they are not subject to metric monitoring using indicators such as patent registrations, R&D expenditures, a highly skilled workforce, or success rates of start-up companies.

The pervasiveness of econometric indicators extends to the typically narrow conception of *regional economic development* which is often monitored, evaluated, and strategically orientated against such criteria. Assessments often exclusively build on variables found in official industry or labor market statistics, business reports, or similar sources. Other variables than material or monetary expressions of wealth are rarely used to scrutinize the actual well-being of a regional economy and population. Assessing the latter would require both suitable indicators and a (fundamentally) different understanding of *value* creation and *wealth* distribution.

A further example would be what we understand by *labor*, be it paid work recognized in employment statistics etc., or a more encompassing notion of usually unpaid activities that serve societal well-being (e.g., care work, volunteering in charities and sports clubs). The role of these various types of labor and its social recognition is an important strand in the current debates around post-growth orientation (see overview in Seidl & Zahrnt, 2021).

These examples of terms presented here can only be a small selection. The pledge to critically reconsider established concepts, core assumptions, and usual tools of our discipline expand to numerous other key notions (e.g., evolution and path dependence), models (e.g., clusters), or methods. Simultaneously, economic geography's empirical and theoretical contributions to spatialized conceptions of institutions, power, value, and others put the discipline in a good position to assess transformative processes at local, regional, or superior scales. Little adaptations as to ontological understandings are necessary to access post-growth-related dynamics.

Post-Growth Oriented Economic Geographies

In the remainder of this paper, I aim to start a discussion about possible ways of framing post-growth-oriented economies and of operationalizing the notion of post-growth for research that looks beyond the "usual suspects" of ephemeral post-growth/alternative economies (see the notion of "nowtopias" above). I briefly introduce two recent and implicitly interlinked approaches before synthesizing their main characteristics and provisionally assessing their potential: *Foundational Economy* and the *Economy for the Common Good*.

Foundational Economy

This concept is propagated by an international group of scholars united in the Foundational Economy Collective (FEC). Not surprisingly, this Manchester-based initiative emerged in countries most affected by neoliberal policies and a considerable weakening (if not vanishing) of the welfare state idea. The FEC supporters' central claim is that policy-makers should refocus economic development on industries that provide daily necessities, either material or providential (Foundational Economy Collective, 2018). These industries encompass different types of utilities (including related infrastructures), health and welfare services, education, transportation, as well as food processing and retailing. These activities should become decommodified and hence equally accessible to all parts of the population. Although pleading for a stronger role for the public, the core idea is not to (re)communize those sectors. Rather, it is to mitigate the negative implications of neoliberal privatization of public infrastructures and services through a "fundamental rethinking of the relationship between governing institutions and private operators in the foundational industries through constitutional reforms" (Nygaard & Hansen, 2021, p. 771). A "social license" to operate and a close supervision of corporate service providers shall assure that a) social, ethical, and ecological standards are complied with and that b) surplus benefits exceeding the provider's tender calculation are being reinvested into infrastructures and services instead of being extracted and accumulated by private shareholders. This approach significantly exceeds the usual (and increasing) stakeholder orientation of firms (Braun, 2003; Schwab & Vanham, 2021), for example, in the context of sustainability reporting or more proactive stakeholder dialogues. Other than these often-voluntary initiatives, a formal social license assigned by a democratically constituted authority (e.g., a city government) comes with both a binding character and accountability mechanisms.

Froud, Haslam, Johal, Tsitsianis, and Williams (2018), members of the FEC, contextualize the Foundational Economy as one of three sectors outside the tradable and competitive economy that—together with the latter—constitute a "zonal economy." This distinction provides a compelling view on the sometimes more teleological discussions around diverse, alternative, or ordinary economies, and places

