



Transformative Education for a Post-Growth Future.

A Collection
of Workshops



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NaZemi

NaZemi is a Czech non-governmental organization working toward a society in which the needs of all people are met within planetary boundaries. In its work, it combines transformative education, support for democratic and self-governing organizations, and the promotion of degrowth approaches to the economy and social transformation. The organisation stands on the conviction that today's social, ecological, and democratic crises have their roots in the profound separation of people from nature and from one another, and in an economic system based on constant growth, competition, and the concentration of power. NaZemi therefore supports systemic change that connects an inner transformation in how we relate to ourselves, others, and the world with a transformation of institutions, organizations, and social structures toward the values of cooperation, sufficiency, care, solidarity, and democracy.

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The Institute for Political Ecology (IPE) is a Croatian research and educational organization dedicated to the democratic and ecological transformation of society. In its work, it combines critical research, education and outreach, public advocacy, and international cooperation, focusing on the themes of degrowth, political ecology, just transition, municipalism, and public services.

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Post-growth as a Response to Current Crises

We find ourselves in the midst of an unprecedented convergence of crises that threaten the stability of both ecological systems and social institutions. The accelerating climate crisis, rapid biodiversity loss, and human-induced depletion of essential natural resources are unfolding alongside deepening economic inequalities, political polarization, and a widespread decline in democracy. These phenomena are further exacerbated by worsening geopolitical conflicts and financial instability, as well as public health emergencies.

These phenomena are not separate crises, but interconnected consequences of an economic system based on perpetual growth, capital accumulation, and the intensive extraction of natural and human resources. The current system concentrates wealth and power in the hands of a narrow group of actors, while shifting the ecological and social costs onto the majority of society and future generations. It is precisely this structural orientation toward profit maximization and endless expansion that is gradually undermining ecological stability, democratic institutions, and the conditions for a dignified life.

Economic growth has long been treated as an almost dogmatic imperative. It is embedded in political frameworks and institutional structures, as well as in the common understanding of success and prosperity. Its acceptance transcends ideological, political, and cultural differences. The necessity of growth is rarely questioned, and attempts to challenge it are often dismissed as irrational or impractical. However, while mainstream approaches to addressing today's crises rely on the assumption that further growth and technological innovation will solve current problems, there is a growing conviction within the scientific community focused on sustainability that to truly solve today's environmental problems, we need to transition to a post-growth economic model. Advocates of critical approaches such as post-growth or degrowth criticize the dogma of economic growth and point out that it is precisely economic growth that contributes to deepening inequalities, exceeding planetary boundaries, and geopolitical conflicts; moreover, in wealthier countries, further growth no longer even contributes to improving quality of life.

A survey of nearly 500 sustainability experts found that 77% of them call for post-growth strategies in high-income countries (Koskimäki, 2023). A survey of climate policy researchers showed a similar trend, with up to 86% of European researchers supporting post-growth solutions (King et al., 2023). The European Environment Agency and the United Nations are also now openly discussing the need for a fundamental transformation of the economic system. Thus, from what was once a marginal, minority position, the post-growth perspective is gradually evolving into a relevant framework for seeking systemic responses to current environmental and social crises.

Post-growth and degrowth are closely related concepts, but they do not mean the same thing. Post-growth describes a vision of society and the economy that is no longer dependent on constant economic growth and that would be able to meet everyone's needs within planetary boundaries. The key values of such a vision are quality of life, care, sufficiency, and equality.

Degrowth refers to the path toward such a society. It is a political and economic project aimed at deliberately reducing excessive production and consumption—primarily in the Global North and high-income groups worldwide—so that economies return to within planetary boundaries while strengthening social justice and democratic control over the economy. We can thus understand post-growth as a goal or horizon, while degrowth represents one of the main paths to achieving that goal.

From this perspective, capitalism plays a key role, as its functioning is structurally dependent on constant economic growth. The logic of profit maximization, capital accumulation, and market expansion creates a system that is fundamentally incompatible with the planet's ecological limits in the long term. The post-growth perspective therefore represents not merely a set of piecemeal

environmental measures, but a profound paradigm shift in the way we organize both the economy and society. It entails a reevaluation of dominant notions of progress, prosperity, and success, as well as a transformation of economic institutions, social relations, and value systems so that the goal of the economy is not growth itself, but ensuring a dignified life for all within planetary boundaries. We can understand the transition toward post-growth on three interconnected levels: biophysical, systemic, and cultural.

The first is the biophysical level. This is based on the recognition that the current economy exceeds planetary boundaries, and therefore we need to significantly reduce the material and energy intensity of our societies. This means downsizing sectors that are not essential for a good quality of life or are replaceable, yet currently cause significant environmental and social impacts—such as the fossil fuel, meat, textile, or automotive industries. The goal is not “less of everything,” but rather transforming the economy so that it can ensure a good life with significantly lower resource consumption.

The second level is systemic post-growth. Current economic systems are structurally dependent on growth, and without it, they often lead to unemployment, debt, or social instability. Therefore, the debate on post-growth does not merely mean an effort to slow down the economy, but above all a search for institutions and policies that will enable prosperity even without economic growth. These include, for example, guaranteed jobs, universal basic services, shorter working hours, support for non-profit and cooperative forms of business, or the introduction of income and wealth caps. There is no single simple solution. It involves a broader set of interconnected changes designed to ensure a socially just transformation.

A key component of a systemic post-growth approach is also the issue of the redistribution of resources and wealth. The current economic system concentrates an enormous amount of wealth, power, and consumption in the hands of a relatively small privileged group, while a large portion of society faces uncertainty or cannot even meet its basic needs. The post-growth perspective therefore emphasizes not only the need to reduce overall material and energy consumption, but also to fundamentally transform the way resources are distributed and used. More efficient use of resources should not serve to create further excesses and luxury consumption for a minority, but to ensure a dignified life for all.

It is precisely the issue of redistribution that demonstrates that post-growth is not merely a technical debate about new policies or economic tools, but also a matter of power and conflict. The current system benefits those who profit from it the most, and they therefore often have a significantly greater ability to resist systemic change. The transition to post-growth thus does not merely entail the introduction of new measures, but raises the fundamental question of whom the economy should serve, who decides on the use of social resources, and how to democratically determine society's priorities.

The third level represents cultural post-growth. This concerns a transformation of our ideas and mental models about what constitutes a good life, success, or progress. Contemporary culture is heavily based on overconsumption, performance, and constant growth. The post-growth perspective, on the other hand, emphasizes values such as sufficiency, quality of life, equality, relationships, care, time, community, and meaning. It is not just about individual lifestyle changes, but about a broader shift in societal “common sense”—that is, what we consider normal, desirable, and valuable.

These three levels are closely interconnected. Biophysical sustainability cannot be achieved without transforming economic institutions and policies, just as systemic change is unlikely to occur without a cultural shift in values and notions of prosperity.

Although no fully post-growth country exists anywhere today, we can already find many glimpses of such a future all around us. There are companies that set a maximum gap between the lowest

and highest salaries in order to limit extreme inequality. There are plethora of non-profit or community-oriented enterprises that do not use profits for further capital accumulation but reinvest them in meeting people's needs and protecting the planet. Some countries are experimenting with shorter workweeks or introducing guaranteed employment programs. Other nations are beginning to supplement or replace GDP with indicators of well-being and quality of life.

These examples show that alternatives to an economy based on endless growth are not merely abstract theory or a utopian vision. There are already concrete institutions, policies, and practices that demonstrate that the economy can be organized differently—in a way that prioritizes human needs, relationships, care, and ecological stability over profit maximization and constant expansion.

For the context of post-socialist countries, it is important to recognize that post-growth also requires a reevaluation of prevailing narratives about modernization. In many contexts, particularly in semi-peripheral and peripheral regions, local practices have been marginalized or stigmatized for not conforming to Western models of development. However, practices such as subsistence production, the informal economy, and community resource management often represent forms of resilience and sustainability that are overlooked within growth-oriented systems. Recognizing and integrating these practices can contribute to a more pluralistic and context-sensitive approach to the transformation that post-growth envisions.

The challenge of post-growth transformation is therefore not to “invent” an entirely new world from scratch, but rather to connect, expand, and systematically support existing alternatives. The goal is to create, from these individual experiments and practices, a new economic and social framework that is not based on the imperative of further growth and accumulation, but on ensuring a dignified life for all within planetary boundaries.

At first glance, the debate on post-growth and degrowth may seem like a highly technical topic intended primarily for economists, climate policy experts, or the academic community. In reality, however, it touches on very fundamental questions that affect the daily lives of all of us and the shape of our society as a whole: what we consider a good life, how we want to organize work, care, or businesses, who decides the shape of the economy, and what kind of future we can imagine.

This is precisely why these questions should not remain solely in the hands of experts and technocratic institutions. If economic growth is understood as an unquestionable goal, decision-making about the shape of society is often narrowed down to technical debates about efficiency, competitiveness, or GDP, while broader democratic discussion about values, priorities, and limits recedes into the background. The post-growth perspective, on the other hand, points out that the economy is not a neutral technical system, but a realm of political decisions that have fundamental impacts on quality of life, social relations, and the shape of democracy.

It is therefore crucial that critical reflection on the current economic system not remain confined to academic or expert debates, but also reach the broader public. It is precisely non-formal education that can create a space where people can collectively examine the causes of today's crises, envision alternatives, and develop the ability to actively engage in debates about the shape of future society. At the same time, non-formal education methods make it possible to address these complex topics in a comprehensible, participatory, and transformative way.

Resources

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Transformative and political education

We are living in a time when the world we have taken for granted is beginning to unravel. Across climate systems, ecosystems, economies, and societies, we are witnessing not isolated crises, but a convergence of disruptions that challenge the very foundations of how we live, learn, and organize our societies. As many analyses have shown, these crises are interconnected and systemic, and so too must be our responses.

Education, in this context, cannot remain neutral. It is not merely a tool for transmitting knowledge, but a force that shapes how we understand the world, what we consider possible, and how we act within it.

Yet much of education today remains caught in what Stephen Sterling described as limited responses to sustainability: **denial**, **“bolt-on” additions**, or **partial integration**.

Denial is perhaps the most visible in public discourse, but in education it often takes subtler forms: treating ecological and social crises as temporary disruptions rather than symptoms of deeper systemic failure. It manifests in curricula that continue to assume stability, predictability, and endless growth as the default conditions of the world. More common, however, are the second and third responses.

The **“bolt-on” approach** introduces sustainability as an additional topic. Something to be inserted into existing subjects without fundamentally questioning their assumptions. A course on climate change is added to an economics program that still centres growth as its unquestioned goal. A sustainability module appears in a business curriculum that continues to prioritize profit maximization. In this mode, sustainability becomes a theme, not a lens; an addition, not a transformation.

The **“built-in” approach** goes further. Here, sustainability is recognized as important enough to be integrated across disciplines and practices. It informs teaching, shapes institutional strategies, and becomes part of the educational ethos. This represents meaningful progress. Yet even here, the underlying structures of education—and the societal paradigms they reproduce—often remain intact. The system adapts, but does not fundamentally change.

The last two approaches share a common limitation: they operate within the boundaries of existing frameworks. They aim to make current systems more sustainable, more efficient, more responsive, to optimize rather than to transform. But the scale and nature of today’s crises suggest that optimization is no longer sufficient.

The fourth response identified by Sterling—**whole-system redesign**—points toward a different horizon. It calls for rethinking not only the content of education, but its purpose, its underlying assumptions, and its relationship to society.

- What does it mean to educate in a world where ecological limits are real and already being exceeded?
- What does it mean to prepare learners for futures that are uncertain, unstable, and fundamentally different from the past?
- What kinds of knowledge, skills, and ways of being are needed—not to sustain the current system, but to reimagine and reshape it?

A whole-system redesign of education begins with recognizing that education is not neutral. It is deeply implicated in the reproduction of social, economic, and cultural systems. It shapes how we understand progress, success, and value. It influences what we consider normal, possible, and desirable. If current education systems have been instrumental in sustaining a growth-de-

pendent, extractive model of development, then transformative education must take on the task of questioning and moving beyond that model. This is where the distinction between doing things better and doing better things differently becomes crucial.

Transformative learning can be defined primarily by its aims and principles, not by a concrete teaching or learning strategy. It aims to empower learners to question and change their ways of seeing and thinking about the world, in order to further develop their understanding of it (Mezirow, 2000; Slavich and Zimbardo, 2012). The educator acts as a facilitator who empowers and challenges learners to change their worldviews. The related concept of transgressive learning (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015) goes one step further – it states that learning in Education for Sustainable Development has to overcome the status quo and prepare the learner for disruptive thinking and the co-creation of new knowledge.

At the heart of the question of education lies a deeper political question: what kind of citizen are we trying to cultivate?

Westheimer and Kahne distinguish between three types of citizens: the **personally responsible**, the **participatory**, and the **justice-oriented**. Much of sustainability and environmental education has focused on the first two.

We teach individuals to recycle, reduce consumption, and make ethical choices. We encourage participation—community engagement, volunteering, local initiatives. These are important. But they are not enough.

What is often missing is the third dimension: the **justice-oriented citizen**—one who asks not only how to act, but why the world is structured the way it is. One who is able to question dominant systems, analyze power, and address the root causes of social and ecological crises. This absence is not accidental. It reflects a deeper tension.

If everyone were to fully adopt the behavioral recommendations of mainstream sustainability education—consume less, prioritize sufficiency over growth—the current economic system would face a fundamental contradiction. An economy structurally dependent on continuous growth cannot easily accommodate widespread frugality and reduced consumption, because it would collapse.

This reveals a critical blind spot: without addressing the structural logic of our economic system, sustainability education risks becoming self-limiting.

This is where transformative, post-growth education becomes essential.

It shifts the focus:

- from individual behaviour to systemic change,
- from adaptation to transformation,
- from reproducing the status quo to questioning it.

Transformative education recognizes that knowledge alone is insufficient. As scholars have argued, despite growing awareness of global challenges, societies still lack the capacity to respond adequately. What is needed are new ways of learning, ones that build not only understanding, but also agency.

This publication explores what such an education might look like.

Transformative education:

- **cultivates critical and systems thinking**, enabling learners to see connections, contradictions, and underlying structures;

- **challenges dominant assumptions and ideologies**, making visible what is often taken for granted;
- is **power-conscious**, asking: Who benefits? Whose voices are missing?
- is **participatory and relational**, grounded in dialogue, co-creation, and collective learning;
- is **holistic**, engaging not only the intellect but also emotions, bodies, and lived experience;
- **expands imagination**, fostering the capacity to envision alternative futures beyond current status quo;
- and ultimately, it **leads to strategic action**, action that is informed, collective, and oriented toward systemic change.

In this sense, transformative education is not simply about preparing individuals to navigate the world as it is. It is about equipping them to transform the world as it could be. The stakes of this shift are profound.

If education continues to reproduce existing paradigms—economic growth as necessity, competition as norm, extraction as progress—it will remain part of the problem. But if it embraces its transformative potential, it can become a powerful driver of change: helping societies reimagine their economies, rebuild relationships with the living world, and create more just and sustainable futures.

This publication is an invitation to take that step. Not to add sustainability as another topic, but to rethink education itself.

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Workshops and How to Work With Them

Post-growth is often perceived as an abstract, academic, and inaccessible topic. From our experience with post-growth education, one of the most effective ways to make these themes more approachable to a broader audience is to work with concrete examples and case studies, where broader principles and frameworks become embodied on a more tangible level that participants can more easily relate to. This is why many of the methodologies include case studies from around the world that illustrate how the logic of growth and post-growth manifests through specific policies, institutions, and identities.

The methodologies are organized according to the sequence of analysis – vision – strategy, which is also the structure we typically follow in our educational practice. We have found this logical progression effective both for shorter lectures and for longer educational programs (such as a 7-day summer school).

1. Analysis: Understanding the Current System

The first step is to familiarize participants with the critique of growth-based economics. If we want to discuss a radically different economic vision, it is crucial for participants to first understand where the current growth-oriented economic model fails and what its negative social and environmental impacts are. This goal is addressed most directly by methodologies such as *The Systems Thinking Iceberg*, *Justice as the Key to Sustainability*, *From Dominance to Care: Masculinities in a World of Crises*, or the discussion accompanying the film *The Cost of Growth*.

At this stage, it is essential to create enough space for working with emotions. A deeper analysis of the current status quo, its harmful impacts, and future outlooks often brings difficult emotions to the surface: anger, helplessness, despair. It is therefore important to make room for these emotions both within individual activities and potentially through activities specifically designed for emotional processing (for example, *Tending the Inner Sun: Fighting Eco-Anxiety with Imagination*).

2. Vision: Imagining What Could Be Different

After engaging with the critique, participants often begin asking how our economy and society could function differently. At this stage of learning, it is useful to support participants' imagination and expand it through concrete, pioneering, and inspiring examples of policies, businesses, movements, or initiatives that embody post-growth values in practice (for example in the methodologies *Artificial Scarcity or Radical Abundance? Decommodification as a Key Path to Post-Growth*, *Post-Growth Entrepreneurship*, or *Degrowth Policies*).

The aim of this phase is to help participants imagine a post-growth society and economy that could meet the needs of all people within planetary boundaries, and to make such a vision tangible and accessible.

3. Strategy: How to Advance Change

Naturally, participants then begin asking how such a vision could actually be achieved – in other words, questions of strategy and theories of change emerge. At this stage, it is important to introduce different approaches to social transformation (for example through the methodologies *Strategies of Transformation* or *The Systems Thinking Iceberg*), while also examining historical attempts at systemic change and reflecting on what we can learn from them (for example through *From Enterprise to a System: Scaling Cooperatives*).

An important theme throughout this phase is power – and how power can be built in order to advance desirable social transformations.

Given the complexity of post-growth transformation, our selection of methodologies is neither exhaustive nor intended to cover all key aspects of the topic. Rather, it serves as an example of how even academic themes can be translated into non-formal education. We design the methodologies so that they can be used independently, but also combined as part of a longer educational program or process, complementing one another like modular building blocks. Because post-growth is such a complex topic, we recommend that educators approach it as a long-term educational process – for example through a series of thematic workshops (such as evening seminar series) or through longer formats such as multi-day courses or summer schools.

Guide to Specific Workshops

The Systems Thinking Iceberg

This methodology offers a practical tool for analyzing complex problems on multiple levels – from visible events and trends to the deeper structures and mental models that shape them. In the context of post-growth education, it helps participants understand not only the concrete manifestations of the growth economy, but also the assumptions on which it is built (such as belief in endless growth, productivity, or competition). It also enables participants to identify the institutions and structures that support or depend on growth. We often use this methodology at the beginning of educational processes because it helps establish a shared language and common framework for thinking about problems. It is useful not only for analysis, but also for identifying leverage points for systemic intervention.

Justice as the Key to Sustainability

This methodology demonstrates how deeply interconnected social and environmental issues are. Through concrete case studies, it helps participants understand that the climate crisis is not only an environmental issue, but also a question of justice, power, and the distribution of resources. It helps uncover the deeper causes of current problems and opens discussion about why purely technological solutions are often insufficient. In the context of post-growth, it emphasizes that transformation must address both ecological limits and social inequalities simultaneously – seeking solutions that connect the two.

Discussion on Film The Cost of Growth and Reflection

The film provides an accessible introduction to the critique of so-called green growth and highlights the limitations of strategies that attempt to address the climate crisis without abandoning the growth paradigm. A key part of working with the film is facilitated reflection – simply screening the film is not enough. The methodology offers several possible directions for discussion (for example through themes such as democracy, activism, or the role of trade unions), making it possible to adapt the activity to a specific group. The film often evokes strong emotions and important questions and can serve as a bridge between analytical and value-based learning.

From Dominance to Care: Masculinities in a World of Crises

This methodology explores how dominant ideas of masculinity are intertwined with the logic of a growth-oriented society, and how growth ideology is embedded not only in economic institutions but also in our identities, relationships, and notions of success and strength. The workshop reveals how hegemonic forms of masculinity reinforce competitiveness, performance, dominance, and the rejection of vulnerability – values that simultaneously sustain growth-oriented institutions and economic systems. Through personal sharing, collective reflection, and engagement with research, the methodology opens questions about what kinds of masculinities we need in a world shaped by ecological and social crises, and what institutional changes could support more caring, relational, and ecological forms of masculinity.

Tending the Inner Sun: Fighting Eco-Anxiety with Imagination

This methodology works with the topic of eco-anxiety and explores how it can be addressed collectively through imagination, sharing, and creative language practices (such as poetry). It helps participants understand emotions connected to the climate crisis as a social rather than purely individual issue. In the context of post-growth, it supports the ability to “decolonize the imagination” – to imagine alternatives to the current economic system and overcome the feeling that there is no alternative to a growth-based economy.

Artificial Scarcity or Radical Abundance? Decommodification as a Key Path to Post-Growth

This methodology works with concrete examples of the commodification of basic needs, such as housing, water, energy, or care and shows how transforming these needs into market commodities affects their accessibility and the fairness of their distribution. At the same time, it introduces examples of decommodification – approaches that reframe these needs as rights or public goods. The tension between commodification and decommodification is one of the central themes of both growth and post-growth economics. One of the strengths of the methodology is its grounding in participants’ everyday experiences: the issue of basic needs is immediately understandable to most people while also opening space for imagining alternatives.

Degrowth Policies

This methodology focuses on specific public policies and measures and compares their forms within growth-oriented and post-growth approaches. It shows that post-growth is not only an abstract vision, but also a set of concrete proposals for transforming the economy and society. Participants learn to think about the impacts of individual policies in broader contexts – for example through mapping cascading effects. The methodology therefore develops systems thinking while also making practical implementation at the level of the state or public administration more tangible.

Post-Growth Entrepreneurship

Dependence on growth manifests not only at the level of states, but also in the everyday functioning of companies and organizations. This methodology therefore approaches business through

five key dimensions that shape its impact on society and the environment. It helps participants understand how firms are structurally organized and how this organization shapes their behavior. The methodology works particularly well in combination with The Systems Thinking Iceberg, because it connects concrete organizational practices with deeper structures and values. Through inspiring examples of alternative enterprises, it also opens space for imagining different forms of economic organization.

Pirate Care

This methodology focuses on care in contemporary society and examines how systems of care are weakened, privatized, or criminalized. Through concrete examples of so-called “pirate care” initiatives, it presents forms of solidarity that emerge from below and often outside official institutions. In the context of post-growth, it emphasizes care, interdependence, and solidarity as foundational principles of economy and society that stand in opposition to the logic of profit and growth.

Strategies of Transformation

This methodology focuses on different approaches to social change and offers a framework for comparing and combining them. It introduces approaches such as institutional reform, building alternatives, or bottom-up pressure, and demonstrates how these strategies can function independently as well as in synergy with one another. Through this process, participants can better understand the different pathways of change and locate themselves within them. The methodology supports strategic thinking and helps bridge the gap between vision and concrete action.

From Enterprise to a System: Scaling Cooperatives

This methodology is based on the analysis of existing examples of solidarity-based, cooperative, or community economies and explores how individual initiatives can connect into broader ecosystems. It emphasizes that systemic change rarely emerges in isolation, but rather through networking and collaboration among different actors. It helps participants think about how alternatives can scale not only through the growth of individual projects, but also through their interconnection. At the same time, it offers concrete inspiration from practice, showing that these models already exist and can function successfully.

Systems thinking Iceberg

This activity introduces participants to one of the tools of system thinking using a complex real-life example. It offers a group training session of mastering the tool.

Duration:	60 minutes (1 hour)
Number of participants:	unlimited
Tools:	writing papers for participants, writing supplies, flipchart markers and flipchart paper
Tags:	system thinking tool
Topic:	system thinking, analysis
Program objectives:	Participants: • understand the iceberg model (events → patterns → structures → mental models) and becomes able to apply it to specific problems (personal and social), • perceives that different solutions (for example degrowth ones) target different levels of systems, • understands the role of mental models and preconceptions in society.

Program Implementation

Introductory framing:

When we look at the problems around us—whether personal or societal—we usually see only what's on the surface: a specific situation that has occurred. And we often tend to react to it quickly. Today, however, we're going to try a slightly different approach.

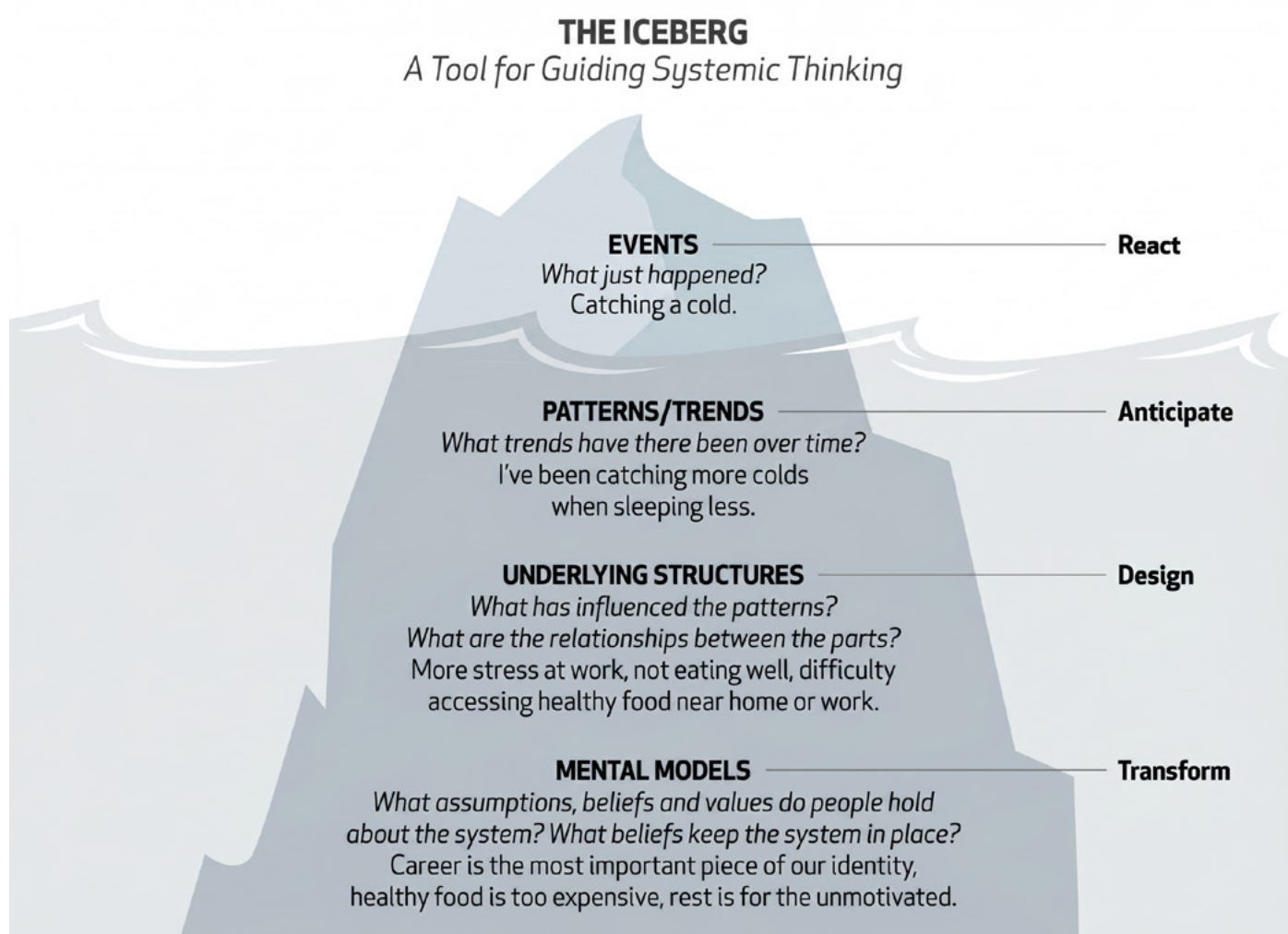
Let's introduce a tool—the system iceberg model—that will help us look at problems with more depth. Not just at what is happening, but why it is happening and what factors influence it.

The iceberg will help us perceive connections, relationships between things, and recurring patterns, rather than isolated individual events.

You may be familiar with the iceberg metaphor—only a small part is visible above the surface, while most of it is hidden beneath. And it is precisely that hidden part that actually determines how the iceberg moves. We can view the problems around us in a similar way. What we see on the surface is only a fraction of the whole. And if we want to truly understand or change something, we need to look beneath the surface as well.

Introducing the iceberg model (10 minutes)

Before the workshop begins, we need to draw the iceberg on the flipchart and, ideally, reveal it level by level (for example, by peeling back masking tape from the bottom so that only the first layer of the glacier is visible: Events). As we explain each level, we'll supplement our explanation with a specific example that illustrates the theory—for instance, someone catching a cold.



1. The level of events (what can be seen on the surface)

The level of events is what is visible at first glance—a specific situation that has occurred. It is what we usually respond to most quickly and naturally. We often address problems at this level immediately, but we tend to address their symptoms rather than their causes.

Example: I've caught the flu. I have a fever and a cough, so I'm staying home.

Response: I'll take some medicine, see a doctor, and try to get better as soon as possible.

2. The level of patterns (what is recurring)

When we look deeper, we begin to notice recurring patterns. It's no longer about a single event, but about the fact that similar situations happen over and over again. This level of analysis helps us identify trends and better predict what might happen.

Example: I realize that I don't get sick just once in a while.

- I get sick almost every winter.
- I often get sick after a period of high stress.
- I tend to get sick when I don't get enough sleep for a long time.

Suddenly, it's not just "one case of the flu," but a recurring pattern.

3. The level of structures (what the patterns emerge from)

At this level, we ask: What causes these patterns? The answer lies in structures—that is, the conditions, rules, environments, and settings of the system in which we operate. These are often not immediately apparent but they have a profound impact on our behavior.

Example: The following factors may be contributing to my recurring illnesses:

- a high-pressure work environment with little time for rest
- a culture of "working even when tired or sick"
- long commutes → little time to recover
- limited access to quality food (due to time or financial constraints)
- systemic issues (e.g., inadequate sick leave benefits)

So it is not just about individual failure, but about how the system around me is set up.

4. The level of mental models (deep preconceptions)

Deepest of all are our mental models—our beliefs, values, and ideas about how the world works. We often aren't even aware of these assumptions, but they shape both our thought processes and our behavior.

Example: The following beliefs may underlie the structures mentioned above:

- "Performance is more important than health."
- "Rest is a sign of weakness or laziness."
- "I have to be productive all the time."
- "I can't afford to slow down."
- "Health is solely my own responsibility."

These mental models lead us to create an environment that wears us down over time—and this eventually takes a toll on our health.

Here, we can examine the assumptions that different actors hold about various matters. For example, what assumptions do I have about myself (e.g., "performance is more important than health"), but also, for instance, what assumptions does my boss have when creating a work

environment with high pressure to perform and little room for rest (“people give their best when they’re at the end of their rope”), etc.

Group exercise: The iceberg of homelessness (10 minutes)

Now that we have an idea of how the iceberg model works, let’s try applying it to a slightly more complex example. Imagine you’re walking through your city and, near the train station, you see a person in ragged clothes carrying plastic bags. You assume that this person is homeless.

This time, I won’t be introducing the individual levels myself—let’s try it together.

2. The level of patterns (what is recurring)

Let’s start by looking at the broader context in time and space:

- Is the number of homeless people increasing or decreasing?
- Where are they most commonly spending time (train stations, city centers, parks)?
- At what time of year (e.g., are they more visible in winter due to outreach services)?
- What is the gender distribution (e.g., are there more men than women)?
- What are typical life trajectories (e.g., people after leaving institutions, after losing a job, after a divorce)?

3. The level of structures (what the patterns emerge from)

We must ask: What in the system causes these patterns to exist?

- lack of affordable housing due to rising rents
- shortage of social housing
- low wages and job insecurity
- lack of or fragmented social and health services
- the structure of the social welfare system (eligibility requirements for benefits, bureaucracy, and the rules and regulations of shelters)

We can see that homelessness is not just an individual problem, but the result of broader societal structures.

4. The level of mental models (deep preconceptions)

What beliefs and values do uphold these structures?

- “Everyone is the architect of their own fortune.”
- “Poverty is the result of personal failure.”
- “Homeless people have only themselves to blame.”
- “Providing aid would only spoil people or demotivate them.”
- “The housing market should not be regulated.”
- “Inequality is natural and inevitable.”

These preconceptions, assumptions and beliefs influence how we shape policies, institutions, and everyday behavior.

✓ **Facilitator's tip 1:** This level is often the most difficult and sometimes also confusing for participants because it is very abstract. It is therefore helpful not to ask a general question like, “What are mental models?”, but **relate them to specific structures that we have already identified**. You can proceed as follows:

- Highlight one specific structure.
- Then ask: What assumptions or beliefs shape this structure?

Examples:

Structure: Shortage of social housing

→ mental models:

- “The government shouldn’t own housing; it’s inefficient.”
- “The market will handle this better than the public sector.”
- “Everyone must earn individually to pay for their own housing.”

Structure: rising rents

→ mental models:

- “Housing is an investment opportunity.”
- “Profit maximization is legitimate even in the housing market.”
- “Housing is not a right, but a commodity.”

Point out to the group: *Always try to look for the mental model behind a specific structure, not in general. And make sure there is a logical connection between them.*

✓ **Facilitator's tip 2: Important acknowledgments for working with the iceberg model**

It is worth noting that in this exercise, we are trying to form hypotheses. This means we are speculating about the patterns, structures and mental models that might underlie a given phenomenon but our conclusions aren’t necessarily accurate or complete. Our interpretations may be influenced by our own experiences or perspectives.

If we truly want to intervene with the systems based on such an analysis, it is important to verify these assumptions:

talk to people who are part of the system

- e.g., homeless people, social service workers

draw on data and research

- how much social housing is available
- whether the number of homeless people is increasing or decreasing
- how housing prices are changing
- what are the main causes of homelessness

You may conclude with this formulation: *The iceberg helps us ask better questions and see the bigger picture—but it isn’t the whole truth. It is a starting point for reflection that is worth testing further in practice.*

Individual work and sharing: The participant's iceberg (20 minutes)

Now it is your turn to try this out for yourselves using your own examples. Over the next ten minutes, choose a problem from your own experience and try to create an “iceberg” for it. It could be something from your personal life, from society, or a topic you deal with at work or through your activism. It is essential that your “tip of the iceberg” be a specific and observable situation.

- No: “capitalism,” “climate crisis,” “inequality”
- Yes: “My rent went up by 20%,” “The company laid off employees,” “They closed the social services office in our town”

If you start out too broadly, it will be more difficult for you to identify specific patterns, structures, and mental models.

Assignment:

- Choose a specific event.
- Try to break it down into the different levels of the iceberg.
- Look for connections between them.

Finally, ask yourself: Which level of the iceberg did my solution so far address?

Sharing in pairs (10 minutes)

When you see that the participants are almost finished with their icebergs, ask them to pair up and share their icebergs with their partners:

- How did you approach the problem?
- What did you write down at each level?
- Listen to one another and:
 - If you have a different perspective, share it.
 - You can help each other add further layers or connections.

During this sharing session, the tutor walks around and listens in on the pairs at random or steps in to clarify any points of confusion.

Sharing in the group

Conclude the activity by a shared reflection of the following questions.

- What did you learn from the iceberg exercise? What new insights did it provide?
- What was difficult about the iceberg exercise, and what did you find easy?
- In what situations would you use the iceberg model again?

Justice as the key to sustainability

Compared to “green” growth that relies on the promises of non-existent technologies, climate justice is more attainable within planetary boundaries, even with current means and resources. This methodology aims to introduce a concept of justice that allows us to treat people resisting current climate measures as partners. For when we examine specific civic initiatives separately from campaigns protecting investments in fossil fuel infrastructure, we find that they often respond to perceived injustice, not to climate action as such. Using this methodology, we can explore this perspective through examples of resistance to hydroelectric power plants, the introduction of a carbon tax, the mining of critical resources for the green transition, and the launch of an emissions trading system.

Duration:	120 minutes (2 hours)
Number of participants:	8-20
Tools:	printed case studies, 2-4 large sheets of paper for group work, a flip chart with paper, a supply of Post-it notes, writing supplies
Tags:	use of case studies, critique
Topic:	climate justice, resistance to climate measures, just transformation
Program Objectives:	Participants will: • explain the dimensions of justice and the difference between procedural, distributional, and recognitional justice, • identify manifestations of procedural, distributional, and recognitional injustice in grassroots initiatives opposing specific measures, • strengthen the willingness to engage with people who oppose climate policies.

Introductory framing:

Gather the group in a circle, introduce yourself, and start a brief round of introductions. Especially in larger groups, try to encourage participants to keep their responses brief. The simplest option is a round of introductions based on the question: “What is my name, and what pronouns do I use?”

After everyone in the group has introduced themselves, provide some context and explain the purpose of the workshop. Such a framing might look something like this:

We will be addressing resistance to climate policy, climate action, or transitions toward environmental sustainability. This resistance, sometimes referred to as the climate backlash, is a troubling side effect of global systems adapting to the reality of the climate crisis. We usually encounter it as a problem or an obstacle that frustrates us. It is a fact that global warming and the collective goals that reflect it—such as decarbonization—can be called polarizing issues, dividing society into two imaginary camps. In this workshop, however, we will show that the climate backlash is a more complex phenomenon than so-called “climate skepticism”—the rejection of the reality of anthropogenic global warming, the denial of climate science, or the unwillingness to take action. If we allow ourselves to understand the motivations of people participating in the climate backlash through the lens of justice, it will give us the tools to open up a social dialogue.

Evocation 1: The preliminary understanding of reasons behind resistance to climate policy (10 minutes)

Ask an opening question and let a few answers come up: *Where do you encounter resistance to climate policy? Where do you observe it?*

Group brainstorming: Participants are divided evenly into 4 to 5 small groups (the number of people in each group depends on the total number of participants) and are provided with blank post-it notes and a marker for taking notes.

Give instructions: *Over the next three minutes, brainstorm answers to the following question collectively: What do you think leads people to resist climate policies? Try to come up with as many answers as possible and write each one down in brief on a post-it note.*

Group harvest: After three minutes, the facilitator will wrap up the brainstorming session and invite the groups to gather around a large sheet of paper, which may be labeled: “What leads people to resist climate policies?” The collection will proceed according to the following rules: The facilitator will ask each group to share one answer they had written on a post-it note). The first group to speak will read one of their answers aloud and hand the note to the facilitators. If the facilitator feels that the answer is not easily understandable, they will ask the group that wrote it for a brief explanation. The facilitator will then place the slip on the collection sheet and invite the other groups to immediately add their answers that are identical or similar in content. The facilitator will then ask for another answer, and the process repeats. During the collection process, the facilitator tries to place notes with related answers close to each other on the harvest sheet, gradually creating clusters of answers on it.

What clusters can emerge during the exercise?

Individual level:

- **Emotional experiences of those who resist:** feelings of guilt, fear of change or of responsibility, fear of losing freedom, uncertainty

- **Failure of imagination among those who resist:** inability to envision the impacts of the climate crisis, inability to perceive its urgency, inability or unwillingness to imagine an alternative to the status quo
- **Personal attributes of resisters:** ignorance, lack of education, poor information, gullibility when exposed to misinformation, machismo, conservatism, conformism, uncooperativeness, rejection, individualism
- **Ideological reasons:** “it’s left-wing propaganda,” “it’s a hoax”

Structural level:

- **Unequal distribution of resources:** decisions are made by an elite unaffected by the crisis; the high financial cost of participating in the transition; lack of capacity
- **Failure of social dialogue:** excessive moralizing and judgment in promoting sustainability; excessive polarization of the discussion...
- **Shortcomings of climate policy:** the policy is not designed fairly, the policy creates uncertainty, the policy is not convincing...

Once all the notes are clustered together on the collection sheet, invite the participants to comment on the sheet filled with clusters of answers (for example, ask: *Does this map of the causes of the climate backlash that we’ve created evoke any emotions in you? If so, what kind?*).

Conclude with a question that links the exercise’s findings to the topic of justice: *Which of these reasons do you think are associated with some form of injustice?*

Let a few people speak, wrap up the activity, and ask the participants to break up the small groups and return to the circle.

⊕ Infobox 1: Neoliberal ignorance and neglect of structural levels

The tools we use to interpret social reality are derived from our education and from public discourse, which has long been shaped by neoliberal ideology. Among other things, this ideology is characterized by a hazing of the social and structural dimensions of reality and a focus on the individual when seeking the causes of observable phenomena. This neoliberal logic places the entire responsibility on individuals not only for their life situations but also for the state of the world. Such a model of the world does not allow for the examination of systemic phenomena and thus makes it impossible to identify injustice, which always concerns what connects individuals and situates them within social, cultural, political, and economic structures. Speaking and teaching about injustice thus develops an understanding of the world that has long been neglected in our society. If the participants in your lesson primarily cite reasons for resistance to climate policy at the individual level, the content of this lesson may be something truly new to them.

⊕ Infobox 2: Justice for people or only for the elites?

There is a difference between resistance led by ordinary people and resistance initiated, for example, by the owners of fossil fuel infrastructure—that is, the economic elite, the very wealthy and influential. In reality, it is not so easy to distinguish between these two categories, but it is crucial to try.

Initiatives by the underprivileged often arise in response to a specific project or measure that has a direct impact on their lives. They employ various forms of protest, advocacy campaigns, or civil disobedience. Meanwhile, campaigns initiated by the economic elite consist of lobbying in higher levels and efforts to shape public opinion. After the anthropogenic climate crisis became a widely accepted reality, the goal of their campaigns shifted from denying climate science to discouraging any collective action responding to it. The research community has coined the term “climate inactivists” for the actors engaged in this discouragement and skepticism.

Climate inactivists are quick to co-opt the stories and efforts of spontaneous civic initiatives that express resistance to the measures affecting them. Some civic resistance, in turn, can flare up based on misinformation and manipulative framing that originates and spreads on social media. It is nevertheless important to keep in mind that whether resistance was ignited by inactivist agitators or arose spontaneously from the grassroots, it must be sustained by people motivated by something other than paycheck.

The ability to analyze resistance through the lens of justice is key to understanding this “human factor.” This is evidenced by the fact that presenting climate measures as unjust and demanded by a privileged segment of society at the expense of the underprivileged majority is one of the most successful tactics of inactivists. The effort to address perceived injustice is a major driving force behind any social struggle. It is therefore particularly unfortunate when climate policy is really unjust and sparks genuine civic resistance, thereby doing the inactivists’ work for them.

Evocation 2: The preliminary understanding of justice (15 minutes)

In the following exercise, participants will explore what they themselves consider to be unjust by sharing their personal experiences and perspectives. You can frame the exercise by noting that justice and injustice are concepts that are always tied to taking a stance in the real, lived world of people and societies, not in the abstract world of models and quantifications. We take such stances at various levels of our lives: on the personal level as well as on the systemic level. The theme of justice thus connects the personal, systemic, structural, and political levels of life in society. The educational process on justice at higher levels can be deepened by incorporating how the personal level is reflected in our conception of justice.

Give an instruction: *Close your eyes and try to recall a situation you were part of or witnessed in which you felt a sense of injustice. In the next steps, you will have two minutes to describe this situation. For this exercise, do not choose a situation or memory that is too complex or difficult to describe, or one that is associated with strong unpleasant emotions. The goal here is not to delve into our personal traumas and work through them, but to explore how we understand justice in real-world contexts. Once you have selected a memory to share, open your eyes.*

The stories will be shared in the model of the dyad technique, with two minutes for sharing and one minute for paraphrasing. In each dyad, one person actively listens (without commenting or interrupting), while the other has the opportunity to share. Once the sharing time is up, the active listener offers their interpretation of what they heard. Once the interpretation time is up, the roles are switched.

Ask the group to form pairs and explain the concept of dyads.

Clarify the instructions for the narrator’s role: *In two minutes, describe an unfair situation that comes to mind.*

Clarify the instructions for the interpreter's role: *In one minute, try to capture what the narrator perceived as unjust in the situation described.*

Time the group and facilitate the dyads (announce when the time for narration and interpretation begins and ends, invite them to switch roles...).

After the dyads are finished, invite the participants back into the circle.

Group harvest: The goal of the debriefing is to extract the most general statements from the dyads, not their entire content. The statements we will work with in the next exercise might look like this:

- Some people have less than others.
- Some people have been excluded from decision-making.
- Some people have been punished disproportionately.
- Double standards are applied to some.
- Some people's perspectives are not taken into account.
- Some people's rights are not recognized.
- Some people are exposed to the consequences of others' actions.
- Some people cannot comply with established rules.
- Some people were unable to express their views on something that affected them.
- A decision was made on someone's behalf without their consent.

Ask the group: *What were the injustices you discussed in your pairs?*

✓ **Facilitator's tip:** It's possible that the first person to speak will provide more context from the conversation. Always write the answers on the board or flipchart paper as simple, general statements, and show that such schematic statements are the goal of the exercise. Encourage brevity.

After writing them down, invite participants to add another statement: *Has anyone encountered a situation that was unfair in some other way? In what way?*

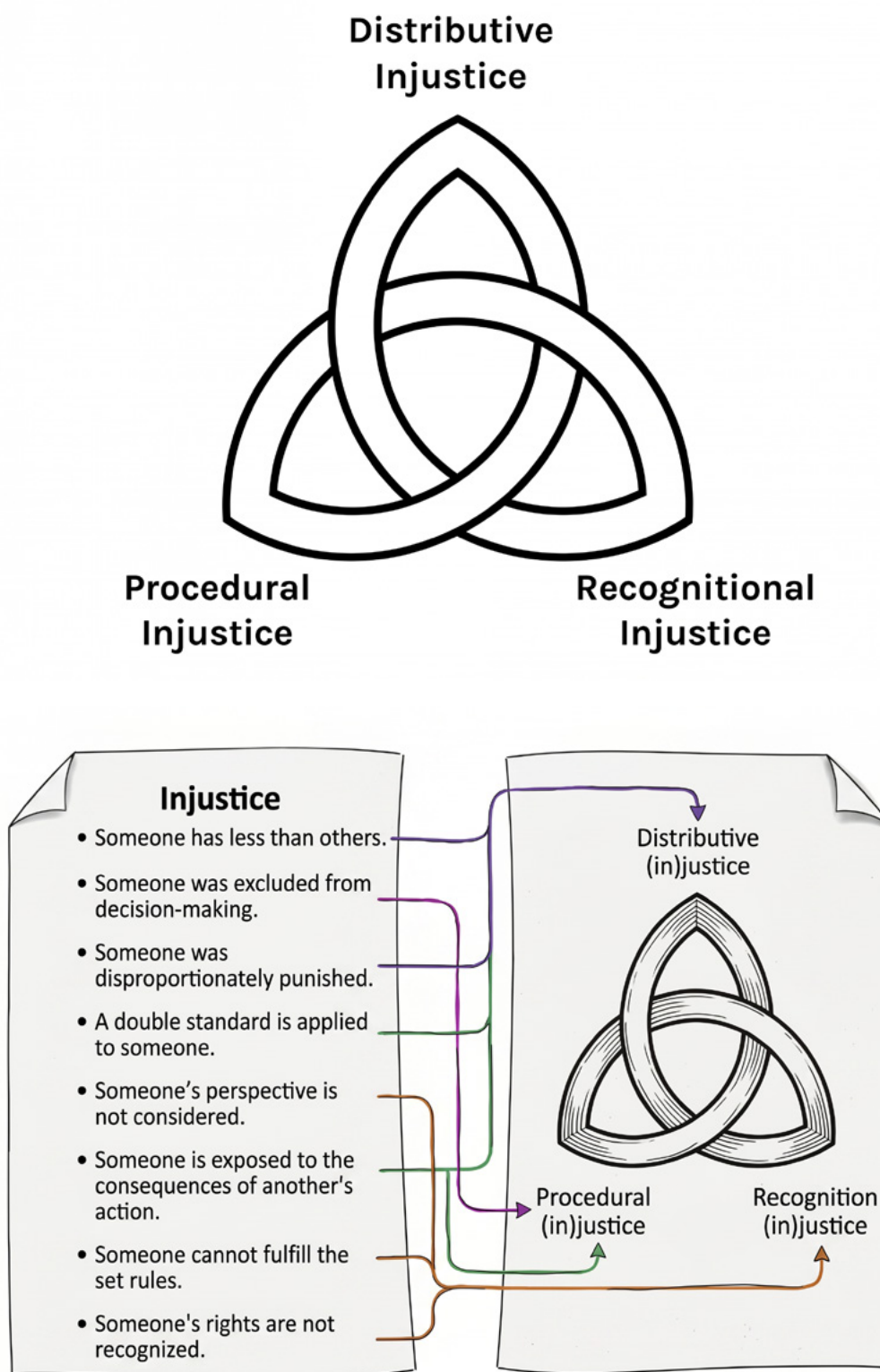
Once you have a good number of statements (at least 5) and you know that based on this collection you will be able to illustrate at least two dimensions of injustice (see the following passage), sensitively wrap up the sharing and move on to the theoretical input.

Theoretical input: The triquetra of justice (15 minutes)

Offer a framing: *As the previous exercise showed, a situation can be fair or unfair in various ways. Current research on fairness identifies three main dimensions, which we will now explore. These dimensions are not entirely separate from one another, and one often leads to the other. We can illustrate this interconnectedness using the symbol of a triple knot.*

On a piece of paper or the board, next to the sentences written down from the previous exercise, present the group with a picture of a triquetra (a triple knot) and explain that this symbol will help us understand the three interconnected dimensions of justice. The triple knot itself in this model represents justice. In other words: Justice is the interconnection of different levels. Then introduce the three vertices of the triple knot one by one and label them "distributional justice," "procedural justice," and "recognitional justice." Use the sentences from the previous exercise when

introducing each dimension. It is important for participants to perceive the connection between the three-dimensional model of justice and the collection of their own encounters and experiences with injustice.



Why a triple knot? A triple knot allows us to discuss the interconnections between dimensions without falling into the trap of shaky, linearly causal “chicken-or-egg” arguments. Such reasoning could delay the learning process, the goal of which here is not to examine whether and how the dimensions of injustice generally influence one another linearly, but rather to lead to the realization that justice can have these various interconnected dimensions. The search for universally valid patterns in the relationships between them is tricky, but more importantly, there is no room

for that in this workshop. It is true that there are studies suggesting that causal relationships exist between the dimensions of justice. For example, some authors suggest that recognitional injustice leads to unfairly designed processes that create a distributively unjust situation. However, such a thesis can be challenged, for instance, by the fact that the failure to recognize the rights and perspectives of a certain group may be conditioned by distributional injustice in the allocation of resources within the community. In the triquetra framework, the dimensions of justice are therefore symmetrically intertwined, and participants can explore the causal relationships among all dimensions either through case studies from the next exercise or in real-world situations they may examine outside this workshop.

The three dimensions of justice:

Distributional justice concerns the allocation of resources and costs. In a distributively just transition to sustainability, both the benefits and opportunities, as well as the costs and impacts associated with the transformation, are fairly distributed among all stakeholders involved. This is the most intuitive dimension of justice. Even in discussions of climate justice, the most frequently cited evidence shows that while the wealthiest segments of society contribute most to the causes of global warming (and/or benefit most from these causes), it is the poorest who are most severely exposed to its impacts. This constitutes a clear, multi-layered distributional injustice.

What patterns from the evocative exercise are associated with distributional justice?

- Some have less than others.
- Some are disproportionately punished.
- Some are exposed to the consequences of others' actions

Procedural justice concerns the involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process. In a procedurally just transition to sustainability, all stakeholders affected by it are equally involved in negotiations regarding its goals, form, and course, as well as in its development. Conversely, a transition would be procedurally unjust if various stakeholders were directly excluded from or selectively included in its decision-making processes. In representative democracies, most political decision-making is delegated to representatives to whom the public grants a mandate by electing them. The result, however, can be that decisions are made “behind closed doors” among these representatives, which frustrates society and creates a sense of powerlessness within it. That is why many communities prioritizing well-being have adopted participatory models alongside the representative model of decision-making, which involve public voices more in debates the consequences of which will affect everyone. The results of participatory decision-making are generally better accepted, even if they entail some form of restriction.

What patterns from the evocative exercise are associated with procedural justice?

- Some people have been excluded from decision-making.
- Some people were unable to express their views on something that affected them.
- A decision was made on someone's behalf without their consent.

Recognitional injustice concerns the acknowledgment of rights, perspectives, experiences, culture, status, or, for example, one's position within a system. To a limited extent, but accessibly, this can be illustrated by the recognition of human rights granted to all people by the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms. If these rights are not recognized for a particular group, recognitional injustice occurs. However, it is not only rights whose recognition this dimension concerns. Especially in situations as far-reaching as the transition to sustainability, recognition must be much more holistic. Anything that makes an actor and their needs specific to a given sit-

uation can be recognized to make the system more just. This may involve recognizing the specific needs of people with disabilities, acknowledging the historical and lived experiences of exclusion, oppression, and segregation faced by minorities, and much more. Even rules that apply equally to everyone can be unjust if they are not set in a world where everyone is equal and has the same opportunities and needs. If the transition to sustainability is not based on a holistic recognition of the actors it affects, and thus fails to take into account their diversity and differences in their positions within the system being transformed, it creates conditions for exclusion.

Which patterns from the evocative exercise are associated with recognitional justice?

- Double standards are applied to some.
- Some people's perspectives are not taken into account.
- Some people's rights are not recognized.

If you have enough time, you can also note and illustrate on the triquetra visualisation that one dimension of justice influences the other. You can also involve the participants in exploring these systemic dynamics, provided they are ready and able to engage with such abstract concepts. Questions you can use to explore this, either here or in the final reflection, might sound something like this:

- How do you think procedural injustice can lead to distributional injustice? And what about the reverse?
- Can distributional injustice somehow create recognitional injustice? And what if we swap the terms?
- How can recognitional and procedural injustice influence each other?

Working with Case Studies (40 minutes)

You will need one printed case study per person. Throughout the exercise, each person will read one case study on their own and then discuss it in a group with other participants who have read the same one. They will then become familiar with the other case studies during the inter-group sharing session.

✓ **Facilitator's tip:** You can ensure and facilitate an even distribution into groups by adjusting the number of printed case studies to match the number of people in the workshop before the workshop begins or during a part of it when participants are working on some of the previous exercises. For example, if 20 people are participating in the workshop, each group should have 5 people. In that case, print five copies of each case study.

Individual part (15 minutes)

Place the case studies in piles in the middle of the room and let the participants choose which one they want to work on.

Once everyone has their reading material, give them the assignment for their individual work, for which they will have 20 minutes.

- *What specifically provokes resistance, and what aspect of injustice is it linked to?*
- *Who presents resistance as opposition to sustainability or environmentalism in general?*

Group part (15 minutes)

When the time is up, ask the participants to divide into groups consisting only of those who read the same case study. Each group will receive a large sheet of paper labeled with the title of their case study.