	Form of consumption	Examples	Provider business model	Source of revenue	Organisational mobility and mortality	Post 1980s public policy
Core Economy	Non-economic because "we must love one another and die"	Parenting, voluntary action etc.	Gifting: no charging or recovery of cost	Goodwill	Re-invented forms e.g. divorce and marriage in our generation	When the state retreats, try volunteers
Foundational Economy	Daily essentials via infrastructure of networks and branches	Material e.g. food, and utilities; Providential, health and care, social housing	WAS low risk, low return, long time horizon for public and private providers	Tax revenue for free at point of use or subsidised; or regulated private purchase	Low mobility and mortality as networks and branches 'ground' firms, stable demand	Privatisation, outsourcing and shareholder value = new business model
Overlooked Economy	Occasional purchases of mundane, cultural necessities		Financialized corporates vs SME and micro pro lifestyle and getting by	Discretionary from market income	High mortality in small firms and structural shifts e.g. streaming not DVD	Below the policy radar if firms too small to take outside capital
Tradeable, competitive Economy	(aspirational) private purchase	Cars, electronics, new kitchens and bathrooms, private housing	IS high risk, high return, short time horizon	Market income from wages (state subsidy for R & D, training etc.)	High mobility as footloose under free trade; cyclical demand	Business friendly, structural reform

Fig. 9.2 Schema of the "zonal economy". Source: Design by author, based on Froud et al. (2018, p. 7)

the Foundational Economy as a key pillar alongside the market economy, the core economy, and rather overlooked parts of the economy (Figure 9.2).

Researchers currently working in this realm deal with regional approaches to implement Foundational Economy (FE) principles, as in Wales or Barcelona (Earle, Froud, Johal, & Williams, 2018; Russell, Beel, Rees Jones, & Jones, 2022), or its articulation with other conceptual debates. For example, Wahlund and Hansen (2022) explore the compatibility with the concept of the Doughnut Economy (Raworth, 2017), and discuss to what extent it could serve as a means of further operationalizing Foundational Economy research and policies. Bärnthaler, Novy, and Plank (2021) explicitly discuss how the FE can be one trajectory within a post-growth transition, transforming capitalism "from within" (see more in this chapter's conclusion). Those (self-)criticising the FE approach address its "overwhelmingly Western-centric gaze" (Russell et al., 2022, p. 1081), to which one could add a lack of differentiation in terms of "varieties of capitalism" recognizing the achievements (or remnants) of actually existing welfare states and further exploring the variegated dispositions of national (Crouch, 2005) and regional economies (Ebner, 2015).

Economy for the Common Good

Narrowly linked with the work of the Austrian activist Christian Felber (2019), Economy for the Common Good (ECG) has become an international network movement whose supporters seek to propagate values-driven businesses that are committed to human dignity; solidarity and social justice; environmental sustainability; and transparency and codetermination. The ECG Matrix (Figure 9.3) serves as a differentiated tool for monitoring a company's common good performance. First developed only for businesses, adapted matrices can also be applied to municipalities and educational institutions.

A detailed evaluation scheme is provided for each matrix box. For example, in category A3—"Environmental sustainability in the supply chain"—the following levels of evaluation are used in assessing a firm (Drosg-Plöckinger et al., 2017, p. 27):

> *Exemplary*—Ecological purchasing management is part of the company's corporate identity and positioning. Policies for environmentally friendly purchasing and reducing the environmental risks of purchased goods are innovative in all areas of business.
>
> *Experienced*—Comprehensive purchasing guidelines have been established outlining how purchased goods are assessed and selected according to environmental criteria, and how suppliers are supported in implementing required environmental standards. Almost all main suppliers fulfill above-average environmental standards.
>
> *Advanced*—First measures have been put into place to reduce the environmental risk or impact associated with the purchase of goods and services. The firm is committed to reducing the use of environmentally damaging products. Initial steps have been taken to encourage suppliers to reduce environmentally damaging activities.

VALUE / STAKEHOLDER	HUMAN DIGNITY	SOLIDARITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	TRANSPARENCY AND CO-DETERMINATION
A: SUPPLIERS	**A1** Human dignity in the supply chain	**A2** Solidarity and social justice in the supply chain	**A3** Environmental sustainability in the supply chain	**A4** Transparency and co-determination in the supply chain
B: OWNERS, EQUITY- AND FINANCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS	**B1** Ethical position in relation to financial resources	**B2** Social position in relation to financial resources	**B3** Use of funds in relation to social and environmental impacts	**B4** Ownership and co-determination
C: EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING CO-WORKING EMPLOYERS	**C1** Human dignity in the workplace and working environment	**C2** Self-determined working arrangements	**C3** Environmentally-friendly behaviour of staff	**C4** Co-determination and transparency within the organisation
D: CUSTOMERS AND OTHER COMPANIES	**D1** Ethical customer relations	**D2** Cooperation and solidarity with other companies	**D3** Impact on the environment of the use and disposal of products and services	**D4** Customer participation and product transparency
E: SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	**E1** Purpose of products and services and their effects on society	**E2** Contribution to the community	**E3** Reduction of environmental impact	**E4** Social co-determination and transparency

Fig. 9.3 The Common Good Matrix for Enterprises. Reprinted from Drosg-Plöckinger, Kofranek, & Koloo (2017, p. 8). Copyright 2017 by Matrix Development Group. Reprinted with permission

Getting started—Purchased goods and services are checked for environmental risks and impact, and environmentally preferable alternatives are sought. Initial exclusion criteria are met when making purchases.