Explain the assignment for the group work: *After this exercise, you will learn from the other groups what the case studies you did not read were about. Prepare an introduction with your group to the one you worked on. You may or may not use the paper to take notes on your discussions and for the later presentation of the case study to the other groups. It is not necessary to summarize the entire story. Instead, try to focus on the following questions during your preparation:*

- *How does the entire story relate to environmental sustainability?*
- *When, between whom, and in what dimensions of justice did injustice arise in the story?*
- *What were the causes and consequences of these injustices?*

Group Sharing (10 min)

Invite the groups to have one spokesperson present the results of their group work, with input from others as needed. Ensure that the other groups understand the case study and encourage them to ask clarifying questions.

Conclude by inviting everyone to join a collective reflection.

Final reflection (30 minutes)

Conduct the reflection through a group discussion in a circle. Depending on the time available, ask one or more of the following questions:

- *What do you think would need to happen for the tensions in the examples examined to be resolved?*
- *Why do you think injustices arise in the transition to sustainability?*
- *What impact does it have when we don't talk about justice, but only about resistance to climate policy?*
- *What questions do you think are worth asking when we observe resistance to environmentalism or climate measures?*

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“Clean Energy” or Colonization? The Dark Side of the World’s Fifth Largest Hydroelectric Power Plant

The indigenous peoples living in the Xingu River basin in Brazil (in the Amazon basin) have long resisted one of the most ambitious renewable energy megaprojects: the Belo Monte Dam and hydroelectric power plant. From their perspective, the project fits into a broader history of the violent colonization of the continent by white settlers and the displacement of indigenous communities. The dam on the Xingu River became operational in 2019, after more than fifty years since the first plans to massively expand hydroelectric infrastructure on the Amazonian rivers had been introduced. The first plans, presented at the time mainly as a path to “growth,” “development,” and the spread of “civilization,” were introduced in 1975 by the Brazilian military junta which had been in power. The original project was named Kararaô. Its enormous scale was subsequently significantly reduced, in part due to resistance from indigenous communities. Although the Belo Monte Dam does not reach the intended scale of the Kararaô project, it is still the fifth-largest hydroelectric power plant in the world.

Constitutional amendment and transformation of conflict

In this conflict, the constitutional recognition of indigenous groups’ rights to land and culture changed the rules of the game. This occurred after the new Brazilian constitution was adopted in 1988 following the fall of the military junta. Indigenous groups participated in its drafting thanks to the fact that they had been building power within the Brazilian state for a long time. The new legislation introduced a law requiring that all “development” projects be approved by the Brazilian Congress following consultations with the indigenous populations whose land would be affected by the project. However, whether and how this land would be affected—that is, how seriously the voices of the affected indigenous groups must be taken—became the subject of assessments by “external,” rather than local, experts.

A new front has opened up between companies pushing for massive projects on indigenous territories and the defenders of these territories—the issue of scientific assessments. Whose perspective and system of knowledge will be incorporated into them? How will potential impacts be evaluated? Where, by whom, when, and how will data be collected? Who will determine that the data is valid? How will the analysis be conducted, and to whom and how will its findings be presented? It is in these moments that the conflict and inequality between colonizers and the colonized are now taking shape.

The fall of Kararaô and the rise of Belo Monte

While legislation was changing at the national level, local resistance to the Kararaô project was taking shape. A key milestone was the “First Meeting of Indigenous Peoples of the Xingu” in Altamira—a city near the site of today’s Belo Monte Dam—in 1989. This meeting garnered global attention. In addition to Indigenous leaders, experts, and hundreds of other participants, the event was attended by singer Sting, among others. The most striking symbol of the meeting was a photograph in which Mebengokré Tuíra Kayapó, then a 19-year-old Indigenous woman, confronted José Antônio Muniz Lopes, the director of Eletronorte—the company promoting the Kararaô project—by symbolically placing the blade of her machete against his face.

Through a combination of power struggles and shifts in the Brazilian government's geopolitical position during the transition from military dictatorship to a new regime, and thanks to the growing strength of indigenous voices, a tremendous victory was achieved from the locals' perspective. The Kararaô project lost support and was suspended. But the plan did not disappear. During the 1990s, the Belo Monte project began to emerge. The state promoted it not only in terms of "development." Belo Monte was supposed to combine economic growth in the region with clean energy. The latter narrative was particularly useful in obscuring the project's environmental impact.

Assessments, plans, actions and reactions

In order for the Belo Monte project to be approved, environmental impact assessments had to be conducted. Although indigenous groups were distrustful of white researchers conducting the assessments, whose findings often did not reflect reality, they sent representatives to participate in discussions with them. In parallel with the assessments, a draft mitigation plan was developed to address the socio-environmental impacts of the dam and hydroelectric plant on the region. This formal commitment to protect and support the affected community and landscape created the impression that the implementation of the massive project was accompanied by a genuine sense of responsibility for the area. Critics of the project labeled the completed assessments as inadequate, arguing that they did not reflect reality nor were they in compliance with the law. Despite this dispute, however, the Brazilian Congress approved the construction of the Belo Monte Dam. Indigenous communities responded by occupying the future construction sites. For three weeks in July 2012, community members blocked the construction with their own bodies, once again drawing the world's attention to the Xingu River region.

The launch of the Belo Monte hydroelectric plant in 2019 disrupted the river's flow and brought an influx of non-indigenous people, companies, institutions, and customs. What the locals had feared thus came to pass. The entire region and the way of life of local communities have changed rapidly and profoundly. Most recently, this dispute attracted media attention in 2024, when members of the Xikrin, Mebengokré-Xikrin, Xipaia, and Curaia indigenous groups caused a traffic collapse in the city of Altamira by blocking several roads. What were they demanding? That the aforementioned mitigation plan—which the Belo Monte project developers had committed to following—was at least fulfilled.

Source

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100 people and nature against EU and lithium mining

The village of Cínovec in the Krušné hory mountains has always been associated with mining. Even its name refers to this—specifically, to tin mining. That activity came to an end in the 1990s. In the 21st century, however, the possibility arose that mining might return to the area. This time, not tin mining, but mining of Europe's largest lithium deposit, which was discovered beneath Cínovec. The mining proposal came from Geomet, a company in which the ČEZ Group holds a 51% controlling stake. The Czech state is the main shareholder in ČEZ, and the remainder is held by investors such as fossil fuel billionaire Pavel Tykač. The remaining 49% of Geomet is owned by an Australian-British holding company.

The proposal was not just about mining. The company wanted to create an integrated mining and industrial complex that would extract raw ore, process it, and manufacture lithium batteries from it. At the time, just over 100 people lived in the village, and with the support of environmental organizations, they opposed the mining operation. Since lithium is used, among other things, in the production of batteries and solar panels, the resistance was viewed by some as hindering the “green transition” based on “NIMBYism” (NIMBY – Not in My Backyard). The Cínovec case, however, allows us to discuss what kind of “green transition” lithium mining actually fits into and what it has to offer not only for the residents of a small settlement, but also for nature and the underprivileged majority of the European population.

The green transition and a mining fever

There are various ideas about what needs to be done to make the European economy and infrastructure “green.” The most widely accepted—though not necessarily the most realistic or sufficient in terms of sustainability—focuses on so-called “green technologies.” These refer to infrastructure that does not produce greenhouse gas emissions. However, developing such technologies and building “green” infrastructure from them naturally requires additional resources. Raw materials such as lithium, on which not only the new “green” technology sector but also the defense and digital industries depend, are designated as critical raw materials in EU strategic documents. The European Commission (under the presidency of Ursula von der Leyen) and the European Parliament reached an agreement on sourcing them from within the EU when the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA) was adopted. In all these documents, however, the stated ambition to make the European economy “competitive” prevails over the ambition to make it “sustainable.” Following the publication of these documents, a wave of mining fever swept across Europe.

The leverage of the car industry

Lithium mining is crucial for the European car industry, which, by prioritizing short-term profits, missed opportunities to transition to electric vehicle production and is now unable to compete with Chinese manufacturers. According to current estimates, by 2040 over 80% of mined lithium will be used specifically for the production of batteries for electric vehicles, the vast majority of which are expected to be passenger cars.

Compared to other options, lithium batteries offer the greatest potential for profitable business. However, their production also has a much greater environmental impact compared to, for example, sodium batteries. Therefore, in order for the European automotive industry to pursue lithi-

um path as the most profitable one, a decision had to be made at the EU level to revoke nature conservation laws and agreements that made it difficult for businesses and their shareholders to profit from electric mobility in Europe. The automotive industry associations pushed this decision through by lobbying President von der Leyen.

So the investment is profitable...

The lithium deposit in the Krušné hory mountains lies hundreds of meters below the surface, making it accessible through underground mining. While this method is financially costly, its environmental impact is significantly lesser than that of inexpensive open-pit mines, which destroy everything on the surface. In this case, surface mining would completely destroy the village of Cínovec and, at the same time, the planned protected landscape areas (CHKO) in the surrounding area that enhance biodiversity in the region. Underground mining “only” threatens the stability of the bedrock and may destroy or contaminate underground water sources.

Due to the profit-oriented nature of its business model, Geomet must meet investors’ expectations and maximize profits. This means promoting options with the lowest possible financial costs. While surface mining seemed unrealistic for several reasons, the question of the location of the planned processing and manufacturing plants had also been opened. Some of these facilities could also have been located underground, which would have increased costs but reduced the environmental impact. Such an option did not appear in any of Geomet’s scenarios, despite the company’s commitment to minimize impacts. Instead, it took steps such as buying up surrounding land to create the planned system of conveyors, transfer stations, and processing centers for converting raw ore into usable lithium. This entails disruption and pollution of ecosystems, threats to biodiversity, and damage to the local environment in general.

Cínovec vs. EU

In 2025, this project appeared on a list of 47 new “strategic projects” published by the European Commission. The Commission committed to accelerating the permitting process for all these projects in cooperation with member states. It promised to secure mining permits for investors within just twenty-seven months. Another promise is the possibility of providing investors with money from public subsidies. In the face of resistance from local residents and environmentalists, the EU has mobilized massive power in this way—power whose direction is discussed far from the locations that will bear the consequences—rather than engaging in communication and negotiation.

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Heavy industry under pressure and the abduction of desperate unions

On February 5, 2026, over a thousand union members from steelworkers' unions gathered in Ostrava. They participated in a demonstration titled "Together for Good Jobs, a Strong Industry, and a Stable Europe," one of the events of the pan-European campaign by the IndustriALL trade union federation. In the Czech Republic, it was organized by OS KOVO, ECHO, and TOK in cooperation with unions from Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary. The demonstration intended to send a message to policymakers at the EU level—or, as the demonstrators would say, at the "Brussels" level. The event focused on protecting the rights and job security of workers in heavy industry, particularly in the context of the European decarbonization strategy and its impacts on the sector.

The gathering took place on a cold, rainy day in the Dolní Vítkovice district which is an imposing complex of defunct steel smeltery. Hundreds of union members, carrying banners and wearing scarves and clothing in the visual styles of the participating organizations, created powerful images of workers' unity with the backdrop of the steel mills. Demonstrating this unity to "Brussels" was, after all, one of the goals that the event organizers had publicly communicated. Although most of the banners bore traditional union slogans, some of them were thematic. One of them read: We won't save the climate by killing industry.

To, kdo a jak na akci mluvil, ilustruje trendy ve struktuře vztahů mezi podniky, státem, EU a pracujícími. Vzhledem k tomu, že rolí odborů vždy bylo posilovat práva pracujících, a to jak v jednáních se zaměstnavateli, tak s politiky, je nezvyklé, že vedle osobností z odborového hnutí se na pódiu objevili také vládní politici a dokonce zástupci zaměstnavatelů. Ba co víc, tito extrémně bohatí podnikatelé od dělníků a dělnic možná poprvé v životě sklízeli potlesk, jak ve své reportáži poznamenala odborářka Kateřina Vaňková, která se akce účastnila.

Industry under pressure

The main topic of the event was the so-called Emissions Trading System (ETS), which is one of the tools the EU uses to encourage member states and private companies in general to decarbonize. Under this system, major polluters are required to pay, while environmentally friendly companies stand to gain. The EU and member states are supposed to generate revenue by auctioning off so-called "emission allowances," which the EU distributes each year. The money raised is then supposed to be directed toward climate measures, investments in green innovations, and so on. In practice, of course, things are more complicated.

Decarbonization has a massive impact on heavy industry. In her report, Vaňková compared, among other things, the arguments against the ETS system that were raised by various speakers at the event. "German trade unionists consider the transition to carbon-free steel to be technologically feasible—but only on the condition that jobs are protected and investments flow into modern technologies (...). However, he warned that this transition is not possible if, at the same time, emission allowances are stifling businesses and becoming a plaything for financial speculators. Trade unionists from the V4 countries, on the other hand, emphasized the need to defend traditional manufacturing and alleviate the financial pressure of allowances. However, protection against Asian and Indian dumping remains a common theme among all participants," writes Vaňková.

Do billionaires speak for endangered workers?

Pavel Juříček, owner of the Brano Group and one of the wealthiest men in the Czech Republic, also took the stage. He shocked many when he veered off the topic of the demonstration and declared that, in addition to its climate policy, Europe must also change its migration policy in order to remain a “white continent free from the influence of Islam.” According to Vaňková, during his speech, several voices from the audience shouted “shame.” The presence of such rhetoric not only risks turning workers’ frustration into xenophobia and racial intolerance but also creates a hostile image of the event to the outside world. For groups that do not feel a sense of solidarity with the working class, this image makes it easy to label the labor movement and the people it represents as uneducated, racist, anti-European, and climate-skeptical. And this is despite the fact that the most extreme views at the demonstration were expressed by billionaire Juříček himself.

Such rhetoric is off-putting to segments of the general public. However, what sparked far greater public outrage over the union demonstration was the fact that politicians from the government coalition—against which public opposition was growing at the time—spoke at the event. Prime Minister and billionaire Andrej Babiš (ANO), his Minister of Labor Aleš Juchelka (ANO), and MP Filip Turek (Motorists for Themselves) all spoke at the demonstration. Although they tended to tone it down during the event, they also employed hateful, racist, and fascist rhetoric in their own campaigns. At the same time, even if these politicians are not, like Babiš, billionaires whose extreme profits are threatened by any policy protecting the environment, they have ties to such billionaires.

The consequences of ignoring unions

How is it that organized workers are finding allies among business owners—their traditional rivals—as well as among politicians who are beholden to a much higher economic class? We might find a possible answer, for example, in an issue of the union magazine KOVÁK, in which the union invited its members to a February demonstration. Right below this invitation, we find the headline: “Could social dialogue once again replace the government’s monologue?” The article under the headline reports that Babiš’s government, which was taking office during those months, at least entered into communication with the unions, unlike the previous one. Not only at the Czech level but also at the European level, unions had long faced ignorance and “government monologue.” When billionaires and Babiš’s government then offered them a sense of recognition and symbolic concessions, union leaders could at least boast of something to workers after four years of Czech politicians ignoring their proposals and demands.

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How the carbon tax set France ablaze: The Yellow Vests' fight for fair climate policy

In France, the introduction of a specific carbon tax in 2018 sparked the largest unrest since 1968. The “Yellow Vests” movement, which organized and mobilized these protests, was a decentralized group without a clear organizational structure. The tax that the movement was protesting against was presented by the French government and President Emmanuel Macron as a step toward carbon neutrality and compliance with the Paris Agreement. The increase mainly affected fuel prices, which meant higher costs for car travel. According to the government’s narrative, this price hike was intended to motivate the population to switch to electric vehicles. The protests lasted from November 2018 through June 2020. The mass mobilization led to numerous public demonstrations in Paris and across France, which took place every week. According to estimates, around three million people participated in the protests, and the yellow vest became a symbol of resistance around the world. The Yellow Vests’ tactics included inciting social unrest and causing property damage. Even by French standards—where this tactic of putting pressure on political leaders is far more normalized than in other countries—the Yellow Vests’ protest activities were exceptionally intense. The famous Parisian street Champs-Élysées—a symbol of Paris’s power and wealth—was particularly hard-hit by this destruction; after the protests, it was littered with charred car wrecks and shards of glass from windows and storefronts. Walls and monuments in public spaces were spray-painted with political slogans.

Who said the protests were against climate policy?

The public rejection of this policy, as expressed through the activities of the Yellow Vests movement in France, was used by many commentators, politicians, and public figures as irrefutable proof that ordinary people are opposed to any form of climate policy. As early as 2018, for example, Donald Trump, then in his first term as U.S. president, publicly framed the protests in France as a consequence of the adoption of the Paris Agreement on climate neutrality. Trump, as one of the most prominent global proponents of fossil industry affiliated policies based on the denial of climate change, even repeated unsubstantiated claims that protesters in Paris were chanting “We want Trump!”

Framing the Yellow Vests protests as resistance to climate policy and the Paris Agreement was not only used for their own purposes by pro-fossil-fuel figures like Trump, but also by people who had publicly declared their support for climate goals—such as Trump’s French counterpart Macron, who was the main target of the demonstrations. In his speeches addressing a restless nation, Macron characterized any protest against carbon taxes that increase transportation costs as selfish and anti-climate. Unlike Trump, however, he presented himself and the policies he defended as the altruistic and responsible opposite of an anti-climate stance.

The fact is, however, that there is no evidence that opposition to the Paris Agreement or climate policy motivated any significant portion of the Yellow Vests protesters. On the contrary, the Yellow Vests’ public messaging has always emphasized the importance of ecology and climate policy alongside social issues. The key point is that the impact of the carbon tax on transportation costs—and thus on everyone’s cost of living—was what catalyzed anti-government and, by extension, anti-elite sentiment in society.

Conflict on the path to a common goal

If we look, for example, at the petition by Priscilla Ludosky, which marked the beginning of the Yellow Vests movement, we find in it a critique not of climate policy as such, but of a climate policy that forces the majority of the population to bear the financial burden of the transition to sustainability, while wealthy elites and corporations evade their responsibility for contributing to climate disruption. In her petition, Ludosky even proposed, as an alternative solution, cooperation between the state and car manufacturers or support for working from home, thereby reducing the need to travel. According to her, both of these solutions would lead to a reduction in emissions from the automotive sector—that is, to the stated goal of the criticized carbon tax on fuels—while at the same time not presenting the population with thresholds that are insurmountable for most, such as the purchase of an expensive new electric car.

The Yellow Vests framed the impact of the original carbon tax on citizens' wallets within the context of the long-term rise in the cost of living in France, illustrated, for example, by wage stagnation despite inflation. Part of this framing of the country's economic situation was also the identification of growing economic inequalities between a privileged minority and the majority population. Based on the belief that political elites were corrupt and detached from the reality of life in France, the movement also demanded not only greater transparency but also referendums and other tools for deeper citizen involvement in decision-making processes and policy-making. It was precisely the frustration stemming from these sources—rising living costs, deepening inequalities, and the perceived exclusion of the majority's perspective from decision-making in democratic institutions—that transformed the Yellow Vests movement into a mass mobilization.

Source

Daniel Driscoll, Populism and Carbon Tax Justice: The Yellow Vest Movement in France, *Social Problems*, Volume 70, Issue 1, February 2023, Pages 143–163, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spab036>

Discussion on the film The Cost of Growth

This activity serves as a prompt for discussion and reflection on the film The Cost of Growth. The goal is to focus attention on specific topics discussed in the film that are relevant to the participants' lives and their local context. The result should be a critical reflection on the film's conclusions within that specific context.

Duration:	60 minutes + 93 minutes film
Number of participants:	around 20; if there are more, omit writing on sticky notes
Tools:	post-it notes and markers (optional), a whiteboard, flip chart, or presentation to display discussion questions
Tags:	activity
Topic:	growth, democracy, activism
Film:	The Cost of Growth, 2025. Directed by Thomas Maddens. Screenplay by Anuna De Wever
Program objectives:	Participants connect the themes of the climate movement, union activities, and democracy through examples from the film, formulate their key takeaways, and apply them to their own contexts.

Program implementation

Welcome and Introduction (25 min)

Welcome the participants to the film screening and outline the schedule for the activities and the screening itself. The first discussion questions are meant for pairs, so participants can stay within the comfort zone of familiar faces: What will the film be about? What price does our society pay for growth? (5 minutes in pairs followed by 5 minutes of sharing insights with

the rest of the room). We can have the questions prepared in a presentation that we show before and after the film, or written on a flip chart and revealed one by one.

We also offer alternative questions tailored to different audiences or for exploring different themes. If there is enough time, the questions can be combined, but the simplest approach is to focus on a single theme—marked (A)ctivism, (D)emocracy, or (U)nions—both before and after the film. In this section, we divide the group into groups of four and ask them to come up with a few short answers to the prompts, which we then post in a visible place and set aside (5 minutes of discussion, 5 minutes of sharing).

(A) The film is narrated by two activists who reflect on the role and workings of the climate movement. What do you think are the key issues and questions the movement must address today?

(D) One of the film's themes is the shortcomings of democracy in European societies. Where do you see the greatest democratic deficit specifically in the Czech Republic?

(U) How are grassroots movements based on shFilm Screening (93 min)

Film Screening (93 min)

Reflection (35 min)

Emotional check-in: We start in pairs again - What made the biggest impression on you? What emotions are you feeling right now? (5 minutes in pairs, 3 minutes sharing a few emotions).

Next, we'll work in new pairs: Now try to find someone you don't know to pair up with. Your task will be to revisit key moments in the film and discuss how they relate to us. (10 minutes of pair work, without sharing with the whole group).

(A1) What is the film's main message to the movement? Do you agree? If not on one, suggest two alternatives.

(A2) How does this issue manifest itself in Czechia? Is it relevant to us?

(D1) The film highlighted various instances of exclusion or undemocratic practices - try to identify similar patterns in them (e.g., which people are excluded? Why does this happen? How and why do the checks and balances fail?).

(D2) Think about similar cases here and try to determine whether the patterns you've identified also apply in our context.

(O1) Can union organizing be linked to broader social and environmental concerns, as demonstrated by the case of the GKN factory in Florence? What challenges must be overcome when taking such an approach?

(O2) Is this approach inspiring or irrelevant in the domestic context? Why?

To conclude, we'll invite everyone to reflect on the key "aha" moments connected to the film. The pairs formed earlier will continue their discussion in pairs; we'll present them with the following three questions, and each pair can choose one, or even move on to another if they wish. After the discussion, we'll ask everyone to share one answer to each question (7 minutes of discussion, 5 minutes of sharing).

Emotions: What were the most powerful experiences you took away from the screening and discussion, and how do you plan to process them further?

Analysis: What was the most important thing you learned, and what insights did the film and discussion help you connect?

Action: Do you feel inspired to do something now (or conversely, to stop doing something)? What, and why?

In conclusion, we will thank everyone for their active participation and say goodbye.

From Dominance to Care: Masculinities in a World of Crises

This workshop explores how dominant notions of masculinity shape our relationships, institutions, and the way society responds to today's crises. Participants will reflect on their own experiences with masculinity, analyze the impacts of hegemonic forms of masculinity on politics, the economy, and the climate crisis, and collectively seek alternatives based on care, cooperation, and mutuality. The program connects the personal level with a broader systemic perspective and raises the question of what social and institutional changes are needed to foster caring and ecological forms of masculinity. The workshop combines experience-sharing, group reflection, engagement with research, and collective imagination of possible futures.

Duration: 200 minutes (3 hours, 30 minutes)

Number of participants: 8–30 participants

Tools: writing utensils, flipchart paper, cards of emotions

Tags: critique, vision, identity,

Topic: hegemonic masculinity, gender, socialization, expectations,

Program objectives

Participants will:

- understand hegemonic masculinity as a social construct and a set of expectations placed on men, and reflect on how these norms influence their personal lives and relationships with men in various contexts,
 - understand that masculinity is not merely an individual identity or the result of socialization, but is also shaped by broader social structures and institutions,
 - analyze how the institutions of contemporary growth capitalism (e.g.: focus on profit, competitiveness, hierarchy) reinforce certain forms of masculinity and how these identities and structures mutually reproduce one another,
 - be able to envision and describe what institutional changes could support caring and ecological forms of masculinity.
-

Workshop Implementation

Introductory framing:

Together, we will explore the impact of masculinity—that is, societal expectations of what it means to be a man—has on our lives, our relationships with ourselves, and with the men in our lives. In the second part of the workshop, we will examine the systemic impacts of dominant forms of masculinity in the context of today's crises, and we will also discuss changes that could lead to more caring forms of masculinity.

Evocation in the form of dyads (30 minutes):

The personal is political. That is why we, too, will begin by sharing our personal experiences. This activity will take place in pairs. It will take the form of a dyad, in which each of you will have 5 minutes to share your response to the question I will present shortly. The dyad format is not a traditional dialogue. The role of the person who is listening is simply to hold space for the other person to share and to listen actively. They do not ask follow-up questions, interrupt, or bring up their own experiences with the topic. They just listen quietly. The other person will share for 5 minutes. It is not necessary to fill the entire 5 minutes with sharing; if the person no longer feels the need to share, it is okay to be silent after a while. Sometimes experiences or insights emerge from the silence that would not have surfaced otherwise.

Question for the dyad:

- *What is your relationship with men in one of these contexts:*
 - *in your family (father, brother, grandfather...)*
 - *at work / school*
 - *in social movements, civic initiatives, or interest groups (e.g., a choir)*

Please remind participants to choose only one of these contexts. Also, if they have had very negative or even traumatic experiences in one of these contexts (e.g., within their family), it is better to choose a different context to share. Share within your own comfort zone—that is, each person should share to the depth or breadth that feels comfortable to them. It's possible to spend the entire 5 minutes talking about a single relationship, but it's also possible to go through several relationships. It's up to each person to decide what suits them best—whether to go more in depth or in breadth. After 5 minutes, I'll interrupt the sharing with an audio signal, and you'll switch roles. The one who was listening will share, and the one who was sharing will listen.

Group reflection (15 minutes)

- *Did you find any similar patterns in your sharing?*
- *Conversely, what was different in what you shared?*

At the same time, encourage participants to be careful about sharing overly personal details from the other person's sharing.

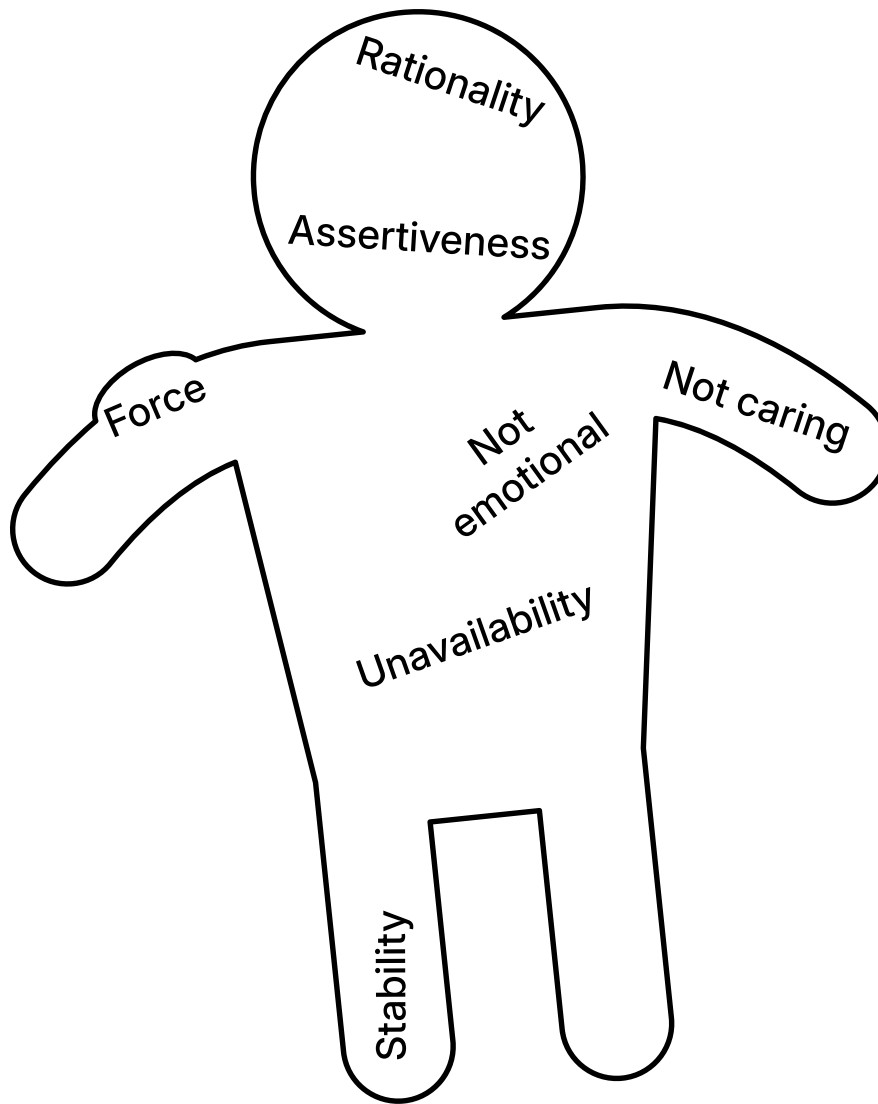
Creating Silhouettes of Men (25 minutes):

Now we're going to explore together what society expects men to be like and what characteristics they should have. Please divide into groups of 3–5 people; each group will take one flipchart sheet and some markers. Your task will be to draw a silhouette of a man on the entire flipchart and discuss the following question together:

- *What physical, emotional, and cognitive characteristics does mainstream society present to us as those that men should possess?*

In addition to discussing these questions, try to visually represent these characteristics and locate them on the male body—either graphically or verbally. For example, if I say he should be strong, how could I represent this characteristic on the male body, or where would I write it? If you can think of any objects associated with men, or that men are expected to like, you can draw those as well. However, the main goal is not to create a work of art, but rather to discuss what characteristics are expected of men.

✓ **Facilitator's tip:** Groups sometimes ask what is meant by “dominant society.” It refers to a set of expectations derived from upbringing, the media, culture, etc. (such as “boys don't cry”). It is clear that these expectations will vary across different segments of society, and you can explain this to the participants (e.g., rural vs. urban areas, or the working class vs. the middle and upper classes). Our goal is not to clearly define what “dominant society” is, but to discuss what those expectations are, so it's perfectly fine if participants mention different and sometimes conflicting types of expectations.



Silent Gallery and Reflection (40 minutes):

They have 15–20 minutes to create the silhouettes. During this time, the facilitator walks among the groups, listens, and may jot down snippets of what is shared so that some can be used in the group reflection.

Once the time is up, ask the group to place the flipcharts with the male silhouettes in the center of the room. In complete silence, they can then walk around and look at the individual flipcharts to see how other groups interpreted the male silhouette. After 3–4 minutes, the facilitator can walk around the room and place emotion cards on the flipcharts, then ask the group:

- *How do you feel now as you look at the silhouettes of these “ideal men”? Sharing feelings isn’t that common in our society (except for “I’m tired,” “I’m hungry,” “I’m okay...”).* So, you have these feeling cards on the floor that can help you name the feeling you’re experiencing when looking at these silhouettes. Try sharing these feelings in pairs with the person standing next to you right now.

✓ **Facilitator’s tip:** Sharing in pairs creates a safe, low-barrier environment and involves everyone. If the pairs then share with the group, it increases the chances that the voices of those who don’t speak much will be heard. That’s why it’s important not to skip the pair sharing.

Group discussion:

- *What emotions did you identify in pairs? What feelings did looking at these silhouettes evoke in you?*

It is important here to keep the group focused on identifying emotions. There is often a tendency to rationalize, analyze, or comment on the topic instead, and to avoid sharing emotional experiences. If this happens, it's a good idea to pause the activity and explain that this is a time for sharing emotions, and that there will be time later for comments and more analytical thinking.

- *What did you realize during the activity, or now as part of this sharing? What did this bring to you?*

At the end of the session, the facilitator will present the seven characteristics of dominant forms of masculinity according to psychologist Levant (cited in bell hooks, *Will to Change*, 2004: 118), which may be displayed on a flip chart or whiteboard.

1. **Avoiding femininity** – rejecting everything perceived as “feminine.”
2. **Restricted emotionality** – suppression of emotions, particularly vulnerability, sadness, or fear.
3. **Focus on success and status** – a man's worth is measured by performance, competitiveness, and social standing.
4. **Self-reliance** – the belief that a man must manage on his own and should not ask for help.
5. **Aggression as a legitimate tool** – greater tolerance for anger and violence as a means of resolving conflicts.
6. **Homophobia** – distancing oneself from anything that might challenge the heterosexual norm or “masculinity.”
7. **A non-relational conception of sexuality** – a conception of sexuality separate from emotions, intimacy, and reciprocity.

To wrap up this section, you can divide the group into pairs. Have them start by sharing their experiences with the men they mentioned at the beginning, and then spend 5 minutes discussing their answers to the following questions:

- *How do these expectations affect your relationship with one of the men you mentioned at the start?*
- *Alternatively, if you are men, how do these ideas affect you personally and your lives?*

This concludes the first part of the workshop, where we looked at masculine socialization and its impact on our lives and relationships. After the break, we will begin to examine the systemic impacts of masculine socialization.

Break (15 minutes)

The Systemic Impacts of Masculinity (50 minutes)

After the break, we'll begin with another probing question for the whole group about the systemic impacts of masculinity:

- *How do you think this “mainstream” or patriarchal conception of masculinity relates to the crises we face today? How does it manifest itself? (Let a few voices speak.)*

Now we will look at three specific areas of the systemic impacts of dominant masculinity and at various empirical studies. We will form groups of ideally three people; if that doesn't work out, it's better to have some groups of four (rather than pairs). In each group, there should be three people who will explore different topics:

- *Masculinity, styles of power, and decision-making in times of crisis*
- *When sustainability is perceived as unmanly*
- *Fragile masculinity and political radicalization*

The facilitator can briefly introduce each topic in two sentences so that participants can choose what interests them and form groups of 3, or at most 4, people based on that.

Reading and discussion (30 minutes)

After reading the information provided, please:

- *Share the content and key points or takeaways from your case studies.*
- *What in your local area or country confirms the phenomena described? Conversely, what contradicts or challenges them?*
- *In what ways does traditional masculine socialization influence our ability to respond to systemic crises? (be as specific as possible)*

Group reflection (15 minutes):

What was new to you? Where did this lead you in the group discussions?

Different Forms of Change and Institutional Imagination (40 minutes)

We have seen the various impacts of hegemonic masculinity on our lives and on society at large. You may have been aware of many of these impacts even before the workshop, while others may have been new to you. We also noted that the construct of masculinity is not determined solely by various social notions, but is also co-created by the logic of social institutions. "Structure influences behavior," states one of the basic rules of systems thinking.

The question, of course, is what we can do about it.

There are two types of interventions. Individual interventions are most often discussed:

- men need more men's circles,
- they lack initiation rituals,
- men should go to therapy,
- they need strong but healthy male role models.

These aren't bad steps. All of them can be very healing. They can help specific people. But they have significant limitations:

- first, they attract only a certain type of man who is already quite self-aware,
- masculinity is structurally produced—adopting masculine behavioral patterns suits almost anyone who wants to succeed in today's world (regardless of gender or sex).

If a man leaves a men's circle where he learns openness and care, and the next day enters a work environment where he is expected to generate profit at any cost, where competitiveness, tough-

ness, and constant performance are rewarded, which of those worlds will ultimately be stronger? If we want men to be caring, we cannot simultaneously force them to work 60 hours a week in a competitive environment where vulnerability means a loss of status.

If institutions reward competition, toughness, and performance, they will produce these qualities—regardless of individuals’ personal efforts. If structures shape behavior, then caring masculinity cannot be merely an individual trait. It must be structurally possible, supported, and rewarded. If we want caring men, we must create caring institutions.

I would therefore like to explore what kinds of systemic interventions might change masculinity—not at the individual level, but rather at the systemic level.

The group will split up into smaller groups at individual flipcharts, based on the topics or contexts that most interest them. Not all flipcharts need to be filled, but each group should have no more than 5 people. There are no right answers; this is more about expanding your imagination regarding what changes could help create a different kind of environment:

- the functioning of organizations/companies and work
- politics
- the economy
- education
- parenting

Assignment for 15 minutes in groups, during which you will discuss this question:

- *What institutional changes would make it possible for caring masculinity to become the norm rather than the exception?*
- *What would a caring institution look like?*

Sub-questions that may help guide the discussion (it is by no means necessary to answer all of them)

- *What would need to stop being rewarded or valued?*
- *What would need to start being rewarded or valued?*

Group Presentations (15 minutes)

Each group will now share the specific steps or changes they have identified within their group. Each group has about 3 minutes.

Afterward, you can ask the group:

- *Do you know of any inspiring practices from your local community or around the world that could lead to such changes?*

Final Sharing (10 minutes)

What have you realized during this workshop? Share specific insights or new key takeaways.

Key academic studies and books related to the topic

hooks, b. (2004). *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*

bell hooks analyzes how patriarchal socialization shapes men and limits their ability to experience emotions, intimacy, and care. She demonstrates that hegemonic masculinity is not only a source of dominance but also a source of suffering for men themselves. It leads to isolation, emotional suppression, and destructive forms of behavior. The book is significant for linking a critique of patriarchy with empathy toward men's experiences and helps frame masculinity as a systemic problem rather than an individual failure.

Hultman, M. & Pulé, P. (2018). *Ecological Masculinities: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Guidance*

The authors develop the concept of ecological masculinities as an alternative to dominant forms of masculinity, which are historically linked to dominance over nature, technological optimism, and economic growth. They demonstrate that masculinity can be reshaped toward values of care, responsibility, and connectedness toward both people and ecosystems. The text provides an important bridge between masculinity studies and environmental policy.

Khanna, P.S., (2021). *Sustainable Masculinities and Degrowth*

The text examines the relationship between masculinity and a growth-oriented economic system and asks which forms of masculinity may support or, conversely, hinder socio-ecological transformation. The author demonstrates that dominant forms of masculinity are historically linked to ideals of performance, competitiveness, technological control, and expansion—that is, to values that are simultaneously structurally reinforced by growth-oriented capitalism. The publication therefore proposes the concept of “sustainable masculinities,” which are grounded in care, relationality, responsibility, and the ability to accept limits. The text serves as a bridge between masculinity studies and post-growth thinking, offering a framework for considering how the transformation of economic institutions could enable the emergence of more ecologically and socially sustainable forms of male identity.

Žďárský, T. (2024). *What is the relevance of masculine subjectivities for the degrowth transformation?*

This paper examines how subjective identities of masculinity are linked to the institutions of growth capitalism and how they may influence society's ability to respond to the climate and socio-ecological crisis. It argues that dominant masculinities are structurally linked to an economy of performance, competition, and expansion, and therefore may hinder the transition to post-growth models of society. The text also suggests how the transformation of institutions could lead to new, more caring forms of masculinity.

Kaiser, S. B. (2022). *Political Masculinity: How the Presidency Became a Gendered Institution*

Kaiser analyzes how political institutions are shaped by masculine norms and how political leadership has historically reproduced ideals of strength, dominance, and authority. He demonstrates that political power is not gender-neutral but structurally linked to certain forms of masculinity. The text is useful for understanding how masculine identity intersects with political mobilization, authoritarianism, and contemporary populist movements.

Vandello, J. A. & Bosson, J. K. (2013). *Hard Won and Easily Lost: A Review and Synthesis of Theory and Research on Precarious Manhood*

This review article summarizes the theory of precarious manhood, according to which masculinity is perceived in many cultures as a status that must be constantly proven and can be easily challenged. Research shows that the threat of losing masculinity can lead to overcompensation—such as aggressive, risky, or dominant behavior. The text is key to understanding the psychological mechanisms that link masculinity to political attitudes, violence, or environmental behavior.

Katz, J. (2020). *Political Masculinity: How Incels, Fundamentalists and Authoritarians Mobilise for Patriarchy*

Katz analyzes how various political and cultural movements—from incel communities to religious fundamentalism to authoritarian and far-right politics—mobilize narratives of threatened masculinity. He shows that the sense of a loss of male status can be a powerful mobilizing tool that transforms personal frustration into political energy directed against feminism, LGBT people, or democratic institutions. The book helps us understand how uncertainty surrounding masculinity intersects with political radicalization and why themes of the “crisis of masculinity” have become an important part of contemporary authoritarian and far-right movements.

Masculinity, Leadership Styles, and Decision-Making in Times of Crisis

178 out of 193 heads of state are men.

459 out of 500 CEOs of Fortune 500 companies are men.

Nearly 90% of the world's billionaires are men.

These figures speak to gender inequality in access to power. But an even more important question is: what does it mean that most of the people who decide the shape of the global economy, climate policy, or crisis measures were socialized as men in a system that has long associated masculinity with competition, performance, control, and growth?

Traditional masculine socialization often emphasizes a focus on performance as a source of value, a willingness to take risks, the suppression of vulnerability, and an emphasis on control and expansion. If these very qualities are also structurally rewarded in the selection of leaders in both politics and business, then they become part of the institutional logic of decision-making.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that leadership style can have a direct impact on people's lives. Analyses cited by the Center for Economic Policy Research and The Guardian showed that countries led by women—such as New Zealand, Germany, Finland, Denmark, and Taiwan—adopted protective measures earlier and recorded lower mortality rates in the first months of the pandemic than similarly affected countries led by men. A study published in *Feminist Economics* (Garikipati & Kambhampati, 2021) suggests that these governments were more willing to accept short-term economic costs when it came to protecting human lives. What was decisive here was not just technical data, but how priorities were set between the economy and the protection of life.

Similar correlations emerge in climate policy. Research from 130 countries (Norgaard & York, 2005) shows that higher representation of women in parliaments correlates with a greater likelihood of adopting environmental commitments. In the corporate sector, greater gender diversity in leadership is associated with higher investments in sustainability and fewer environmental violations (Liu, 2018; Jiang & Akbar, 2018).

Research on the gendered framing of the climate debate offers crucial insights. A study by Swim et al. (2018) shows that arguments for climate action are not evaluated neutrally. Men who advocate for climate policy using frames associated with science, technology, and business are perceived as more masculine than men who argue on the basis of ethics, justice, or the protection of vulnerable groups. At the same time, men find science-business frames more appealing, while ethical and justice-based arguments are more often associated with femininity. Men who use ethical frames are more frequently perceived by other men as less masculine or homosexual, and their arguments are consequently evaluated as weaker.

This means that norms of masculinity influence not only who gains power, but also what types of arguments and solutions are considered strong and legitimate. If power is associated with control, expansion, and economic growth, then accepting limits, redistribution, or preventive restrictions on production may be perceived as weakness.

A similar pattern can be observed in economic decision-making. Research shows that a highly competitive and dominant leadership style correlates with a higher tolerance for inequality and a stronger focus on growth over stability. Discussions of the 2008 financial crisis repeatedly point to a culture of aggressive risk-taking and competitiveness in investment banking, where

a high degree of self-confidence and a willingness to take on systemic risks were part of the institutional norm.

In an era of climate destabilization, growing inequality, and other systemic crises, we will need the ability to act preventively, accept limits, and prioritize the protection of life over short-term profit. However, if institutions are structured in the long term to reward norms associated with dominance, performance, and expansion, this can undermine our collective ability to respond to these risks in a timely and responsible manner.

It would be a mistake, however, to view feminine leadership as an automatic privilege of women. There are female leaders, such as Margaret Thatcher, who practice a masculine style of leadership and thereby reproduce patriarchal patterns of dominance and harshness. Likewise, there are men who lead inclusively and with an emphasis on collaboration. The issue, therefore, is not between “men” and “women,” but between different leadership norms.

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When Sustainability Is Perceived as Unmanly

The climate transition requires reducing consumption of meat, fossil fuels, cars, and arms production. However, these sectors are not only high-emission—they are also deeply intertwined with notions of masculinity. Not only do they employ predominantly men, but their products symbolically represent strength, control, performance, and dominance. If sustainability is perceived as a threat to these symbols, it may encounter resistance that is not primarily economic but identity-based.

Research by Janet Swim and colleagues (Gender Bending and Gender Conformity) shows that environmental behavior is culturally coded as feminine. Men who behave in an environmentally conscious manner are more often perceived by others as less masculine. This effect is strongest among men themselves—they tend to view other men who act “too green” as weaker or less masculine. Environmentally conscious behavior can thus become a symbolic threat to male identity.

This mechanism is also confirmed by research conducted by Brough et al. (Is Eco-Friendly Unmanly?). The authors demonstrated that a product’s labeling alone can influence whether men accept it. In collaboration with BMW in China, they tested two versions of an identical car. One was presented as an “eco-friendly model,” the other as a “protection model.” Technically, it was the same car. However, men rated the car significantly more positively when it was framed in terms of protection and strength—that is, in masculine terms. Eco-friendly branding elicited greater resistance. Among women, the effect was the opposite or neutral. The study thus shows that the problem is not eco-friendly technology itself, but its symbolic placement within the “feminine” sphere.

A similar effect was observed with environmental organizations. In the experiment, participants had the opportunity to support one of two nonprofit organizations. One was called “Friends of Nature” and used soft green colors and a tree in its logo. The other was called “Wilderness Rangers,” had darker colors, and featured a wolf symbol. Both had the same environmental goal. Men were significantly less willing to donate to the organization with feminine branding, while the masculine-framed version reduced resistance. Once again, it turned out that it was not about the content, but about symbolic compatibility with masculinity.

These experimental findings have parallels in real-world institutions. When the Norwegian military planned to introduce “Meatless Mondays” for environmental and health reasons, the proposal met with resistance and was unsuccessful. Soldiers viewed meat as part of their military identity—as a source of strength and performance. Reducing meat consumption was not interpreted as a dietary change, but as a weakening of masculinity. (Kildal and Syse, 2017).

Gonda (2017) observed similar dynamics in her research on Nicaraguan ranchers. Adaptation projects promoting a reduction in cattle herds met with resistance because the number of cows was a direct symbol of masculine status. “For a rancher to be considered a real man, he had to have as many cows as possible,” writes Gonda. Even though deforestation threatened future livelihoods, maintaining the herd was a matter of identity.

These examples illustrate a broader pattern. Meat consumption, large cars, and work in the fossil fuel industry or arms manufacturing are not merely economic activities. They are also performances of masculinity. Reducing consumption can thus be perceived as a loss of symbolic status and the claim to dominance over nature.

Climate policy therefore clashes not only with material interests but also with cultural norms. If power is associated with expansion, growth, and control, reducing consumption will always

risk being interpreted as weakness. The transition toward sustainability is therefore not merely a technological or economic change. It is also a matter of redefining what it means to be strong—and which forms of masculinity are rewarded in institutions and culture

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Precarious Masculinity and Political Radicalization

The theory of precarious masculinity is based on a simple yet powerful premise: while the content of what is considered “proper masculinity” changes historically and culturally, one thing remains constant—in many societies, masculinity is understood as a status that must be earned, is fragile, and must be publicly reaffirmed time and again. Vandello and Bosson (2013) summarize this by stating that “the only enduring quality of ‘real manhood’ is its constant anxiety.”

Research within the empirically tested theory of precarious masculinity repeatedly highlights three fundamental mechanisms. First, masculinity is perceived as something that is acquired and demonstrated (in contrast to femininity, which is often perceived as “given”). Second, once this status is achieved, it is precarious: it can be challenged, taken away, or lost. And third, masculinity is validated primarily by other people and therefore requires public signals—demonstrations of strength, control, dominance, success, or heterosexual “normality.”

The consequences are significant not only for individual lives but also for society. Men experience higher levels of anxiety and stress regarding their gender status than women, especially when they feel their masculinity has been challenged. And that is precisely when a typical reaction sets in: overcompensation. This is not a matter of mildly making up for a shortfall, but rather of exaggerated displays intended to quickly restore their status in the eyes of others.

Empirical studies show specific, recurring patterns of such overcompensation. When men are implied to be “not manly enough” or “feminine,” they more often respond with physical aggression (e.g., hitting a punching bag harder) (Bosson et al., 2009), increased alcohol consumption (Fugitt and Ham, 2018), greater aggression toward gay men (Bosson et al., 2012), or even sexual harassment of women (Maass et al., 2003). Other studies also suggest that a threat to the traditional role of breadwinner can escalate domestic conflicts: for example, in households where the woman “outearns” the man, some men may compensate for their threatened masculinity by distancing themselves from household chores (Brines, 1994; Bittman et al., 2003), and another study found that unemployed men were at higher risk of committing violence against an employed partner (Macmillan and Gartner, 1999).

Crucially, this mechanism does not stop at personal relationships. Politics can be a particularly appealing arena for men to demonstrate and reaffirm their masculinity: it offers clear hierarchies, conflict, symbols of power, and frameworks of “protection” or “struggle.” The study “Overdoing Gender” (Willer et al. 2013) shows that after their masculinity was challenged, men were more likely to express support for war, hold homophobic attitudes, show greater interest in purchasing an SUV, desire to climb the hierarchy, and hold stronger beliefs in male superiority.

Follow-up research by DiMuccio and Knowles (2020; 2021) then finds a link between fragile masculinity and support for aggressive policies and authoritarian leaders (in the American context, including higher support for Donald Trump). This helps explain why the far right so often employs the narrative of a “effeminate,” “castrated” society and promises a return to “male strength.” Mobilizing fear of losing masculinity can be politically as effective as mobilizing fear of economic decline—and in some cases even more effective, because it touches on a deep layer of identity.

At the same time, this creates a bridge to resistance against climate and social policies: restrictions on cars, meat, or fossil fuel industries can easily be framed as an attack on freedom, sovereignty, and power—values that, in traditional masculinity, are closely linked to control, dominance, and independence.

In the context of the many crises that lie ahead—climate destabilization, inequality, economic uncertainty—this is a dangerous combination. Insecure masculinity increases the likelihood of risky behavior and conflict escalation precisely at a time when we need the opposite: the ability to accept limits, act preventively, cooperate, and take responsibility. If institutions and public discourse continue to reward excessive compensation and performative “toughness,” fragile masculinity may become not only a personal burden for men but also political fuel for authoritarianism and for blocking transformative policies.

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Tending the Inner Sun: Fighting Eco-Anxiety with Imagination

Young people today are facing increasing levels of eco-anxiety and hopelessness around the climate crisis, but also the state of the world in general. This workshop tackles these feelings and responds by focusing on the power of imagination and utopian thinking. It provides an exercise in moving away from common modes of thinking - utilitarian, defeatist and catastrophic - to harnessing imagination for problem-solving, and purposely uses a different type of language - poetry - to further loosen and set free the participants' expression. This methodology opposes the often-solitary feeling of eco-anxiety with collective sharing and imagining. In this way it also corresponds to the post-growth motto to "decolonise the imaginary"; or to disrupt established beliefs that the capitalist way of living, harmful to the planet and humanity, is the only way of living.

Duration: 100 minutes

Number of participants: 8-30

Accessibility: some level of awareness of the climate crisis is needed, but if the group has too little knowledge of the climate or doesn't experience eco-anxiety, other anxieties about the state of the world (poverty, war, etc.) can be explored

Materials: printed poems and quotes, post-its, pens, large paper or flipchart, one flipchart paper with a sun (yellow or another color) drawn on the middle of it

Tags: working with literature, creativity

Topic: eco-anxiety, fear, imagination, utopia

Program objectives:

Participants will:

- get a sense of eco-anxiety as a public and political feeling, not a personal issue,
 - explore using imagination as a tool,
 - be empowered to share views and feelings,
 - be encouraged to use their imaginations, do research and explore,
 - reimagine emotions as public and shared, and identify them as tools,
 - be inspired to move away from AI-formatted types of language and discourse.
-

Program Implementation

Opening question (5 min)

Ask the question: How often do you feel anxiety/fear about climate change and the climate crisis we are in? and ask participants to position themselves on an imaginary line in space depending on the answer:

NEVER ---- SOMETIMES ---- OFTEN ---- ALL THE TIME

Group discussion and harvesting (15 min)

Participants are divided into groups of 4-5, so that in each group there is a mix of answers (never, sometimes, often, all the time). The facilitator distributes post-its and pens to all groups.

In the group, have them discuss the following questions (the facilitator can write them on the board):

- *How do you feel eco-anxiety?*
- *When do you feel this emotion?*

After this initial sharing, the group moves to the next set of questions and instructions:

- *What triggers that feeling in you?*
- *Try to remember as many examples, causes and triggers of your eco-anxiety as possible and write them down (1 example per post-it)*

They are encouraged to vent and write down everything that comes to mind.

The facilitator then collects all the post-its, roughly groups them by theme and covers the drawn sun with them.

Group reading of the poem and discussion (20 min)

The facilitator distributes a copy of the poem “Rant” by the poet Diana di Prima to everyone and gives the following instructions:

- the group will (sitting or standing in a circle, as preferred) read the poem aloud together, with each person reading one line or stanza (depending on the number of participants)
- every time something in the poem is unclear, uncomfortable or the participants simply want to comment on something, they can say STOP and the reading will stop until the question is addressed together **OR** all the questions can be asked after the poem is read. **The group chooses which way they want to proceed**

After the poem has been read, the facilitator leads a group discussion using the guiding questions:

- *How did you feel reading the poem aloud together?*
- *How challenging was it for you to read this type of language?*
- *Did the content of the poem evoke any feelings (such as hope, impatience, discomfort, boredom, inspiration)?*
- *Does the poem reflect or provoke your thoughts and attitudes?*
- *What stuck out to you and resonated with you?*
- *What is your key takeaway from the poem?*

It is important for the facilitator to establish – in case the group does not – that the poem has a key message about the importance of imagination for human activity.

Quotes about activating imagination (10 min)

The facilitator hands out a sheet of paper with two quotes about imagination that the participants read by themselves. (The quotes are formatted so they visually resemble glasses or binoculars.)

The quotes serve as two perspectives on themes of imagination and eco-anxiety, and as a bridge to the next part of the workshop. The participants briefly reflect on them in couples, with the person sitting next to them; for a more structured reflection they can use these guiding questions:

- *How do these quotes resonate with you?*
- *How do they relate with the poem we have just read?*
- *Do you feel they help orient you forward in an inspiring or productive way?*

I think hard times are coming, when we will be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now, and can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies, to other ways of being. And even imagine some real grounds for hope. We will need writers who can remember freedom: poets, visionaries - the realists of a larger reality. ... We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable; so did the divine right of kings. ... Power can be resisted and changed by human beings; resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art - the art of words.

Radical imagination is an opportunity to envisage the world, its inhabitants and structures beyond what they are currently. It is a practice about forging realities rather than escaping them. It is an invitation to imagine what could be if anything were beyond climate injustice, and beyond the 'mental health' crisis that plagues our communities. It is the adversary of capitalist realism and climate doomism, encouraging endless possibilities and multifarious ways of being.

- Tori Tsui, climate activist

*If the terms *capitalism*, *capitalist realism* or *climate doomism* are unfamiliar to the participants, the facilitator can consult the glossary below.