Baseline—Legal requirements are met. The firm makes no further assessment of suppliers according to the environmental impact of their activities.

Together with further assessment tools recommended by the ECG network, these levels are used to reveal individual scores for each respective category. The evaluation results then feed into a comprehensive balance sheet for the company. The current scores of all categories are displayed in the synoptic matrix, which can be used like a dashboard for further monitoring and adaptation strategies.

Despite its analytical rigor and search for methodological transparency, the ECG approach can be criticized, for example, for the following issues:

- Like many other multi-dimensional evaluation schemes that result in a kind of metric synthesis expressed in a scoreboard, questions arise concerning the underlying criteria, the scope and comparability of the variables, and the pertinence of the indicators used.
- On a more than semantic level, Felber and the ECG network have built not only a concept but also a brand. To a certain extent, their label takes possession of a formerly wider notion of the common good in the corporate sector. With all respect for the concept's robustness and the network's noble motivations, the ECG represents but one particular reading of how the concept of the common good can be established in the corporate sector.
- Finally, one could question the dynamics inherent to a somewhat commercialized label and the performativity of the Common Good Certificate assigned to positively evaluated firms (see the general discussion on the validity of sustainability labels used in corporate marketing).

Despite these criticisms, the ECG provides an advanced tool to further operationalize the idea of post-growth orientation. Possibly going beyond the status of a voluntary assessment in the future, it could provide a tangible tool and substantiated standards for political and regulatory initiatives towards incentivization and formal recognition of firms that divert from mere material growth logics.

Discussion and Conclusion

Both the post-growth imperatives in general and the two concepts presented in the preceding section in particular offer compelling research avenues for an economic geography engaged with a profound transition of socio-economic practices and institutions.

These avenues are intriguing albeit challenging, as their exploration necessitates questioning established reference frameworks and core assumptions of economic geography and other disciplines. The challenges exceed terminological and

conceptual reconsiderations and also require adaptations in methodological terms, aspects that would go beyond this chapter's scope and cannot be outlined in more detail. They include both the range of appropriate research tools as well as issues related to the availability of data and monitoring indicators.

What those utilizing the Foundational Economy and the Economy for the Common Good approaches have in common is that neither claim to provide a comprehensive alternative to the capitalist economy. Nor do they present a one-size-fits-all methodology, applicable in the same manner to all different industries, business models, organizational forms, or regional contexts.

Rather than claiming for an antagonistic model to prevailing capitalist practices, they aim at conceptualizing ideas that can inform either policy making (e.g., the FE's role) or corporate enterprises (e.g., by providing instruments such as the ECG Matrix) to readjust within the current system. This does not mean, however, that they do not aspire towards fundamental (if not disruptive) changes, be they in the role of the state and civil society in controlling corporate FE providers or in the motivations, goals, and actual practices of companies turning towards a common-good orientation. Still in their infancy, both concepts need further elaboration and real-world experiences. An economic geography whose practitioners are interested in socio-ecological transformations seems well situated to contribute to the further development of these and other operationalizations of post-growth ideas.

Finally, and as indicated above, growth critique and post-growth thinking is inherently normative (as many other research perspectives implicitly are too) and may require a particular consideration of researchers' positionality. This is the more relevant as numerous post-growth scholars would see themselves as action/activist researchers advocating for transformative ideas in a fairly militant manner. Such scholars would justify their combativeness by citing the pertinence and emergency of the current global crises; their work, they might say, is in response to societal expectations that scientific contributions solve pressing problems. Although transformative commitment appears justified under these circumstances, all activist researchers should also be able to adopt a critical distance and address any possible conflicts of interest and resulting biases in a transparent manner to avoid a loss of credibility.

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