They can also use the additional clarifying quote:

„We are inevitably reminded of the phrase attributed to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism. That slogan captures precisely what I mean by 'capitalist realism': the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it.“ (Mark Fisher)

Imagining solutions (40 min)

The facilitator directs the entire group back to the post-it-covered sun.

The facilitator then shares the following instructions:

- The facilitator will choose one post-it at a time (or a group of them if they are closely related) and the participants will try to find solutions together, using (radical) imagination.
- One participant should be chosen/volunteer to write down the solutions on another large paper/flipchart paper.

Imagining/finding a solution should be future-oriented, so the solutions can come from answering the guiding questions:

- what does the future (e.g. in 2050) look like regarding this problem? has it been solved or fixed? how?
- what underlying values have changed?
- what strategies and actions have brought this change about?

This process will continue until all post-its have been removed from the sun, and solutions written down.

✓ **Facilitator's tip:** some problems might be too complex or difficult for the group to feel like they have successfully solved them. The facilitator should then guide the group with questions such as:

- *What kind of knowledge do you lack to be able to come up with a solution?*
- *Where could you find such knowledge?*
- *Who could you ask to help you?*

Reflection (10 min)

The reflection round takes the form of popcorn-style sharing, giving the participants an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings of the workshop. The following reflection questions can be used:

- *How did you feel about the exercise?*
- *Do you have any thoughts on utopias that you would like to share with everyone?*
- *Are you encouraged to imagine and dream a little more?*
- *Do you feel more prepared – or less anxious – to face the climate crisis?*
- *Are there new thoughts that have come to you from the discussion today?*

⊕ Infobox 1: A shared approach to eco-anxiety

“Viewing eco-anxiety as a shared, public emotion shifts our understanding of its role in the climate movement. Rather than being a private “problem to be solved”, difficult or “unhappy” emotions become the substrate of political action; the politics of the youth climate movement grows within its remarkable emotionality. Eco-anxiety concerns us all, not as a narrow category of mental health expertise and care, but as a shared affective experience permeating the present – a public feeling born out of a political system that has for too long been out of touch with ecology. Making environmental feelings public can nurture a collective agency. Recognising it as a shared human feeling doesn’t just shift how we think about emotional responses to climate change – it reshapes what kind of climate politics becomes possible. And, if we embrace and share it, our eco-anxiety can make us more resilient.”

See: Jana Bednarova

<https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/eco-anxiety-a-public-feeling/#8e3f825a-b10b-4f01-8d0e-17cfe8b34d2>

⊕ Infobox 2: The political and educational power of imagination and art

As extreme events make the climate crisis more tangible, people may fall into “tunnel vision”, fixating on catastrophic outcomes and feeling overwhelmed or powerless. However, recognizing the seriousness of the crisis also help them to open up to new possibilities, where imagination is not escapism but becomes a vital survival strategy. Imagination enables people to navigate uncertainty, sustain hope, and act meaningfully.

Imagining a more just and sustainable world is itself a radical and necessary act. These visions serve as blueprints that can guide real-world change, helping people reorient their values

within systems that often discourage long-term or collective thinking. Utopian thinking thus becomes practical rather than unrealistic: small-scale, “microcosmic” examples of better ways of living can be created and gradually expanded. In this sense, imagining becomes the first step in building a world characterized by climate justice and well-being.

Imagination is a skill that must be cultivated, and literature, poetry, and shared narratives train the mind to break through its usual patterns, move beyond immediate reality and create new and unexpected. In a time when much of both language and idea production is being relegated to so-called AI, and becoming more uniform, using and confronting artistic forms of language reminds us of original human thought. It is also through stories and language that communities share values and teach new generations how to navigate the world. Imagination is therefore central to human development, resilience, and connection.

By combining awareness of the climate crisis with an active, practiced imagination, individuals and societies can move beyond fear toward purposeful action, using creativity as both a coping mechanism and a catalyst for meaningful change.

See:

Britt Wray. "Generation Dread." Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Anxiety (2022)

⊕ Infobox 3: Post-growth's imaginary

The phrase “It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (Fisher) shows how many people feel trapped by the current system, accepting that it seems like there’s no alternative to the way capitalism works, and only those who succeed under its rules can survive.

Ideas like post-growth clash directly with this mindset. That’s why the slogan “decolonize the imaginary” (Latouche) has become important for degrowth thinkers: it’s about freeing our imagination from the limits of capitalist thinking.

People often treat it as unrealistic to think about societies that reduce growth, stop harming the environment, and live more sustainably. To many, the vision of a chaotic, post-apocalyptic world seems more believable than imagining a society where humans live in solidarity with each other and with nature.

“To many, the dystopian thoughts of the apocalyptic Mad Max worlds where humans turn against each other after social and ecological collapse seems more credible than any quest to imagine a world where people live convivially and in solidarity with each other and other non-human beings. [I] do not just dismiss the notion that being utopian would be a futile exercise but argue that utopian thought can be the very foundation of our collective understanding and action in a world often described as complex and ambiguous.”

See:

"Roles of utopian thought in a degrowth transformation", Alexandra Köves. In "Routledge Handbook of Degrowth" (2025)

Capitalism

An economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit.

Capitalist realism

An ideological framework which sees capitalism as the only viable system of organizing society, such that no alternative to it can be imagined.

Climate doomism

A perspective that fixates on the worst potential outcomes of the climate crisis, and takes a hopeless or nihilist approach.

Eco-anxiety

Heightened emotional, mental or somatic distress in response to dangerous changes in the climate system (The Climate Psychology Alliance) or the chronic fear of environmental doom (The American Psychological Association)

Radical imagination

„The practice of reimagining the world and its systems, guided by principles of community, solidarity and radical change.” (Tori Tsui)

REVOLUTIONARY LETTER #75

(Rant)

by Diane di Prima

You cannot write a single line w/out a cosmology
a cosmogony
laid out, before all eyes

there is no part of yourself you can separate out
saying, this is memory, this is sensation
this is the work I care about, this is how I
make a living

it is whole, it is a whole, it always was whole
(...)

every man / every woman carries a firmament inside
& the stars in it are not the stars in the sky

w/out imagination there is no memory
w/out imagination there is no sensation
w/out imagination there is no will, desire

(...)

the war that matters is the war against the imagination
all other wars are subsumed in it.

the ultimate famine is the starvation
of the imagination

(...)

the ultimate claustrophobia is the syllogism
the ultimate claustrophobia is 'it all adds up'
nothing adds up & nothing stands in for
anything else

THE ONLY WAR THAT MATTERS IS THE WAR AGAINST
THE IMAGINATION
THE ONLY WAR THAT MATTERS IS THE WAR AGAINST
THE IMAGINATION
THE ONLY WAR THAT MATTERS IS THE WAR AGAINST
THE IMAGINATION

ALL OTHER WARS ARE SUBSUMED IN IT
There is no way out of the spiritual battle
There is no way you can avoid taking sides
There is no way you can not have a poetics
no matter what you do : plumber, baker, teacher

you do it in the consciousness of making
or not making yr world
you have a poetics : you step into the world
like a suit of readymade clothes

or you etch in light
your firmament spills into the shape of your room
the shape of the poem, of yr body, of yr loves

A woman's life / a man's life is an allegory

Dig it

There is no way out of the spiritual battle
the war is the war against the imagination
you can't sign up as a conscientious objector

the war of the worlds hangs here, right now, in the balance
it is a war for this world, to keep it
a vale of soul-making

the taste in all our mouths is the taste of our power
and it is bitter as death

bring yr self home to yrself, enter the garden
the guy at the gate w/the flaming sword is yrself

the war is the war for the human imagination
and no one can fight it but you / & no one can fight it for you

The imagination is not only holy, it is precise
it is not only fierce, it is practical
men die everyday for the lack of it,
it is vast & elegant

intellectus means 'light of the mind'
it is not discourse it is not even language
the inner sun

the polis is constellated around the sun
the fire is central

I think hard times are coming, when we will be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now, and can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies, to other ways of being. And even imagine some real grounds for hope.

We will need writers who can remember freedom: poets, visionaries - the realists of a larger reality. ... We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable; so did the divine right of kings. ... Power can be resisted and changed by human beings; resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art - the art of words.

- Ursula K. Le Guin, writer

Radical imagination is an opportunity to envisage the world, its inhabitants and structures beyond what they are currently. It is a practice about forging realities rather than escaping them. It is an invitation to imagine what could be if anything were beyond climate injustice, and beyond the 'mental health' crisis that plagues our communities. It is the adversary of capitalist realism and climate doomism, encouraging endless possibilities and multifarious ways of being.

- Tori Tsui, climate activist

Artificial Scarcity or Radical Abundance? Decommodification as a Key Path to Post-Growth

We live in a society of material abundance, and yet many people experience a shortage of housing, energy, or care—not because resources are lacking, but because they are organized as commodities. The workshop will focus on the commodification of basic human needs and demonstrate how market logic creates artificial scarcity, inequality, and dependence on growth. Through specific case studies in the areas of housing, care, water, and electricity, we will examine the negative impacts of commodifying these needs, as well as real-world examples of successful attempts at their decommodification. Together, we will reflect on how public, cooperative, and community forms of governance can contribute to a post-growth future based on abundance for all within the planet's limits.

Duration: 160 minutes (2 hours 40 minutes)

Number of participants: 8–30 participants

Tools: printed case studies, writing materials, paper

Tags: working with case studies, critique, vision

Topic: commodification, decommodification, basic needs, for-profit, not-for-profit

Program Objectives:

Participants will:

- explain the difference between commodification and decommodification and understand their role in the current capitalist and post-growth context,
 - identify and analyze the negative consequences of commodification,
 - be able to envision and describe how decommodification processes could unfold in the areas of housing, care, water, and electricity through various institutional arrangements such as remunicipalization, public-commons partnerships, non-profit and cooperative models, and community infrastructure.
-

Program Implementation

Introductory Framing:

The way the economy is structured is closely linked to how, at what cost, and whether our basic human needs will be met at all. It is also linked to who has the power to decide how these needs will be organized and whom the economy will primarily serve. During this workshop, we will look at ways of meeting basic needs that are typical of a growth-based economy, but also at approaches that align with a post-growth economic system, whose main goal is to meet needs within planetary boundaries. Today we will work with four selected basic needs so that we can visualize the logic of both systems in practice. These will be water, housing, care, and electricity. These are by no means all basic needs, but today we will work with these selected ones.

Evocation (25 minutes)

Give the following instruction: *Form pairs.*

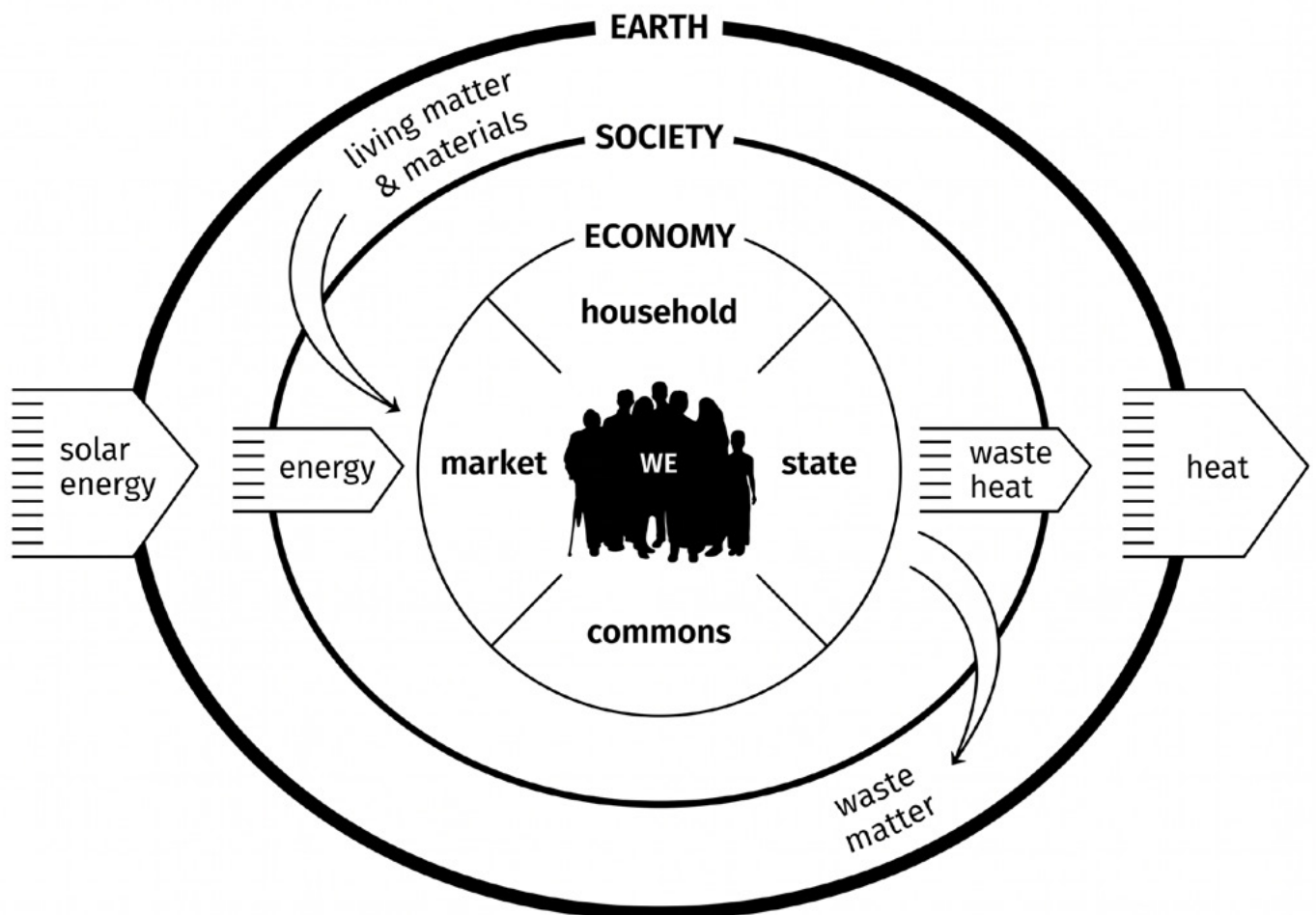
Choose one of these four basic needs: water, housing, healthcare, electricity. Over the next 5 minutes, think about the different ways these goods or services might reach you. Who can provide these services to us (actors, institutions...)?

Begin the group harvest session with the question: *What ways did you find? Who were the various providers you came up with?*

Write the answers on the board.

After the group brainstorming, summarize that it is possible to meet various basic needs through 4 different options. Introduce Kate Raworth's embedded economy model, which shows that we can meet needs through four spheres of the economy:

- the market and primarily private companies
- the public sector, the state
- commons/ communities (i.e., the nonprofit sector, cooperatives, community initiatives)
- households



Source: Raworth (2017) Doughnut Economics

Use specific responses from the survey as examples when introducing individual sectors; for example, you mentioned social housing, which falls under the jurisdiction of the state or municipality, or family care, which is an example of meeting a particular need within the household, etc.

Kate Raworth, the author of this model, points out that mainstream economics focuses primarily on the market and the relationship between supply and demand; however, this is only one way of meeting needs. Others may include, for example, the state, community-based enterprises, or households, where the main goal is not profit but the fulfillment of specific needs.

Later, ask the group the following question:

- Which of these ways of meeting needs do you find most effective? Why?

At this point, just collect the answers; the goal is not to have a group discussion, but rather to share individual opinions. The aim is to gather various preconceptions about what the group already knows or thinks regarding different ways of meeting needs.

Working with Case Studies on Commodification (50 minutes):

We will divide the group into smaller groups of ideally 3–4 participants, each of which will examine a single example of the commodification of a specific need. If the number of participants and the time allow, we can let them choose the commodification of the need that interests them most.

Group work (15 minutes): Now we will look at specific examples of when the fulfillment of our basic needs (electricity, healthcare, water, housing) has been entrusted to private companies—a process we call commodification. In groups, spend 15 minutes reading the case study and **list the specific impacts of commodification (economic, societal, social, or environmental)**. Some will be mentioned in the text; others you can deduce. Write the bolded assignment as a question on the board.

Group summary and discussion (35 minutes):

One representative from each group will present the key points of their case study to the others and list the negative impacts.

The facilitator writes the negative impacts on the flipchart (e.g., negative environmental impacts, higher costs, lack of democratic oversight, growing inequality, etc.).

The facilitator then asks:

- *Why do you think these services are being commodified or privatized despite these negative impacts?*
- *Who benefits from this process?*

The goal is to determine how and why public services have been significantly privatized and commodified in recent decades. Here, for example, the topic of neoliberalism can be introduced—that is, a set of ideological beliefs and specific economic measures (see the info box for facilitators for more details).

To conclude, give the following instruction: *Write down in your own words how you understand the concept of commodification. Try to include the question of power in your definition—who makes the decisions, whom it serves, and who benefits from it.*

Wait three minutes, then have 3–5 people read or share their understanding.

Then present the definition of commodification on the board:

Commodification is the process by which something that was not previously a commodity begins to be organized as a commodity intended for sale on the market with the aim of maximizing profits.

In conclusion, the instructor will explain the connection between commodification and the dependence on growth:

Commodification is also closely linked to the modern economy's dependence on economic growth. Growth often arises not only from producing more goods, but also from the expansion of market logic into other areas of life. Things that were not previously part of the market are gradually becoming sources of profit. Just a few decades ago, for example, our personal data or attention were not economic commodities. Today, digital platforms collect data on our behavior and sell access to our attention through advertising.

At the same time, this process creates an **artificial scarcity**. The scarcity does not arise because of a lack of resources or capacity, but because access to basic goods is contingent on the ability to pay. When housing, for example, is treated as a commodity and its price rises, people must work harder to afford it. In order to pay for our basic needs, pressure builds to produce ever more goods and services—often including those that are not particularly necessary for a good life in and of themselves. This creates a paradox: the economy produces a vast amount of goods, services, and digital content—sometimes referred to as **“bullshit abundance”**—while access to basic

needs remains precarious. Thus, material abundance and social deprivation coexist side by side: empty apartments alongside homelessness, energy abundance alongside energy poverty.

After the break, we'll look at what the alternative is—namely, the process of decommodification.

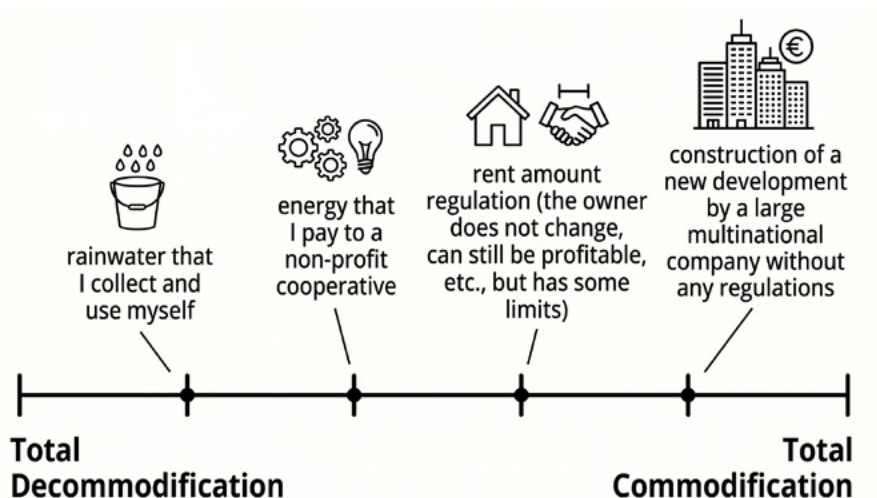
Working with case studies on decommodification in small groups (40 minutes)

Framing the transition—returning to Kate Raworth's diagram: Now we'll look at meeting those same needs (water, housing, electricity, care) and examples from around the world where a given service has been “decommodified”—that is, where the service is not primarily approached with the goal of increasing profit, but rather to meet those needs.

Theoretical introduction to decommodification:

At this stage, it is helpful to return to Kate Raworth's diagram and note that in economic debates we often discuss the state vs. market dichotomy, whereas in practice there are many more approaches, often linked to the community sphere. Just as commodification and the expansion of the market sphere into new areas of our lives are key in growth capitalism, for the transition to a post-growth economy, the opposite transition is key—namely, decommodification, the removal of at least basic needs from a purely market-driven environment—both through regulation and by shifting from market intermediaries to more non-profit forms of meeting our needs.

Present a spectrum of decommodification:



Here, too, the instructor can explain that two processes are key to the context of decommodification:

- a shift in mental models—from profit and exchange value to the fulfillment of needs and use value
- as well as a shift in ownership structures (e.g., from for-profit corporations, which must grow, to nonprofit forms that do not allow for financial extraction).

Ideally, the mindset and the form of ownership are aligned; for example, a company whose goal is to meet housing needs is also a nonprofit through its legal structure. In practice, this is not always the case—for example, state-owned companies have the option to operate as nonprofits, but often do not. Conversely, we may have for-profit companies that are genuinely committed to the public good and allocate all profits toward increasing their positive impact, even

though their ownership structure and/or legal form does not require them to do so. However, this can be fragile when conditions change, such as when ownership or management changes.

Activity Instructions

Form groups of four so that each group includes one representative for each of the four needs identified in the first activity. Each group should therefore have someone who, in the previous activity, read about care, water, electricity, or housing. If the numbers don't work out, it's not necessary, but groups should have at least 3 people so they can share different ways of decommodification.

Each group will receive 4 case studies of decommodified ways of meeting needs. The person in your group who read about housing, for example, will now read the case study on the decommodification of housing, and so on. As you read the study, reflect on these questions:

- Who is the provider of the service in question? What ownership structure does it use?
- What are the impacts of this?
- What are the risks associated with these methods of provision? What concerns do you have regarding them? (if you have time)

After you've read the case study and answered the questions on your own, start sharing your ideas. Your common goal is to compile a diverse list of different possible ways to decommodify.

✓ **Facilitator's tip:** Different groups go into varying levels of detail during discussions. It's a good idea to check in with the groups halfway through and let them know they're halfway done. This helps prevent situations where some groups have already finished their discussion, while in others, some participants haven't even presented their case studies yet.

Group Reflection (30 minutes):

The final reflection consists of several stages.

Understanding different forms of decommodification:

- What different forms of decommodification have you identified? Who acted as the intermediary for the service in each case?
 - public-commons partnerships (PCP) in the electricity sector in Wolfgang
 - a nonprofit organization in the water sector
 - the city and limited-profit companies in the housing sector in Vienna (+ regulation)
 - community initiatives, cooperatives in the care sector in Barcelona, coordinated by the city
- Which of these forms of decommodification do you consider to be the most resilient? Why? What are their advantages and disadvantages?

Clarifying the Understanding of Decommodification

- Write down on a piece of paper how you personally understand the concept of decommodification in your own words. Wait three minutes, then have 3–5 people read their definitions aloud.

Relate this to the context of participation, the formation of their opinions, and their lived experiences.

- How does the topic of commodification and decommodification relate to the current situation in the Czech Republic (your country)? What processes are taking place here? (e.g., the possible privatization of hospitals and their transfer to joint-stock companies is being discussed)

Summary:

Decommodification is therefore key to a post-growth transformation. If basic needs—such as housing, care, energy, or water—are organized primarily as commodities, people must constantly increase their incomes to afford them. This creates pressure for further production, labor, and economic growth. Decommodification weakens this mechanism by ensuring access to basic goods outside of market logic, for example through public services, cooperatives, or community institutions. When key needs are met by means other than the market, society does not have to constantly expand just so that people can survive.

In this sense, decommodification opens up space for what some authors call **radical abundance**. This is not abundance based on ever-increasing consumption and production, but abundance of access to what people truly need for a good life—housing, care, safety, time, or a healthy environment. This approach stands in contrast to what is sometimes called “**bullshit abundance**”: an economy producing ever more goods, digital content, or short-term services, while basic needs remain inaccessible or precarious. The post-growth perspective therefore does not seek the endless expansion of production, but rather the reorganization of the economy so that it **creates enough for everyone within planetary boundaries**.

The issue of commodification and decommodification is not merely a matter of institutional structure; it is primarily a question of power. History is made up of struggles over whether the logic of growth and profit maximization will prevail, or the logic of meeting needs.

To conclude, ask a question and let a few voices be heard:

- What is the most important thing you learned during this workshop?
- What are you taking away from it?

✓ Facilitator's tips:

- For a deeper understanding of the connection between commodification and decommodification and post-growth, facilitators should read the Infoboxes and at least one of the recommended academic sources before leading the activities.
- If there are significant examples of commodification or decommodification in your country, it is a good idea to adapt some of the case studies to the local context so that the examples are as relevant as possible and closely aligned with the participants' lived experiences.
- In long-term educational programs, it is a good idea to follow this activity with the “Transformation Strategies” activity, which raises the question of how to build political power to drive key changes that will lead to greater sustainability and equality.

⊕ Infobox 1: What Is Neoliberalism and How Does It Relate to Commodification

Neoliberalism can be understood as a combination of an economic project and an ideological framework that has profoundly shaped how basic human needs are organised. As a set of economic policies, it manifests through the privatisation of public services and infrastructure, deregulation of markets, introduction of competition into the public sector, outsourcing, and reductions in public spending. These processes have shifted housing, water, energy, and care from the public sphere into private hands.

At the same time, neoliberalism operates as an ideology that legitimises these changes. It rests on the assumption that markets are inherently more efficient than the state, that individuals primarily act as consumers, and that value is created through competition and profit. Public institutions are framed as inefficient, and care or social services as costs rather than social investments. Together, these economic and ideological dimensions create the conditions for commodification of basic needs and their subordination to price and return on investment.

Facilitator note: This infobox is especially useful when participants ask why services continue to be privatised despite clear negative consequences. It helps show that commodification is not accidental but structurally driven.

⊕ Infobox 2: Commodification and the Post-Socialist Experience in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic and the wider post-socialist region, commodification has a specific historical context. After 1989, privatisation and market reorganisation were framed not only as economic reforms but as a symbolic break with the previous regime. Collective and public solutions were often associated with state socialism, inefficiency, and lack of freedom, while markets and private ownership were seen as paths to prosperity and “returning to the West”.

This led to widespread acceptance of capitalist frameworks even in areas that had previously fulfilled social and stabilising functions, such as housing, water, energy, and care. Over time, however, rising costs, outflows of public resources, declining accessibility, and growing inequalities have shown that market solutions did not improve conditions for large parts of society.

Understanding this context is crucial for discussions of decommodification. In the Czech case, decommodification is not only a technical shift in ownership or governance but also a reconsideration of collective solutions – without returning to authoritarian forms of the past.

⊕ Infobox 3: Artificial Scarcity, Capitalism, and Radical Abundance

Artificial scarcity describes situations where people experience lack not because resources are physically absent, but because they are organised as commodities. In capitalism, access to housing, care, water, or energy depends on ability to pay, while limited availability increases profitability. This creates the paradox of material surplus alongside social deprivation.

Decommodification responds to this contradiction by removing basic needs from market logic and securing them through public, cooperative, or community institutions. Rather than promoting austerity, it opens pathways toward radical abundance – abundance of access, care, and security – grounded in collective governance within planetary limits.

Key Academic Literature

Hickel, J. (2019). Degrowth as a Project of Radical Abundance

Hickel develops the concept of radical abundance as an alternative to a growth-oriented economy based on artificial scarcity. He shows that shortages of housing, care, or energy are not the result of physical limits, but of the institutional organisation of capitalism, which produces scarcity through commodification. The text provides a strong normative framework for linking decommodification with a post-growth future.

Heron, K., Milburn, K. & Russell, B. (2024). Radical Abundance: How We Can Build a World Beyond Capitalism

The authors develop radical abundance as a political and institutional project grounded in the decommodification of basic needs and collective control over key systems of life provisioning. The book connects post-growth thinking with concrete strategies in housing, energy, care, and public services, and shows how public, cooperative, and commons-based institutions can create abundance without growth. It is useful as a synthetic framework that links a critique of capitalism with practical imagination of alternatives.

Gerber, J.-F. & Gerber, J. (2020). Decommodification for Ecological Economics

The authors systematically elaborate decommodification as a key concept of ecological economics. The text offers an analytical distinction between different forms of decommodification (state-led, community-based, commons-based) and demonstrates how these approaches can reduce growth pressures and environmental degradation. It is essential for the conceptual grounding of the methodology and for working with institutional alternatives.

Goodwin, G. (2026). Understanding the Roles of Decommodification in Socioecological Transformations: A New Theoretical Approach

Goodwin develops decommodification as a key analytical concept for socioecological transformation and critically demonstrates that it is not merely a matter of eliminating the market or expanding public services. He proposes distinguishing between different types of decommodification based on whether they merely regulate markets, mitigate market dependence, or actually transform production relations and the institutional arrangements of the economy. The text emphasizes that the transformative potential of decommodification lies primarily in changing the mode of production and resource management, not merely in redistributing access to services.

Stratford, B. (2022). Rent Extraction in a Resource-Constrained Future

Stratford analyses how, under ecological constraints, rent and value extraction become central mechanisms of accumulation. He argues that the commodification of basic needs (housing, energy, water) is likely to lead to intensified rentierism rather than productive economic activity in the future. The text helps explain why decommodification is necessary not only for social reasons, but also for structural economic reasons.

Fanning, A. L. et al. (2020). Provisioning Systems for a Good Life within Planetary Boundaries

The authors introduce the concept of provisioning systems—systems that secure basic human needs—and link it to planetary boundaries. They show that a good life can be achieved without growth in consumption if systems of housing, energy, mobility, and care are organised in non-market ways. The text provides an empirical and systemic framework for working with concrete sectors within the methodology.

The Commodification of Housing in the Ostrava Region: The Case of OKD Apartments

The process of housing commodification in the Ostrava region is closely linked to the privatization of the mining company Ostravsko-Karviné Doly (OKD) in 2004. The housing stock, which was originally part of the social infrastructure linked to employment in the mining industry, transformed within a few years into an investment asset traded by global financial actors. This shift fundamentally affected the social stability of the Moravian-Silesian Region.

Before privatization, the OKD housing stock served a stabilizing and social function. The state's significant ownership stake allowed for the promotion of the public interest and oversight of the company's conduct, including in the housing sector. The apartments served to retain the workforce and provided tenants with relatively secure, long-term housing. Housing was not primarily viewed as a source of profit, but as part of regional social policy.

The Privatization of OKD and the Transformation of Ownership Structures

The privatization of OKD was justified on the grounds of securing employment and regional prosperity. In reality, however, OKD was not operating at a loss prior to privatization, and the sale itself took place without enforceable contractual provisions to protect the region. The state sold its stake to Karbon Invest for 4.1 billion crowns, thereby relinquishing the ability to actively influence future developments. Subsequently, Zdeněk Bakala became the majority owner, implementing a strategy of maximizing returns without reinvesting in the company or the region (so-called “downsize and distribute”).

Commodification of the housing stock

The privatization of OKD included approximately 43,000 apartments, valued at a uniform price of 40,000 crowns per apartment regardless of their actual value. In 2010, this was the largest privately owned housing stock in Central Europe. The original promises to sell the apartments to tenants were not fulfilled, and after rent deregulation in 2006, the owner backed away from them. The apartments were definitively separated from their social function and began to function as a financial asset. In 2015, they were sold to the Blackstone investment group, and since 2020 they have been owned by the Swedish company Heimstaden, which today owns more than 42,000 apartments in the Moravian-Silesian Region.

Impact on Tenants and the Region

Rent deregulation has led to significant increases in housing costs in a region characterized by low incomes and high unemployment caused by the decline of the coal mining industry. The dominant position of a single landlord has weakened tenants' bargaining power, led to the proliferation of short-term and precarious leases, and fostered the so-called “poverty business.” Many residents have no realistic option to move, and the high cost of housing is often covered by government subsidies.

The case of the OKD apartments demonstrates how privatization and the financial logic of global markets have transformed housing into a commodity aimed at rent extraction. Instead of the promised prosperity, there has been a deepening of social inequalities, an exodus of the population, and cyclical regional decline. The Ostrava region has thus become a textbook example of the commodification of housing in a post-socialist context.

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Seznam Zprávy. (2023).

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The Commodification of Electricity in Egypt: The Role of International Finance and the Impacts of Market Transformation

Until the early 21st century, Egypt's electricity sector was heavily state-controlled. Electricity prices were subsidized, and the state managed both production and distribution as part of its development and social policies. However, rising demand, underfunding of investments, and power outages in 2014 created an opening for fundamental reforms. A key turning point was the adoption of the new Electricity Law (2015), which opened the sector to private producers and gradually liberalized prices. Electricity was no longer viewed primarily as a universal public service, but as an economic good whose price should reflect "actual costs."

The Role of International Actors

International financial institutions, particularly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, played a significant role in the commodification of electricity. Their loans to Egypt were conditional on structural reforms, including the gradual elimination of energy subsidies, price deregulation, and strengthening the role of the private sector. The reforms were framed as measures to increase efficiency, fiscal stability, and more targeted support for poor households. Other key players included international commercial banks and export credit agencies, which financed large-scale infrastructure projects through so-called EPC+Finance models (engineering, procurement, and construction).

These projects—including large gas-fired power plants—were carried out by foreign corporations and financed with loans denominated in foreign currencies, thereby further integrating the sector into global financial markets. The Egyptian government played an active role as a facilitator and guarantor of these agreements. It adopted legislative changes, established an independent regulator, and set a plan for gradually increasing tariffs.

What did commodification bring?

The reforms led to a rapid increase in production capacity and a temporary stabilization of supply. At the same time, however, they resulted in a sharp rise in electricity prices for households. Since 2014, there have been repeated tariff increases, which coincided with currency devaluation and broader austerity measures. Commodification was particularly evident in the shift in the sector's logic: investment profitability became a priority over social affordability. The risks (debt, currency fluctuations, social impacts of price hikes) were borne primarily by the public sector and households, while international investors secured guaranteed returns.

The case of Egypt thus illustrates that the commodification of electricity is not merely a matter of privatizing ownership, but a deeper institutional transformation in which the energy sector is subordinated to the logic of financial markets. Electricity is shifting from a tool of social policy to a source of investment opportunity—with profound consequences for affordability, public control, and social inequality.

Source

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The Commodification of Care in the United Kingdom

From Public Provision to Market-Organized Care

The commodification of care in the United Kingdom is closely linked to the market-driven reorganization and privatization of social care since the early 1990s. Reforms such as the NHS and Community Care Act (1990) and the Care Act (2014) shifted local authorities from directly providing services to procuring them through competitive contracts. Local authorities became procurers rather than providers of care, and care itself was reorganized as a service bought and sold on the market, divided into standardized units and evaluated primarily on the basis of cost.

This process led to the near-complete privatization of care provision. Today, approximately 96% of residential care beds for adults in England and more than 80% of children's homes are operated by private providers, most of which are for-profit. Public care provision has virtually disappeared—not because the need for care has declined, but because the institutional framework systematically favored outsourcing.

Financialization and Public-Private Partnerships

Privatization has gone hand in hand with financialization. Many large healthcare providers are owned by private equity firms and investment groups that extract value from the sector through debt financing, real estate ownership, rents, and management fees. Although care remains predominantly publicly funded, a significant portion of these funds flows out of the system as profit rather than being reinvested in staff, quality, or service capacity.

This arrangement is often described as a public-private partnership (PPP), but in practice it represents a very weak and extractive form of this model. There is no shared ownership or shared decision-making between public institutions and private providers. Local governments continue to bear responsibility for care outcomes, market stability, and crisis-proofing of services in the event of provider failure, while private firms retain control over internal decision-making and surpluses. Risks and costs are thus socialized, while profits are privatized. This model has created systemic fragility: more than 98% of involuntary closures of care facilities involve for-profit providers, forcing public institutions to bear the consequences of market failure.

Impacts on Work and Care Provision

The consequences of this model are borne primarily by care workers and care recipients. Care work in England is predominantly carried out by women, and to a disproportionately high degree by migrant and racially marginalized workers. Nationwide, approximately 16–17% of social care workers were born abroad; in London, the figure is over 60%. Low wages, precarious contracts, unpaid travel time between clients, and chronic staff shortages are a common reality.

Care recipients face rushed visits, high staff turnover, and limited choice, while rising costs are often covered by public subsidies. The British care system thus demonstrates how commodification transforms care into a space for value extraction—privatizing profits and socializing costs—and undermines the stability and quality of a service that is, at its core, relational and public.

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The Commodification of Water in the Czech Republic: The Case of Water Utility Privatization

The Transformation of Ownership and Operating Models After 1989

The privatization of the water sector in the Czech Republic followed the post-1989 transformation. Until then, the water sector had been wholly state-owned. As late as 1993, there were 11 state-owned water management companies (9 regional and 2 in Prague), which were subsequently transferred free of charge to the ownership of cities and municipalities. Local governments then chose different models for operating water infrastructure.

In most cases, the infrastructure (networks, treatment plants, wastewater treatment plants) remained in public ownership. However, a different development occurred with the operating companies that provide water supply and treatment and collect water and sewage charges. While some municipalities continued operations through associations of cities and municipalities, others opted for a so-called separate (operational) model based on long-term concession agreements. In these cases, private companies—often foreign corporations—became the operators and, in many instances, the recipients of water and sewage fees.

Cash Flows, Water Prices, and the Loss of Public Control

The result is a structural contradiction: municipalities own roughly 90% of the water infrastructure, while corporations control approximately 70% of the cash flows from its operation and the profits from water sales. In many cases, profits are transferred to parent companies abroad instead of being reinvested in network upgrades and the development of local infrastructure. According to data from the Pravda o vodě Foundation, the Czech water sector has lost at least CZK 53 billion since 2010 due to foreign ownership—of which CZK 23 billion in transferred profits and approximately CZK 30 billion in unused subsidies that local governments could not access due to the presence of private entities.

The impacts of this arrangement are also reflected in water prices. In Prague, where waterworks operations are controlled by Veolia (France), the price of water in 2026 is 157.21 CZK/m³ (including 12% VAT). In contrast, in Bratislava, where operations are under city control, the price is 79.5 CZK/m³ (including 23% VAT). Bratislava thus has roughly half the price of water compared to Prague, despite an almost double VAT rate. The difference is primarily related to differing profit flows and the degree of public control.

The Impacts of Commodification and Barriers to Adapting to the Climate Crisis

The privatization model in the Czech water sector leads to the privatization of profits and the socialization of costs. Municipalities bear the responsibility for the long-term maintenance and renewal of infrastructure, while operating companies collect stable revenues from water and sewerage charges. At the same time, this model is proving to be a barrier to adapting to the climate crisis. Deteriorating climate conditions and more frequent extreme hydrological events will re-

quire greater investment, coordination, and sharing of drinking water resources at the regional level. However, the fragmentation of operational structures, differing pricing strategies, and a profit-driven orientation significantly complicate this cooperation. The case of water privatization in the Czech Republic thus illustrates how the commodification of a basic public good leads to a long-term drain on resources, a weakening of public control, and a reduced ability to respond to systemic challenges, including the climate crisis.

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Wolfhagen, Germany: Decommodifying Electricity through a Public-Commons Partnership

Electricity is typically treated as a commodity: produced for sale, governed by market logics, and delivered to households primarily as paying consumers. The German town of Wolfhagen (population ~14,000) offers a contrasting pathway, demonstrating how electricity can be partially decommodified through changes in ownership, investment, and governance. Wolfhagen illustrates how essential services can be re-embedded in collective institutions and governed according to social and ecological needs rather than profit maximisation through a pioneering example of a Public-Commons Partnership (PCP).

Reclaiming Energy from the Market

The process began in 2005, when Wolfhagen's municipal government chose not to renew its concession contract with the private utility E.ON. Rather than allowing electricity provision to remain governed by shareholder value and external corporate priorities, the town re-municipalised the service by placing it under a publicly owned utility: Stadtwerke Wolfhagen. This decision marked an initial step in decommodification. Electricity provision was no longer organised primarily through market exchange with a private monopoly, but instead repositioned as a collective public service accountable to local democratic institutions.

In 2008, the town deepened this shift by committing to supply all household electricity from local renewable sources by 2015. Yet pursuing this goal exposed a central tension in decommodification processes: while market dependence can be reduced, large-scale investment remains necessary.

Collective Investment beyond Private Capital

Rather than reverting to private finance, Wolfhagen developed a hybrid institutional solution that deliberately avoided dependence on external investors and the growth pressures that accompany profit-seeking capital. In 2012, citizens founded the BürgerEnergie- Genossenschaft Wolfhagen (BEG Wolfhagen) to mobilise local capital while retaining democratic ownership and control. The cooperative raised €2.3 million by selling shares to local residents, with ownership capped at five shares per person and a two-year instalment period for purchasing an initial share, lowering financial barriers to participation. In return, BEG Wolfhagen acquired a 25% ownership stake in Stadtwerke Wolfhagen.

This arrangement created what is known as a **Public-Commons Partnership (PCP)**. A PCP differs fundamentally from a Public-Private Partnership (PPP). In a PPP, a public authority partners with a profit-driven private company, which typically expects financial returns, shareholder value, and often influence over strategic decisions. This can lead to profit extraction, upward pressure on prices, and long-term contractual dependence.

By contrast, a Public-Commons Partnership combines **public ownership with organised citizen co-ownership and democratic co-governance**. Instead of bringing in external investors seeking maximised returns, the municipality partners with a community-based cooperative whose purpose is not profit maximisation but collective benefit. Surpluses remain locally embedded

and decision-making power is shared between public authorities and citizens. In this way, essential infrastructure is governed neither purely by the state nor by the market, but through a collaborative institutional arrangement rooted in democratic participation.

By relying on citizen investment rather than private finance, Wolfhagen avoided both the loss of local control and the need to generate ever-increasing financial returns. Energy infrastructure could therefore be planned around long-term socio-ecological goals rather than growth imperatives and for-profit logic. The model partially decommodified investment itself: had capital been raised through private investors, those investors would have expected financial returns and decision-making influence, leading to surplus extraction from the municipality.

Changes in Governance and Control Over the Surplus

Decommodification in Wolfhagen extends beyond ownership to how decisions are made and how surplus is used. The cooperative holds two of nine seats on the supervisory board of Stadtwerke Wolfhagen, giving citizens direct influence over pricing, investment priorities, and surplus allocation. Governance thus shifts away from maximising sales toward collectively managing energy as a limited and essential service.

Surplus revenues are not treated as a signal to expand production or consumption. While cooperative members receive a modest annual dividend of around 4 per cent on paid-in shares, a substantial share of surplus flows into a community-controlled Energy Saving Fund. Governed largely by cooperative members, the fund finances energy-efficiency and demand-reduction measures. Rather than using surplus to drive expansion, Wolfhagen reinvests it to lower future energy demand, aligning with post-growth goals of sufficiency and reduced consumption.

Electricity as a Common Service

By 2015, Wolfhagen was producing 100% of its electricity from renewable sources, with surplus capacity. More importantly, the town transformed the institutional conditions under which energy is produced and governed. Access to electricity became less dependent on market dynamics and private profit, and more shaped by collective priorities, democratic institutions, and ecological limits.

Wolfhagen demonstrates that responding to the climate emergency is not only a technical or financial challenge, but an institutional one. By combining municipal ownership with citizen co-ownership, the town moved beyond the traditional state-market binary. Through a Public-Commons Partnership, electricity provision shifted toward use-value, social need, and democratic control, pointing to possibilities for economic democracy beyond the energy sector.

Source:

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Affordable Housing in Vienna

Most cities today view housing primarily as a market commodity—a source of investment, speculation, and profit. The consequences are rising rents, financial pressure on households, and growing inequality. Vienna, however, has long demonstrated that housing can be systematically understood as a fundamental right and the infrastructure for a dignified life, not primarily as a tool for capital appreciation.

Today, approximately 21% of apartments in Vienna are owned by the city (municipal housing), and another 21% are owned by Limited-Profit Housing Associations (LPHA). This means that roughly 40% of the housing stock is exempt from purely market-driven logic. By comparison, about 34% consists of for-profit rental housing and approximately 20% is owner-occupied housing. Thanks to this structure, approximately three-quarters of the city's residents have access to regulated or non-profit housing.

Historical Roots: Red Vienna and Debt-Free Financing

The foundation of the system was laid as early as 1919 during the period known as “Red Vienna.” The city gained autonomy and began implementing a comprehensive social program. It introduced rent caps, strengthened tenant protections, and allowed for the acquisition of unused buildings for social purposes.

A key factor was also the restructuring of tax policy. In addition to state taxes, the municipal government introduced its own local taxes targeting luxury items (e.g., riding horses, large cars, luxury goods). Construction was financed directly from taxes, not from loans, so the city was not dependent on creditors nor burdened by interest payments. Thanks to this, the city did not have to rely on extensive debt for construction. Over the course of eleven years, 64,000 municipal apartments were built along with community amenities (daycare centers, libraries). The program also boosted employment and the local economy.

To this day, the so-called Wohnbauförderungsbeitrag remains in effect—every employee contributes approximately 1% of their salary as a “housing tax,” which in Vienna alone generates roughly 250 million euros annually to support housing policy.

Limited-Profit Housing Associations: The Third Sector

Limited-Profit Housing Associations (LPHA) are a cornerstone of the system. They are neither traditional private developers nor government organizations—they represent the third sector. Across Austria, they own approximately 17% of the total housing stock and provide housing for about 24% of the population.

Their business model is based on the principle of cost-based rent: the rent amount is based on the actual costs of construction, operation, and maintenance. Profits are limited and must be reinvested in renovations, new construction, or quality improvements. Leases are typically long-term or open-ended, which increases tenant stability.

This results in lower prices:

- on average, LPHA rents in Austria are about 27% lower than for-profit rents,
- in Vienna they are approximately 15% lower,
- and for new construction, they can be up to 30% cheaper.

Despite the scale of the system, public spending on housing in Austria is lower than the EU average and significantly lower than in the United Kingdom or Germany, for example. The model is therefore relatively efficient from a public finance perspective as well. At the same time, LPHA is a leader in building renovations and decarbonization and must meet strict criteria for affordability, architectural quality, social sustainability, and environmental standards.

Rent and Land Price Regulation: Municipal Market Control

Decommodification in Vienna is not just a matter of who owns the apartments, but also of how the city actively regulates prices and market conditions. A sophisticated rent control system plays a key role. If you live in an apartment built before 1945, the rent cannot exceed 5.91 euros per square meter, regardless of whether it is a city-owned or privately owned apartment. However, the regulation also applies to new construction. Since 2019, two-thirds of new construction carried out by limited-profit associations with city support must not exceed a net rent of 4.97 euros per square meter. The city thus sets a price cap not only on the historic housing stock but also on current development, thereby preventing sharp rent increases and stabilizing the entire market.

Equally important is the regulation of land prices, which often constitute the most expensive component of construction. Since 2018, Vienna has been using a categorical zoning tool for subsidized housing. For newly designated building lots, two-thirds of the area must be sold at a regulated price of 188 euros per square meter, while only one-third may be sold at full market price, which is around 750 euros per square meter, for example. In this way, the city significantly curbs land speculation and prevents public investments in affordable housing from being “swallowed up” by rising land prices. The regulation thus affects not only tenants but the entire price formation chain—from land to the final rent.

This model fundamentally changes how the housing market functions: a strong public and nonprofit sector acts as a counterweight to private landlords, prevents speculation, and stabilizes prices. As a result, rents cannot rise unchecked, and housing remains affordable for broad segments of the population, not just low-income groups. Regulation, institutional support for tenants, and an emphasis on construction quality simultaneously reduce inequality, promote social diversity, and strengthen the city’s long-term stability. Vienna thus demonstrates that if local government maintains control over this key sector, housing can function as a public service—not primarily as a source of profit.

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Glas Cymru and the Decommmodification of Water in Wales

The Context of Water Privatization in Wales

Water and sewerage services were privatized in England and Wales in 1989 as part of a broader neoliberal shift in the operation of public services in the United Kingdom. Wales, however, entered this process from a significantly disadvantaged position. It was among the country's economically weaker regions, and its southern and western areas were classified between 2000 and 2014 as less developed regions of the European Union, eligible for additional financial support through cohesion funds. This socioeconomic context was also accompanied by a significant investment deficit in water and sewer infrastructure, which at the time did not meet basic EU environmental or public health standards.

In 1989, approximately 50% of wastewater was treated only at the secondary level and discharged onto land, 30% was treated at the primary level and discharged into the sea, and up to 20% was not treated at all and flowed directly into the sea. Wales thus faced the need for massive infrastructure investments at a time when the water sector was driven by profit and financial returns. Water and sewage rates were historically higher than the average for England and Wales, which, combined with poorer households, led to significant issues of affordability and social justice.

The Founding of Glas Cymru as an Alternative to the Shareholder Model

In this context, Glas Cymru was established in 2000 by Nigel Annett and Chris Jones, with the support of its first chairman, Lord Burns. Their goal was to create an entirely new model for managing a water company that would maintain access to private financial markets but eliminate the pressure to pay dividends to shareholders. Glas Cymru was established solely for the purpose of acquiring and managing Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, which provides water supply and sewerage services to most of Wales and adjacent parts of England.

After a process lasting approximately 18 months, Glas Cymru succeeded in acquiring Welsh Water from the American company Western Power Distribution in May 2001. The acquisition was financed through the issuance of bonds totaling 1.9 billion pounds. A bond can be thought of as a form of large loan: an organization issues a security that investors (such as pension funds or insurance companies) purchase, thereby providing it with capital. In return, the organization commits to paying them a fixed interest rate for a certain period and gradually repaying the principal. However, this does not give investors an ownership stake or decision-making rights—they are not shareholders, but creditors.

In the case of Glas Cymru, investors lent money to the company without gaining control over it or a claim to a share of its profits. This made it possible to acquire the water company without bringing in shareholders and without pressure to pay dividends. It was the largest bond financing transaction of this type without state involvement in the history of the United Kingdom. Crucially, the entire process took place without any government financial support or guarantees—the risk and responsibility for repayment were borne by the company itself.

The Mechanism of Water Decommodification

The Glas Cymru model represents an unconventional approach to managing water without turning it into a commodity or a tool for generating profit. It is not a return to a traditional state-owned enterprise, but rather the creation of a not-for-profit company without shareholders, whose purpose is not to generate profit for owners, but to provide a public service. If a surplus arises, it does not go to the financial markets but is reinvested back into the system—into pipeline maintenance, treatment plants, environmental protection, or directly for the benefit of customers.

Glas Cymru borrows money for major investments primarily through bonds and from its own savings, with its main goal being to borrow as cheaply as possible. This is important because water services require massive, long-term investments, and approximately one-third of water bills goes toward financing them. Since the company does not have to pay dividends to shareholders, it can borrow on more favorable terms and plan investments years in advance. The result is less pressure to raise water prices and a more stable system that is geared toward the public interest, not short-term financial returns.

Governance and Key Stakeholders

Glas Cymru's governance is based on strong internal management and independence. The company has a board of directors with a majority of independent non-executive directors and approximately 50 members, who are selected by an independent selection committee. These members are not representatives of external interest groups, but unpaid individuals whose duty is to oversee the proper functioning of the company in the best interests of customers.

Key players in the decommodification process included the founders of Glas Cymru, financial advisors capable of structuring large-scale bond financing, regulatory authorities that approved the change in ownership structure, and institutional investors—particularly pension funds and insurance companies—for whom stable, long-term returns with low risk were a priority.

Tangible Impacts and Results

Since 2001, Welsh Water has invested more than £6 billion in water and sewer infrastructure, with a similar level of investment expected in the future. These investments were financed at a lower cost than at comparable shareholder-owned companies, which has resulted in less pressure to raise water rates. The company has gradually built up a financial reserve from the money saved, a sort of “safety net.” This helps it manage unexpected expenses—such as damage caused by extreme weather, new environmental requirements, or other regulatory changes—without these costs immediately being passed on to household bills.

At the same time, the company is sending a signal to financial markets that it is stable and reliable. This allows it to borrow even more cheaply in the future, which in turn reduces pressure on water prices. This creates a virtuous cycle: lower financing costs mean greater system stability and long-term benefits for customers, not for investors. From an environmental perspective, this model has enabled improvements in wastewater treatment quality and better protection of coastal waters. The social impacts have been particularly evident in price stabilization and improved access to services for households in poorer regions of Wales.

The Glas Cymru case shows that the decommodification of water does not necessarily mean state ownership, but can consist of removing profit as the primary motive for operation. Today, Glas Cymru represents one of the most compelling examples of an alternative water sector model in Europe.

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The Decommodification of Care in Spain: The Municipalist Approach of Barcelona en Comú

The reorganization of care in Barcelona is closely linked to the municipalist platform Barcelona en Comú's rise to power in the city in 2015. Municipalism, in this sense, is based on the belief that cities should play an active role in addressing social and economic problems by strengthening local public institutions, democratic oversight, and collaboration with communities, rather than relying on the market or a centralized state. In the area of care, Barcelona responded to a long-standing situation in which care for the elderly and dependent persons was primarily provided within families or through paid domestic work, often under unstable and poorly regulated conditions, with significant inequalities in access, working conditions, and the quality of services provided, while public services had limited capacity to coordinate and influence care.

Care Before 2015: The Informal Market and Migrant Women

Before the rise of Barcelona en Comú, care in Barcelona was not primarily provided by large private companies, but rather by a fragmented market of individual domestic workers. Home care for the elderly and dependent persons was often provided by migrant women employed directly by households, frequently on an informal basis or through agencies. This sector was heavily feminized and "foreignized": 88.4% of workers were women, and approximately half had a migrant background. Up to 40% of workers were employed in the informal economy, more than half worked part-time, and most received low wages. Care was paid but institutionally invisible, lacking collective organization and systematic public coordination.

The City's Role: Coordination, Investment, and a Hybrid Strategy

Barcelona en Comú did not seek to create a single municipal care provider. Direct remunicipalization of care proved to be legally and institutionally constrained, particularly due to European competition rules, labor law restrictions, and the division of responsibilities between the city and the region. The city therefore opted for a hybrid strategy: strengthening its own public capacity while systematically supporting cooperative, nonprofit, and community-based forms of care provision.

Despite limited powers, Barcelona has significantly increased public investment in care and social infrastructure. Between 2015 and 2021, the budget for social services, social development, health, and education grew by 39.7%. The budget for the city's home care service increased from €77 million in 2015 to €101 million in 2019. The city also introduced a sliding-scale fee structure for municipal daycare centers and expanded access to public after-school care for children from low-income families, thereby reducing the unpaid care burden on households.

Who Provides Care Today: Nonprofits, Cooperatives, and Community-Based Entities

A key feature of the Barcelona approach is that the primary care providers are not for-profit companies, but rather nonprofits, care cooperatives, and publicly supported community initiatives. As Kussy et al. (2022), the city is systematically pushing for-profit companies out of the core

of care services by prioritizing social economy entities and changing the terms of public procurement. These are no longer based primarily on the lowest price, but instead prioritize stable working conditions, quality of care, and the local anchoring of services.

The institutional core of decommodification thus consists of:

- care cooperatives, often founded by the caregivers themselves (including migrant women),
- non-profit organizations providing professional care,
- community initiatives that operate in conjunction with public funding and coordination by the city.

The goal is not to replace one market with another, but to shift care from an individualized and informal labor market to collective and publicly regulated structures.

Institutional Innovation: Barcelona Cuida and Care Superblocks

The decommodification of care is also supported by institutional innovations that strengthen the care infrastructure without commercializing it. The city has invested in the creation of the Barcelona Cuida Center, which operates as a public municipal institution providing counseling, training, legal and immigration support, and psychological assistance to caregivers and family caregivers. It is not a service provider, but rather a coordination and support hub for the care system.

The “care superblocks” model, piloted in several low-income neighborhoods, organizes care through small, self-managed teams of up to 15 caregivers who look after 40–70 people in a single neighborhood. Reduced travel and local anchoring increase the continuity of care and improve working conditions for caregivers.

From Market-Based Outsourcing to Public Coordination

Unlike in England, where care is primarily organized through large for-profit companies via the outsourcing of public services, the Barcelona approach focuses primarily on removing care from the informal and individualized labor market. The goal is not to replace the market with a single public enterprise, but to institutionalize care as a publicly coordinated activity, based on nonprofit and cooperative models, labor standards, and long-term public funding.

At the same time, however, decommodification remains dependent on sufficient and stable funding and faces the risk of insufficient visibility of class and racial inequalities, especially when migrant women and other vulnerable groups are only limitedly involved in decision-making processes. The case of Barcelona en Comú thus illustrates both the real possibilities and the structural limits of the decommodification of care through municipalist institutional design.

Source

Kussy, M., et al. (2022) *The Caring City: A Critical Reflection on Barcelona’s Municipal Experiments in Care and the Commons*

Degrowth policies

This activity introduces participants to degrowth thinking through general principles and specific policy examples. It builds on the distinction between the principles of green growth and degrowth, presents specific policies, and—through critical group reflection on their transformative potential and potential risks—raises questions about the appropriateness of specific measures in a given context.

Duration:	90 minutes (1,5 hours)
Number of participants:	15-20 persons
Tools:	papers, markers, cards of policies (2 sets), cards of criteria (5 sets) – see attachments.
Tags:	workshop
Topic:	degrowth policies, green growth, transformation
Target group:	Since this is a relatively advanced activity, it makes sense to work with people who already have some knowledge of public policy or degrowth (ideally, participants should include members of both groups).
Program objectives:	Participants will: • identify what makes a policy degrowth-oriented; • learn about selected degrowth policies; • be able to discuss the transformative potential of degrowth policies.

Evocation (10 minutes)

Discussion question for pairs: *What principles should degrowth policy measures be based on?* After a few minutes of discussion, we'll ask you to share a few answers with the rest of the group.

Inquiry (70 minutes)

We will try to form groups of 3–5 people that are as diverse as possible. This can be achieved through random assignment or by encouraging participants to seek out members with diverse skills and educational backgrounds. Each group will receive a list of criteria that includes both degrowth and green-growth criteria.

Degrowth Criteria (15 minutes)

The first task is to select the degrowth criteria and reach a consensus within the group, or to discuss any doubts together. We go around to the groups to see if they are able to identify the correct criteria, and if necessary, we explain the differences and guide them in the right direction. The degrowth criteria are 3, 4, 6, and 8. The others are based more on green growth thinking or environmental economics. However, this is an original conceptualization for this activity, not universally valid degrowth principles—it is important to keep this in mind and approach the criteria more as a general framework for thinking—this becomes evident in the next step, where degrowth policies do not have to fully meet all criteria.

Degrowth policies (15 minutes)

Next, each group will receive cards describing 4 policies (2 non-growth and 2 green-growth) with brief descriptions. Their task is to familiarize themselves with these policies and evaluate them based on the criteria selected in the previous activity (+/0/?/-). We recommend that groups divide up the policies and evaluate them individually, then share the results with the group in a shared T-chart and briefly share their reasoning, or discuss the individual criteria if time permits. We point out that there were two non-growth and two green-growth policies and ask if this is reflected in the criteria. It may happen that a degrowth policy does not clearly meet every criterion, or conversely, that a green-growth policy may meet some of them—this is an opportunity to recognize the ambiguity of these categories and their partial overlap. Next, each group works with only one degrowth policy and sets aside the other three (we recommend determining in advance which group will work with which policy—for example, by color-coding them—so that each group works with a different one).

Policy Effects (20 minutes)

Next, we ask the groups to develop a simple diagram of effects for their policy. It is helpful to provide an example on the board of what the diagram might look like; see below for the EU ETS (emission allowances).

Describe the cascade of transformative effects that this policy would ideally have on society and the economy:

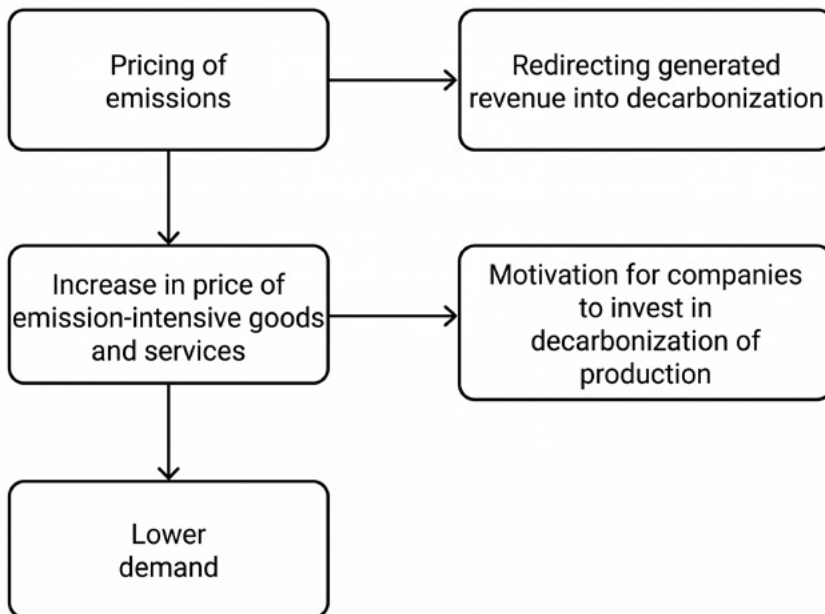
- *What are the potential negative side effects or risks of this policy?*

For more advanced groups or those who finish early, we can add these questions later:

- What would you do to minimize the risks discussed?
- What would we need to know before implementing this policy?

Example of the effects of the EU ETS (Emissions Trading System)

A. Positive effects:



B. Negative effects: higher cost of living, failure to distinguish between basic needs and unnecessary consumption, and growing inequality.

We go around to the groups again and help them with their diagrams. For clarity, we recommend separating the individual branches in the diagrams. As the end approaches, we remind the groups that have finished that in the next step they will be asked to give a short presentation on one of the policies.

Group Sharing (20 minutes)

Finally, each group presents its policy. The task is to summarize for the others how it works and to outline its transformative potential and risks based on the discussion they had about it. If time permits, follow-up questions can be asked after each presentation, such as: *How could this policy improve my quality of life? How could the mentioned risks be addressed in the policy design? Who will be the biggest opponent of such a policy, and how can we work with that?*

✓ **Facilitator's tip:** Degrowth policies are usually bundled together to mitigate threats. This will likely build on the risks identified by the participants. Depending on the time available, you may opt to mention a combination of guaranteed jobs with public service roles and reduced working hours.

✓ **Facilitator's tip:** The policy card set also includes links to sources. We recommend printing the list at least once and having it available during the workshop, or sending it to participants via email as part of the final package. Some statements in the policy descriptions may seem untrustworthy without a source, and any motivation among participants for further self-study is a welcome byproduct of the workshop.

Reflection (10 minutes)

Discussion in pairs (from different groups) – *Which of the measures discussed would make the most sense for us, and why?* After a brief discussion, you can select a few measures with a one-sentence explanation or hold a vote on all five degrowth policies.

Key academic studies on the topic

O'Neill, D. W., et al. (2024). Post-growth: the science of wellbeing within planetary boundaries.

Studie shrnuje vědecké poznatky o tom, jak lze dosahovat lidského blahobytu v rámci planetárních mezí bez závislosti na ekonomickém růstu. Ukazuje, že vysoká úroveň kvality života nemusí být nutně spojená s vysokou spotřebou Sourceů, a identifikuje klíčové oblasti veřejných politik (např. veřejné služby, redistribuce nebo zkracování pracovní doby), které umožňují sladit sociální a ekologické cíle. Text poskytuje empiricky podložený rámec pro návrh nerůstových politik zaměřených na wellbeing.

Fitzpatrick, N., et al. (2022). Exploring degrowth policy proposals: A systematic mapping with thematic synthesis.

Studie systematicky mapuje existující návrhy nerůstových politik a třídí je do tematických oblastí, jako jsou práce, veřejné služby, finance nebo ekologická regulace. Ukazuje šíři a komplexnost politických opatření spojených s nerůstem a zdůrazňuje potřebu jejich kombinování do vzájemně se doplňujících balíčků. Text poskytuje přehledový rámec pro orientaci v konkrétních návrzích politik a jejich transformačním potenciálu.

Criteria

1 The measure uses market mechanisms to determine the optimal level of nature protection.	2 The measure generates revenue for the state budget. The funds raised can then be used for public investments related to sustainability.
3 The measure combines solutions to both environmental and social issues (e.g., climate measures must not increase inequality).	4 The measure brings democratic decision-making to economic issues.
5 The measure uses financial incentives to promote sustainable behavior (or, conversely, to discourage unsustainable activities).	6 In the long term, the measure opens the possibility for further societal transformation toward sustainability.
7 The measure motivates other countries to tighten their own climate legislation through competitiveness and price signals.	8 The measure seeks to limit the export of negative impacts on people and nature to other countries, particularly in relation to the Global South.

Degrowth policies

Maximum wage

The market creates inequalities that are difficult to comprehend from a human, ethical, and even economic perspective. For example, CEOs of large American companies today earn, on average, 360 times more than the median employee at their company. At Starbucks, for instance, the figure is as high as 6,666 times more. The maximum wage is a democratically determined multiple of the minimum income; once this threshold is exceeded, all additional income earned by that individual (e.g., from real estate, bonds, or stocks) would be taxed at 100%—this can be implemented at the company level, the state level, and theoretically even globally. In the literature, recommended ratios between minimum and maximum wage range from 1:4 to 1:30, meaning that the highest earners could have 4 to 30 times the income of the lowest-paid. A maximum income can reduce inequality in society, curb the obscene consumption of the wealthiest (private jets, yachts, etc.), and also improve conditions for democracy, where the wealthiest currently use vast amounts of financial resources to influence political processes. The risks typically discussed include difficulties in enforcement and the concealment of certain activities within the shadow economy.

Work time reduction

This proposal involves shortening the workweek (typically to 32 hours, though other options are also being discussed). As an accompanying measure, programs could be created to encourage companies and other employers to offer “work-sharing,” in which two or more people share a single job. The goal is to close the gap between overworked and underemployed people, reduce inequalities, and eliminate the environmental costs of consumption driven by time discrepancy. Research shows that countries with shorter working hours have lower greenhouse gas emissions, a more gender-equitable division of household care work, and less stress. However, the loss of income resulting from a shorter workweek should affect only the wealthiest 10 percent; legislatively, however, it is not entirely straightforward to ensure this. There are proposals to shorten the workday (e.g., to 6 hours) or to reduce the workweek to 4 days.

Universal basic services

This proposal aims at providing essential services through non-market means. This may take the form of state-guaranteed services, municipal or community organizations, nonprofit enterprises, or communal management (the commons)—but in every case, the primary goal is not profit, but rather the provision of high-quality services for the benefit of users and the broader community. Universal basic services do not have to be free, but accessibility is key, so the price should not be prohibitive (e.g., as in the Czech healthcare system). Another important factor is the opportunity for users to participate in decision-making regarding the service (which, conversely, the Czech healthcare system does not incorporate to a great extent). In terms of specific services, this primarily concerns basic infrastructure such as water, sewage, electricity, heat, public transportation, healthcare, and possibly food or housing. Removing these needs from the market system would mean better democratic control, greater consideration of the public interest, and, above all, greater accessibility of services. In the long term, unconditional basic services could free up the capacity of people who work primarily to afford these goods. A study from the United Kingdom shows that financing unconditional basic services would cost 4.3% of GDP and could be funded through more progressive taxation, property tax, or inheritance tax.

Jobs guarantee

The proposal for jobs guarantee means that the government would offer jobs to people who are unable to find employment elsewhere. It would thus become the “employer of last resort.” This measure would relieve people of the fear of losing their jobs during the economic transition, curb the political leverage of large employers, and simultaneously create the jobs needed for the transition—building green infrastructure (e.g., developing renewable energy sources, insulating buildings, organic farming, restoring ecosystems, etc.) and caring for people and the environment. The state functions here as a “guarantor” of jobs, but their administration should be handled locally—by regions or municipalities; the job descriptions themselves should, in addition to the transition, take into account the quality of life and the needs of local residents; in some proposals, locals should directly determine which activities the funds will be allocated to. The policy promises to connect important activities for which no business model currently exists with the available capacity of people seeking employment. Experiments to date show that guaranteed jobs have significantly improved the mental well-being and inclusion of the long-term unemployed; regarding the impacts on the regional economy and the rest of the municipal population. We must wait for larger-scale programs.

Non-profit enterprises

Non-profit business is possible today, but creating legal frameworks for it within contemporary systems is very difficult. This measure would establish a legal framework for non-profit companies whose primary goal is to meet the needs of people and the planet. The existence of a specific legal form would then also allow for preferential treatment of nonprofit firms over commercial actors, e.g., through tax reductions or prioritization in public procurement. This could include alternative supply chains (e.g., community-supported agriculture), initiatives in healthcare, social prevention (low-threshold clubs), non-commercial organized leisure activities (scouting), projects focused on the cultivation of public space, energy-saving efforts (car-sharing, co-living), or the operation of local cultural centers and various artistic projects (theater, music). The goal is to facilitate the operation of services that are not intended to generate profit but barely survive under the current system. The legal form of non-profit companies allows these entities to generate profit, though it does not permit the distribution of such profits to owners or employees (who, of course, receive a decent wage). All profits are therefore reinvested into the company's social or environmental mission.

Green growth policies

The Allowance Trading System (EU ETS1)

The EU introduced the Emissions Trading System back in 2005. Major carbon dioxide emitters (over 25,000 tons of CO₂ per year) must purchase allowances for every ton of CO₂ they emit. The policy primarily affects energy production and carbon-intensive industrial processes (steel, aluminum, fertilizers). The EU issues a specific number of allowances to ensure a gradual reduction in its emissions. Their price is then determined by the market based on demand in allowance auctions. Some companies complain about price volatility; however, a secondary market has emerged where allowances are traded like other securities, allowing companies to purchase options and hedge against price fluctuations. The advantage of this market is the immediate reflection of EU policy developments in permit prices—for example, permit prices immediately spiked following the announcement of the Fit-for-55 package. The policy aims to level the playing field for carbon-intensive processes and their alternatives (e.g., coal-fired electricity vs. electricity from renewable sources, steel from ore and coke vs. recycled steel from electric arc furnaces, etc.). The impact of the EU ETS on emissions reductions between 2008 and 2016 was estimated at 3.8% of all EU emissions (a total of about one billion tons of CO₂); however, in recent years, allowances have become significantly more expensive, so an even stronger impact can be expected. Governments typically allocate free allowances to companies facing competition from abroad (e.g., steel, aluminum, fertilizers)—this is expected to change gradually with the introduction of carbon border adjustments between 2026 and 2035. For example, in 2023, the EU ETS generated revenue of 43.6 billion euros. These funds are then allocated to decarbonising the energy sector, industry, and other climate measures.

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

The CBAM responds to criticism that emissions allowances reduce the competitiveness of European companies and encourage the relocation of production to countries where emissions are not subject to a tax. CBAM requires that, for five specific carbon-intensive types of goods (steel, fertilizers, aluminum, electricity, and hydrogen), emissions from production be documented upon import and a fee equivalent to the corresponding amount of EU emission allowances be paid. In addition to protecting European industry, the measure also aims to encourage countries to implement their own emissions pricing, thereby relieving their exporters of the burdensome documentation requirements at the borders. The measure is set to be phased in between 2026 and 2035—as the scope of emissions subject to fees expands, the number of allowances allocated for free to domestic European companies will decrease. The measure faces criticism from European industry, which argues that it protects only the domestic market and thus limits its export competitiveness. In an international context, attention is drawn to the situation of certain countries in the Global South, whose economies rely on exports of these raw materials to the EU and which lack the resources to decarbonize their production.

Streamlining Permitting Processes

An interdisciplinary team of experts developed a map of priority zones for solar and wind power plants, as commissioned by the Czech Ministry of the Environment. The team based its work on land-use plans, weather and biodiversity data, and other relevant information. Based on this information, a map of zones suitable for the priority development of renewable energy was created. In these zones, permitting procedures are to be streamlined, making them more attractive to investors and accelerating the development of new infrastructure. EU “strategic projects” in the field of critical materials operate on a similar principle. The EU has identified 47 specific projects (in the Czech Republic, for example, lithium mining at Cínovec) that it considers essential for its competitiveness and security. The permitting processes for these projects have been simplified and expedited.

Subsidies for Electric Mobility

The relatively high cost of electric cars and the lack of charging infrastructure makes electromobility less accessible and attractive as an alternative. The goal of the subsidies is, on the one hand, to create an incentive for people considering this alternative and, on the other hand, to indirectly increase investment in car manufacturing and the development of charging stations. Indirectly, this also involves subsidies for automakers aimed at developing electric models. The success of these policies is evident, for example, in Norway, where the purchase and operating costs of an electric car are lower than those of a car with a combustion engine. Subsidies can be targeted directly at vehicle purchases or infrastructure development, but they can also be indirect in the form of lower taxes or cheaper parking and access to city centers for electric cars. Policies with a similar goal include equivalent price increases or barriers for cars with internal combustion engines. Another indirect measure is a subsidy for the purchase of company electric vehicles, which aims to create a used car market that will emerge after a few years. One criticism of the measure points to the impossibility of replacing all passenger cars with electric passenger vehicles due to the high material and, consequently, environmental impacts of electric cars.

Investment Incentives for Green Technologies

States and regions have traditionally competed for major investments in new manufacturing complexes. This is particularly true for advanced technologies, which promise not only to create jobs and stimulate the local economy but also to raise the know-how level of regional industry. Incentives may take the form of direct subsidies, tax breaks, favorable land offers, or adjustments to local infrastructure. In the context of the green transition, these include projects such as the gigafactory for electric car batteries in Dolní Lutyně or the BMW test track in Sokolov, Czechia. Local residents generally welcome new jobs, but sometimes oppose these projects due to noise, traffic congestion, or the destruction of local ecosystems (e.g., in Dolní Lutyně). Structural criticism of the incentives, however, centers on the fact that, in the competition for new projects, public funds are used to mitigate risks and subsidize corporate profits.

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Post-Growth Entrepreneurship

What does the transition to a post-growth economy mean for businesses? How must companies transform themselves so that they no longer support the logic of constant growth, but instead contribute to a socially just and environmentally sustainable economy? During the workshop, participants will learn about the five key dimensions of so-called “deep design” in business—that is, how a company’s relationship to profit, ownership structure, decision-making processes, scope of operations, and size shape its behavior and impacts on the world. Participants will then apply these dimensions to the analysis of specific companies and collectively reflect on what an ideal post-growth enterprise looks like.

Duration: 90 minutes (1 hr 30 min)

Number of participants: 8–30

Tools: flipchart / projector, writing materials,
company names on slips of paper

Tags: criticism, vision, systems thinking

Topic: post-growth entrepreneurship, ownership structure,
relationship to profit, decision-making

Program objectives: Participants will:

- **describe what constitutes a company’s “deep design”** and explain how factors such as the relationship to profit, ownership, or decision-making influence the functioning of a given company,
- **explain how structure influences corporate behavior** and use examples to illustrate why the social impact of companies is not just about individual decisions, but primarily about institutional settings,
- **identify the key characteristics of post-growth enterprises** (such as limiting the extraction of financial value, focusing on needs rather than profit maximization, democratic governance, or community roots)

Introductory framing:

When discussing the transition to a post-growth economic system, the question often arises: what does “post-growth” mean for business and specific companies? Isn’t “post-growth business” an oxymoron? During this workshop, we will examine the fundamental aspects of businesses and what makes them capitalist or post-capitalist/post-growth alternatives.

Brainstorming (10 minutes)

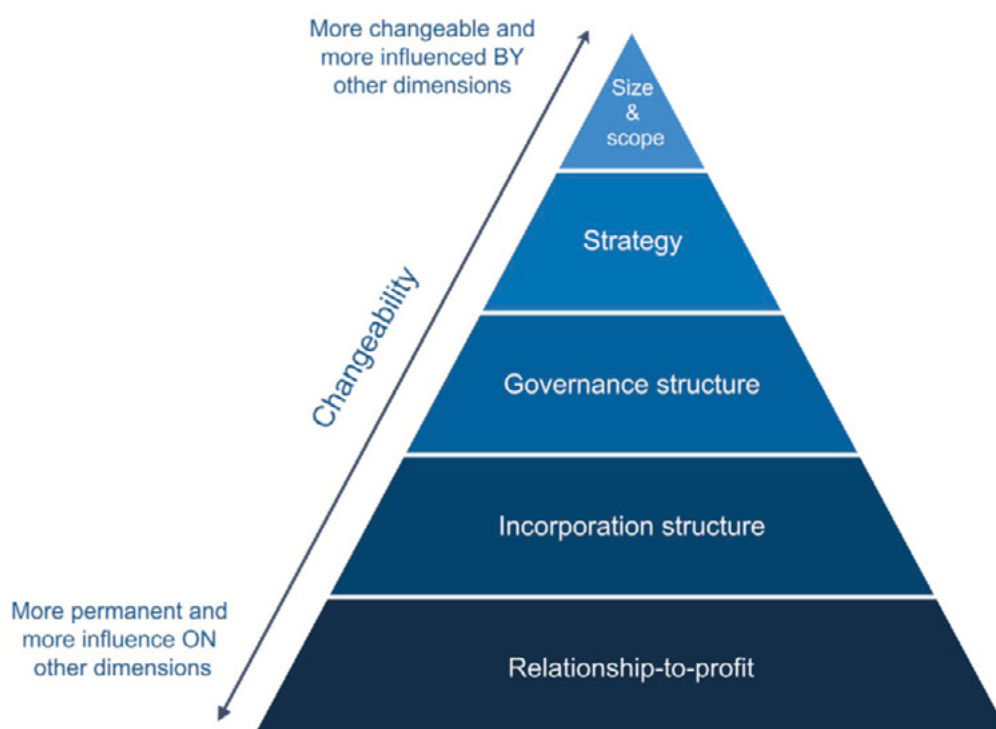
When I say “post-growth business,” what aspects or characteristics come to mind right away?

We’ll collect answers on a flipchart regarding the term “post-growth entrepreneurship” (common answers: it should have a small ecological footprint and an environmentally friendly approach; it shouldn’t be solely profit-driven; it should be small-scale and connected to the local community, etc.).

Presentation of the Pyramid of Key Business Dimensions (10 minutes)

Next, present the pyramid of the five dimensions of business developed by institutional and environmental economist Jennifer Hinton (2021) in “Five Key Dimensions of Post-Growth Business: Putting the Pieces Together*.” Introduce each level of the pyramid, starting from the bottom: begin with the relationship to profit and work your way up. Provide specific, ideally contrasting, examples for each level so that participants gain a deep understanding of these categories. This understanding is key to the next activity.

You can present using a projector, or you can also draw the pyramid on a flipchart.



When discussing the pyramid, it is important to note:

- this “deep design” of a business has a major impact on how that company behaves in the world—for example: if you are a corporation, you are forced to increase profits every year,
- the lower down the pyramid we are, the greater the influence these levels have on other levels of the business, but they are also more resistant to change—for example, the relationship to profit often influences the choice of legal form or specific strategies (e.g., choosing cheap but harmful production processes, etc.),
- efforts to make companies more sustainable, such as Corporate Social Responsibility or ESG, most often focus on lower leverage points without questioning these approaches or mentioning the importance of higher leverage points for change, such as the relationship to profit, legal form, or decision-making mechanisms within a given company,
- it is also crucial to explain exactly what profit means, because many people have different ideas about what profit entails (see Infobox 1 for more details).

Group Work and Deep Design Analysis of Companies (25 minutes)

Divide the group into 6 groups (ideally 3–4 people per group). If your overall group is smaller, you can work with fewer companies so that there are at least three participants in each group. Then ask the groups to draw the name of a company from a slip of paper. They should draw a pyramid on a flipchart and immediately write down what they find out about the company in the levels that most apply. Over the next 20 minutes, each group’s goal is to analyze the selected company in terms of the five business dimensions introduced earlier.

- What is the company’s relationship to profit?
- What is the company’s legal form? Who owns this company?
- Who manages it? What are its decision-making mechanisms?
- How does the company behave? What does it do? (supply chain selection, environmental policies, ethics)
- How big is the company? Where does it operate?

In addition to these 5 dimensions, also consider this question:

- How does what the company does differ from what it says about itself?

The selection of companies for analysis is up to the facilitator, but it should reflect the local conditions of the area where the activity takes place. It is better to highlight local examples so that participants can relate to them, including the impact these companies have in their own country. It is also crucial to select companies that demonstrate diversity in the five-dimensional analysis:

- reflecting different relationships to profit—from companies aiming to maximize their profits, to profitable companies striving to be responsible, to entirely non-profit companies, such as Radically Open Security
- publicly traded companies, privately owned companies, municipal or state-owned companies, cooperatives, and steward-owned companies

List of some of the visionary and inspiring companies:

- Radically Open Security

- Patagonia
- Zeiss Foundation
- Mietshäuser Syndikat
- Som energia
- Glass Cymru

Joint Presentation (20 minutes)

Each group will present its company and its analysis of the five dimensions to the others. Each group will have approximately three minutes. If a group makes a mistake or fails to share key information about the companies, the instructor will ask follow-up questions or clarify and supplement the key aspects as needed.

Discussion and Reflection (15 minutes)

How Structure Influences Corporate Behavior

Begin by reflecting on what participants observed during their analysis of individual companies. Possible questions:

- *How do the deeper layers of a company influence its behavior? Provide specific examples based on the presentations by each group.*
- *Can you give an example from the analyzed companies where the structure almost forces the company to behave in a certain way?*

The goal of this section is for participants to see that, for example, attitudes toward profit, ownership, or decision-making structures significantly influence the strategies companies choose.

Ownership and Legal Structure

Next, focus on the issue of ownership and legal structures of businesses. Possible questions:

- *Does any particular type of ownership or legal structure provide companies with better conditions for acting in the public interest?*
- *Have any forms of ownership been mentioned here that you hadn't heard of before? If so, how do you understand them now?*

The goal of this section is to broaden participants' understanding that there is a wider spectrum of ownership models than just traditional private companies.

The Limits of “Better” Institutional Forms

Finally, it is worth addressing the fact that even “better” institutional arrangements do not automatically guarantee desirable corporate behavior. Possible questions:

- Some companies may have a “better” structure than others. But does that automatically mean they also behave better in the real world?
- For example, if a company is partially state-owned or publicly owned—does that necessarily mean it serves the public interest? (e.g., ČEZ)

The goal of this section is for participants to realize that institutional structures do not guarantee a certain type of behavior, but rather set conditions and incentives that can either encourage or discourage certain types of behavior.

Closing Reflection (10 min)

Ask the group some questions to ponder, let them reflect in silence for a moment, and invite a few participants to share their thoughts:

- *How do you view companies and their social impact after this workshop?*
- *What new insights have you gained?*

Key academic studies related to the topic

Jennifer Hinton (2021) – Five key dimensions of post-growth business: Putting the pieces together

This study introduces the concept of “deep design” in businesses—that is, the deeper structural characteristics that shape their behavior and impacts. Hinton identifies five key dimensions of businesses (relationship to profit, ownership, decision-making, activities, and size) that together determine whether a business reproduces the logic of economic growth or, conversely, creates conditions for post-growth functioning. This framework forms the basis of the entire methodology and serves as an analytical tool for working with specific examples of companies.

Jennifer Hinton (2021) – Fit for purpose? Clarifying the critical role of profit for sustainability

This article focuses on the role of profit in business and demonstrates that it is not neutral—the way profit is defined and utilized fundamentally influences corporate behavior. Hinton distinguishes between different approaches to profit (e.g., profit maximization vs. profit as a means to fulfill a purpose) and demonstrates that the very orientation toward endless profit growth is one of the key factors hindering sustainability. For the methodology, it is particularly important to understand that changing the relationship to profit is one of the most fundamental leverage points for transforming businesses toward a post-growth economy.

Hinton, J. – Why Profit-Driven Business Undermines Sustainability (keynote)

In this lecture, Jennifer Hinton uses tools of systems thinking to demonstrate how the orientation of businesses toward private financial profit—as a key organizational principle of the contemporary economy—leads to environmental degradation, deepening inequalities, the weakening of democracy, and the concentration of market power. She emphasizes that these problems are not primarily the result of individual greed, but stem from the very structure of the system itself. At the same time, Hinton critically examines “corporate social responsibility” approaches that combine profit with positive impact, highlighting their limitations in changing systemic dynamics. As an alternative, he presents models of non-profit and non-extractive enterprises that have the potential to transform the economy toward more sustainable and equitable forms of operation.

⊕ Infobox 1: What Is Profit and Why Is It Important to Distinguish Between Its Meanings

The term “profit” is often used quite casually in discussions about business. In reality, however, it refers to two distinct concepts that have fundamentally different impacts on the functioning of companies and the economy as a whole.

On the one hand, profit can mean a **reinvestable surplus**—that is, the difference between revenues and costs that a company uses to continue operating. Such profit allows businesses to invest in stability, innovation, improving working conditions, or the quality of products and services. In this sense, profit is linked to a company’s ability to operate in the long term and fulfill its purpose.

On the other hand, profit can mean **financial extraction**—that is, money that is siphoned out of the company toward owners or shareholders without being used for its further development. This type of profit creates pressure to constantly increase it, often at the expense of employees, customers, or the environment. At the same time, it limits resources that could otherwise be used to improve the company’s operations or reduce its negative impact.

This ambiguity leads to frequent misunderstandings. For example, when it is said that a company “must be profitable,” it is not always clear whether this refers to the ability to sustain itself and operate (reinvestable profit) or to generate returns for owners (extraction). It is precisely the way a company handles its profits that is one of the key aspects of its “deep design” and significantly influences its impacts on society and the environment.

⊕ Infobox 2: What Is Steward-Ownership and How Does It Relate to Post-Growth?

Steward-ownership is a corporate ownership model that separates control of the company from the right to profits. Unlike conventional companies, where owners both make decisions and are entitled to profits, in steward-ownership the company is managed by people who are responsible for its direction but cannot use it for personal enrichment.

In practice, this means that the company is not owned by investors seeking to maximize returns, but its ownership is “locked in”—often through a foundation, a trust, or a specific equity structure. Decision-making authority lies with so-called stewards, who are typically involved in the company’s operations and are obligated to act in accordance with its purpose. The company may generate profits, but these are not primarily intended for distribution to owners—they serve primarily to support the company’s further development, stability, and fulfillment of its mission.

This model fundamentally changes the motivations and operations of a business. By removing investor pressure to maximize profit and growth, it allows companies to focus on long-term operations, service quality, relationships with employees, and impacts on society and the environment. Steward-ownership thus creates the institutional conditions in which post-growth business is actually possible—that is, business that is not based on constant expansion and value extraction.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that steward ownership does not in itself guarantee “good” corporate behavior. As with other forms of ownership, the structure creates certain conditions and incentives, but the specific outcomes always depend on how the company implements these conditions in practice.

✓ **Facilitator’s note:** This infobox is useful for explaining alternative forms of ownership, especially if participants are not familiar with steward ownership. It helps demonstrate that, in addition to cooperatives, there are models that combine business activities with restrictions on profit extraction. At the same time, steward ownership clearly illustrates the workshop’s main principle: that changing the “deep design” of businesses can fundamentally influence their behavior.

Pirate Care

The topic of care has been taking up more space since the Covid-19 pandemic further exposed weaknesses of life in the current system, or, as authors of the 2020 “The Care Manifesto” claim, highlighted that “our world is one in which carelessness reigns”. Post-growth scholars and activists have also been placing care at the centre of their work of reimagining economy and society, calling for a “care-full radical transformation”. This methodology goes a step further and explores the way collective systems of care have been eroded, defunded and even criminalised, and offers an introduction to solidary initiatives that have sprung up in opposition to contemporary discouragement of care.

Duration: approx. 100 minutes

Number of participants: 8–30

Tools: printed case studies, pens, large paper or flipchart

Tags: working with case studies

Topic: care, capitalism, solidarity, criminalization

Program objectives: Participants will:

- rethink care,
- learn about the concept of “pirate care” and how it responds to mainstream notions of care,
- learn about different forms of self-organised pirate care,
- are empowered to seek out and initiate new types of solidarity.

Opening: What is Pirate care? (30 - 40 min)

Divide the participant into groups of 4-5 people, but paying attention to an even number of groups (groups can also be smaller). Give each group a flipchart paper.

1. Half of the group should think about the term “care” and write down as many associations or meanings of the term as they can come up with, and the other half should do the same with the term “pirate”.
2. After 10-15 minutes, have the groups switch flipchart papers with the other groups, so that those working on the term “care” receive a flipchart with the term “pirate” and vice versa.
3. Ask the groups to try and connect the first term they worked with with the new term they received, and try to find some connections between them. What would “pirate” + “care” entail? Allow 10-15 minutes for this.
4. Ask each group to briefly present their thoughts.
5. Share a definition/explanation of the term “pirate care”. If the time allows, ask the participants if they know any (other) examples of pirate care.

Working with case studies: What can pirate care look like? (45 min)

1. The participants are again in groups of 4 - 5 (groups can stay the same or change) and each group is given one of the 5 case studies. They are asked to read it to themselves. After reading the case study, the groups discuss the case study using the following guiding questions (and any other that might arise from the discussion) (15 min):
 - *How do you feel about the case study / the work of the initiative presented?*
 - *Which lack of care / criminalization of care does it respond to?*
 - *Do you recognize a need for such an initiative in your environment (local or wider)?*
 - *What strikes you the most in the case study?*
2. The participants are now mixed into new groups; each group has all 5 case studies included. (30 min)
 - (A) each participants presents their case study to the rest of the group
 - (B) case studies are briefly discussed using the following guiding question:
 - *Which case study do you find the most relatable/doable/practical and which the most radical/difficult/distant?*

Group discussion and reflection (20 min)

The final round takes the form of popcorn-style sharing. The participants discuss the concept of “pirate care” and the examples shared, but also wider issues of solidarity and have an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings of the workshop. The following questions can be used (as well as any other that might arise from the discussion):

- *How do you now feel about the concept of pirate care?*
- *Has it moved you to rethink your concepts of care under capitalism?*

- Do you better understand the necessity of such initiatives (or not)?
- Which case studies stood out the most to you; what would you particularly like to share about them?
- Can you think of any other existing examples of pirate care in your environment?
- Can you think of any specific issues in your environment that could use pirate care?
- Could you imagine becoming a pirate carer yourself (if you are not one already)? why or why not?

⊕ Infobox 1: What is care?

Some useful definitions of care:

“In the most general sense, care is a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we may live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.”

- Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher. “Toward a feminist theory of caring.”
Circles of care: Work and identity in women’s lives (1990)

“By care, however, we not only mean ‘hands-on’ care, or the work people do when directly looking after the physical and emotional needs of others – critical and urgent as this dimension of caring remains. ‘Care’ is also a social capacity and activity involving the nurturing of all that is necessary for the welfare and flourishing of life. Above all, to put care centre stage means recognising and embracing our interdependencies. In this manifesto we therefore use the term ‘care’ capaciously to embrace familial care, the hands-on care that workers carry out in care homes and hospitals and that teachers do in schools, and the everyday services provided by other essential workers. But it means as well the care of activists in constructing libraries of things, co-operative alternatives and solidarity economies, and the political policies that keep housing costs down, slash fossil fuel use and expand green spaces. Care is our individual and common ability to provide the political, social, material, and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living creatures on this planet to thrive – along with the planet itself.”

- The Care Collective. Andreas Chatzidakis, Jamie Hakim, Jo Littler, Catherine Rottenberg, and Lynne Segal. “The Care Manifesto.” The Politics of Interdependence (2020)

⊕ Infobox 2: What is pirate care?

As defined at the beginning of the Pirate Care Syllabus, Pirate care “primarily considers the assumption that we live in a time in which care, understood as a political and collective capacity of society, is becoming increasingly defunded, discouraged and criminalised. Neoliberal policies have for the last two decades re-organised the basic care provisions that were previously considered cornerstones of democratic life - healthcare, housing, access to knowledge, right to asylum, freedom of mobility, social benefits, etc. - turning them into tools for surveilling, excluding and punishing the most vulnerable. The name Pirate Care refers to those initiatives that have emerged in opposition to such a political climate by self-organising technologically-enabled care & solidarity networks.”

See: <https://syllabus.pirate.care>

Put into simpler terms: because of the way different types of care are increasingly being criminalized (e.g. volunteers are being arrested for giving food to homeless people, sailors

are put on trial for saving refugees from drowning, etc.), some groups are organizing to make sure care still gets to those who need it (people with no access to health care, migrants, LGBTQ+ people, etc.). Pirate care are acts of rebellion that help people who are being left out or ignored. They challenge the unjust systems that separate people into deserving and undeserving of help. A timely example of pirate care the facilitator can give while introducing the concept is the Freedom Flotilla.

“The Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC) is a grassroots people-to-people solidarity movement composed of campaigns and initiatives from different parts of the world, working together to end the illegal Israeli blockade of Gaza.”

See: <https://freedomflotilla.org/who-we-are/>

⊕ **Infobox 3: What is pirate care in opposition to?**

The authors of the book “Pirate Care” call these neoliberal policies (or the system of racialized capitalist patriarchy in general) “Empire”, noting that “Empire was born in colonialism, slavery, and enclosure and matured into an unequal and exploitative system of nation-states. The twenty-first century global Empire emerges out of the withering-away of twentieth-century socialist, anti-colonial, and non-aligned revolutionary worldmaking projects. It reproduces itself through exclusions based on class, race, citizenship, gender, and ability. It coalesces around ever-accelerating forces of capital and its hijacking of technologies that are wrecking the social and ecological conditions that make human and non-human lives livable and joyous.”

Pirate care efforts, therefore, often support people ignored by the neoliberal capitalist Empire’s “matrix of care”, which controls and limits care through the combined power of the state, the market, and the family. It leaves countless people to suffer or die if they fail to meet its expectations or don’t fit into its roles (citizen, worker, consumer, spouse, heir).

“Throughout our lives, we depend on the support of others to sustain ourselves—and the world in which we and future generations have to live. The rollback of reproductive rights, imposition of austerity, and criminalization of solidarity are all examples of how the relations of care are constantly being severed and rearranged to shore up nationalism, patriarchy, and value extraction. In this context, not letting others suffer and die is revolutionary. To stitch these relations of care in new ways that are not amenable to the state, the market, and the family is prefigurative of a world beyond Empire.”

“We propose pirate care not as a distinct definable protocol but a concept to help those already involved and those looking to get involved in defiant practices of solidarity find one another and discover a common vocabulary for what we are doing in a myriad of ways. Unlike those institutions of Empire’s matrix of care, the strengths of pirate care are its multiplicity, plasticity, opacity, and capacity to adapt to local conditions, contexts, and opportunities. Still, we contend that organized acts of disobedient care constitute a political formation that is more than the sum of its constituent parts. We join many radical thinkers in insisting that social and ecological reproduction will be the crucial theater of struggles to come.”

“As the social fabric continues to fray and the criminalization of care escalates, pirate carers are demonstrating the radical shifts in solidarity that will be crucial for survival and our ability to thrive together. Soon, we might all need to become pirate carers, or we risk becoming complicit in the destruction of the social and natural world. Understanding and learning from these carers isn’t just about envisioning a better world; it’s about preparing for the unavoidable struggles ahead.”

See: Valeria Graziano, Marcell Mars and Tomislav Medak. “Pirate Care.” *Acts Against the Criminalization of Solidarity* (2025)

The Hologram

The Hologram is a platform for grassroots care created in 2017 by Cassie Thornton as an art project and now run collectively, which uses both online and in-person meetings to challenge the capitalist system of care.

It is a seemingly simple method, in which three people meet with and support a fourth, and it was inspired by a practice developed in one of the more radical Greek Solidarity Clinics. In 2011, a clinic in Thessaloniki began an experiment where each new participant met at the same time with a doctor, a therapist, and a social worker or community activist. These three people held a shared conversation with the “incomer” (a term chosen to avoid traditional labels like “patient”) in order to build a more complete, “three-dimensional” understanding of the factors affecting their well-being, taking into account not only physical health but also their psychological, social, and political conditions.

The Hologram method starts with one person (the hologram) inviting three others (the triangle), who may be friends, acquaintances, or even strangers, to commit to supporting her through regular meetings focused on her physical, emotional, and social well-being.

As Thornton describes it, “The Hologram as a method of organized social care and collective liberation. In a world where caring is criminalized when not performed by the proper authorities, while racial capitalism ensures that everyone is a little sick, we need pirate practices that do not comply with the for-profit, nationalist, carceral healthcare systems.

This peer to peer practice offers a structured set of instructions for how to distribute the labour of care and to reveal that everyone is a healer and can be healed. We can produce health with stuff we have, hidden in plain sight. It is a pirate practice in that it is proactive and disobedient, it is a formalization of what people already know what to do - it just gives us permission and helps us remember how. It does so with a wish to create a network of healthy and cooperative people who can use their collective power to demolish capitalism and to build a new world.

Capitalism is not only an economic system, it’s a cultural and social system as well, which deeply influences how we relate to one another, how we interact, how we imagine ourselves and one another, even how we talk and feel.

The Hologram is also a delivery mechanism for ideas about how we can reinvent our world by developing new daily habits that incorporate radical re-interpretations of these four themes: trust, wishes, time and patterns.”

In practice, this is how a Hologram works:

“A triangle consists of three people who accept an invitation from a hologram to make a formal commitment to supporting her health by participating in seasonal meetings. In these meetings, each member of the triangle focuses on one of the three aspects of her health: physical, psychic, social. The job of each member of the triangle is to ask really good questions, help identify the hologram’s patterns, and to support her with co-research and indepth knowledge of her health when she needs to make big decisions.

The hologram’s job is to facilitate a conversation with three people who have accepted

her invitation to join the triangle. Unlike a patient being treated by a doctor, a hologram’s role is like that of a teacher, helping the Triangle to understand how she achieves her healthiest possible state and also recognize their own patterns, needs and wishes in contrast and conversation.

The hologram shares their personal stories, their powers of communication, and their well-articulated vulnerability to teach the triangle how to care for and with her. She shows great respect and gratitude for the members of the triangle, and is also observant of their needs and desires, helping them to become better at offering useful questions.

Reciprocation is somewhat automatic in this project, but is not a one-for-one exchange, like paying for a hot dog. For The Hologram project to really work, every person must be a hologram as well as a member of someone else's triangle (not for someone in your triangle, though). The most important healing that you will receive from this project is when you successfully care for someone else. This networked reciprocation means that you will not be directly giving back what you receive from your triangle, but you will be a part of a larger cycle of reciprocation and the production of health, which can never be transactional. For this reason, it is the calling of each hologram to proactively help her triangle all find their own triangles and become holograms themselves. She must also seek to become part of a triangle for someone not in her triangle."

Sea-Watch

The Central Mediterranean is the deadliest border in the world. Official figures show that more than 2,000 people are allowed to drown each year by the European Union, though many deaths are never recorded. This is possible because the EU countries have shut down safe and legal routes for people fleeing war, slavery, torture, rape, inhuman treatment and other forms of violence, as well as economic hardship and insecurity.

Like the pirates of the 1700s, today's search-and-rescue "pirates" in the Central Mediterranean have built and adapted strong technological systems to provide care at sea. Sea-Watch runs a 14-meter speedboat called Aurora, two reconnaissance planes, Seabird 1 and 2, and a 58-meter ship, Sea-Watch 5, which can carry up to 500 people. Sea-Watch works together with Alarm Phone, a hotline that alerts coast guards and civilian rescuers to migrants in danger, as well as Médecins Sans Frontières and other activist groups trying to prevent deaths in the Mediterranean.

Sea-Watch became especially visible in 2019, when the captain of Sea-Watch 3, Carola Rackete, docked at the Italian island of Lampedusa without permission. In a video message announcing the docking, she said, "I know this is risky and that I will probably lose the boat, but the shipwrecked on board are exhausted. I will bring them to safety. Their life is more important than political games." A military patrol boat tried to block the ship, causing a collision. Matteo Salvini, Italy's Deputy Prime Minister at the time, later described the act as "an act of war." The ship eventually docked, and the migrants were allowed to disembark.

Rackete was arrested and charged with helping illegal immigration and resisting a warship, facing up to ten years in prison. Salvini, strongly criticized her, calling her actions "piracy" and labeling her a "potential murderer," an "outlaw," and a "showoff." The intense attacks from far-right groups forced Rackete to go into hiding for a while. In the end, the court ruled in her favor, confirming that her duty as captain was to protect the lives of those on board. Her lawyer then filed a lawsuit against Salvini for aggravated defamation.

The Sea-Watch's rescue system depends on many volunteers and a smaller group of trained professionals, including captains, engineers, medics, psychotherapists, translators who speak non-European languages, media workers, and migrant rights advocates. Their work is supported by thousands of people who contribute money and other resources.

To support both the crew and the rescued during long periods at sea and delays in ports, Sea-Watch activists have created shared practices and rules of mutual care—what they call "technologies of care." By using the word "technologies," they mean more than machines. They refer

to a wider set of tools created together, such as agreements, routines, ideas, and decision-making processes that make cooperation possible, help sustain life, and support freedom. These forms of organization are as important as physical equipment.

In an (auto-)ethnographic account written for the Pirate Care Syllabus, Sea-Watch members Morana Miljanović and Christian Grodotzki describe five key care practices on board: a buddy system where crew members support each other; psychological support before and after each mission; sharing skills among the crew; collective cleaning and maintenance of the ship; and a detailed plan for caring for the rescued.

Although life on the ship requires clear roles and responsibilities, Sea-Watch also tries to reduce the divide between “hosts” (the crew) and “guests” (the rescued). They do this through daily meetings and by involving rescued people in activities such as looking for boats in distress with binoculars, helping with maintenance, and preparing meals. Systems of oppression often depend on fixed roles of who is a caregiver and who is to be cared for. By breaking down these divisions, people on board challenge that logic and demonstrate a different way of sharing care and responsibility.

Pirate kindergartens

Kindergartens are interesting places to examine through a pirate care perspective, as early childhood education is controlled by the state and often targeted by religious groups as spaces for recruitment. At the same time, a growing market profits from parents’ fears and hopes, encouraging them to treat their children as investments and to make sacrifices in order to place them in highly ranked schools that promise better prospects. This trend reinforces racial and class inequalities. During periods of austerity, more children are excluded even from public kindergartens, as public education systems struggle under funding cuts. These cuts lead to overworked teachers, poor infrastructure, and fewer services for children with different needs.

This situation has renewed interest in shared, community-based ways of caring for young children, especially among those whose families are excluded from mainstream systems in one or more ways: by not meeting bureaucratic requirements for public kindergarten access, often due to lack of legal status or limited availability; by not earning enough to afford private childcare; or by living outside traditional family models, such as in queer families or collectives.

One response is Soprasotto, a self-organized kindergarten founded in Milan in 2013, inspired by earlier feminist initiatives like the self-managed Porta Ticinese kindergarten from the 1970s. Soprasotto brings together educators, parents, and children. The collective published an online guide called “How to Build a Pirate Kindergarten in Your Neighbourhood,” which helps others build similar projects. It offers advice on shared decision-making and reflective practices, as well as practical guidance on navigating complex and costly legal requirements that can otherwise make such community childcare difficult.

In Barcelona, a related practice known as *grupos de crianza compartida* (shared parenting groups) has become more common, forming informal networks for collective childcare. These groups respond to the urgent needs of precarious and migrant parents who are excluded from public services and cannot afford private options. Despite their importance, they face a difficult situation: when applying for funding, they are often rejected for not being diverse enough in terms of class or background, or not meeting certain feminist criteria, since many are primarily run by mothers. This kind of bureaucratic gatekeeping shows the conflicting expectations placed on such initiatives, where their transformative potential is overlooked.

A clear example of the challenges within these efforts is Koko Lepo, an autonomous kindergarten active in Belgrade from 2013 to 2016. It was created through collaboration between anarchist activists from the InexFilm squat in the Karaburma neighborhood and Roma families from the nearby informal settlement of Deponija mahala. The project aimed to bridge deep social, racial, and class divisions, but faced internal and external difficulties. Some members of the InexFilm group prioritized cultural work and did not recognize the importance of a children's program. At the same time, critics argued that Koko Lepo was providing a "service" to Roma people, which risked reproducing paternalism and unequal power relations. Even so, its decision not to register as an official NGO helped maintain accountability in a context shaped by strong anti-Romani discrimination.

In other places, childcare has been reimagined as an important part of political protest, such as during the 2020 Yard Movement in Minsk, Belarus. As one anonymous participant described, people would leave their children in one apartment and take turns caring for them, allowing others time to join protests, work, or support family members.

The Yard Movement grew during the anti-government protests in Belarus in 2020, creating a strong network of mutual care in response to both political repression and the COVID-19 pandemic. Named after the courtyards of Minsk's residential areas, the movement began when the government shut down the internet on August 9, 2020, prompting people to gather outside to share information. As authorities blocked central public spaces and suppressed dissent, activities shifted to decentralized neighborhood gatherings. Events in these courtyards were not always openly political but focused on supporting the community's shared vulnerabilities. They included concerts, games, readings, tea gatherings, and childcare, showing how these local networks aimed not only to resist pressure but also to create moments of joy.

Pirate Care Syllabus

Within social movements, #syllabi - such as #StandingRockSyllabus, #FergusonSyllabus, etc - function as a form of collective care for what radical pedagogy theorists call "really-useful knowledge," or knowledge that can be used to challenge oppression.

The #PirateCareSyllabus is another example of this type of knowledge, and the authors of "Pirate Care" describe its creation like this:

"In our own practice with the Pirate Care Syllabus, we aimed to create a learning resource that brings together pragmatic knowledge and situated analysis from diverse repressed care practices, ranging from housing struggles and transhackfeminism to peer-to-peer health support, migrant rescue missions, and digital piracy. Our wager has been that these practices can juxtapose themselves and connect, learning from antagonism to antagonism, transferring fire to fire, passing knowledge from militant to militant, to compose an ecosystem of federated mutualisms.

While inspired by #syllabi, we wanted to guard against their ephemerality. Since they rely on corporate social media platforms, their longevity is often uncertain, and because they are often created with the haste of an urgent moment, their creators don't always think in long-term ways about sustaining websites or databases. Many links in the #syllabic created over the past decade no longer work, or the material has disappeared behind paywalls. While #syllabi resemble other ephemeral social movement media like pamphlets, zines, and blogs, in the tradition of radical archivists, we strive to preserve these resources to maintain intergenerational connections between past experiences and contemporary struggles.

With the Pirate Care Syllabus, we worked together with a small crew of pirate care practitioners to digitize and preserve their educational tools in plaintext, HTML, and PDF formats (which have proved most resilient to digital decay) using a free software platform we built called Sandpoints.

It might not last forever, but certainly longer than the self-made websites or social media platforms running on corporate server clouds. The majority of resources referenced in #syllabi were originally locked behind paywalls, including digital books, academic texts, and newspaper articles. To break down these barriers, we've embedded a digital library within the Pirate Care Syllabus on Sandpoints, offering all the referred-to documents, books, and articles for free in PDF format. Both the syllabus and the associated library can be downloaded as a static website to a USB drive to be used locally, whether in a prison, a remote encampment of water protectors, or anywhere else internet access is limited or surveilled.

We wanted to launch and enrich the Pirate Care Syllabus during a gathering we planned for 2020, a summer camp for pirate carers on an island, where people could learn together and expand the syllabus. But the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic made that impossible. However, as the topics of care and disobedience became more important than ever, the Pirate Care Syllabus was autonomously picked up, used, and transformed by others in ways we could not have expected. It was a reminder that decentralized popular pedagogies have a life of their own and that while local realities may differ, people are oppressed by the same systemic forces.”

GynePunk collective

In the Catalanian mountains west of Barcelona operates the GynePunk collective, formed within Calafou, a post-capitalist, eco-industrial community. Known for its creative spaces, Calafou includes a woodworking studio, a foundry, and the Pechblenda Biotranslab hackerspace. Starting from the idea that “transhackfeminists” were not paying enough attention to the body, GynePunk explores queer activism, biohacking, and the maker movement. With a strong focus on autonomy and self-care, the group develops open-source hardware for self-diagnosis. Their projects include 3D-printed speculums for self-managed Pap smears and a range of DIY lab devices, cleverly repurposed from discarded technology such as hard-drive motors and webcams.

GynePunk’s work echoes feminist self-help practices from the late 1960s and 1970s in the United States that later spread worldwide. Many of these efforts focused on reproductive and sexual health, offering community-led DIY gynecological exams, Pap smears, and methods like “menstrual extraction” to ease painful periods, skip them, or carry out early abortions. In feminist spaces for discussion, healing, and knowledge-sharing, such as the consultori feminist centers in Italy (often self-managed at first), health justice was closely linked with conversations about pleasure and self-care strategies.

In 2015, GynePunk introduced a biolab emergency kit for DIY biohacking. This kit allows users to analyze body fluids such as blood, urine, and vaginal secretions. The broader goal is to build a full emergency gynecological toolkit. It has huge potential not only for marginalized groups like migrants who are often denied health insurance or those held in refugee detention centers, but also for sex workers and non-binary people who often face discrimination in healthcare. Members of GynePunk use and promote the kit in educational workshops, often held in cultural and art spaces.

Beyond these practical tools, the collective also rethinks ideas of sexuality, drawing inspiration from Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens’s ecosexual approach, which aims to “degenitalize” sexuality and expand sensual and healing relationships to ecosystems. They engage with post-porn theory and run workshops on “dildomancy,” where participants learn to make natural lubricants and use herbal remedies for vaginal health, reviving older West Indian herbal practices that support or trigger menstruation.

In this way, GynePunk offers an alternative model for reshaping social life through a hands-on and accessible political practice. Their work challenges common divisions such as traditional versus modern medicine, productive versus reproductive labor, natural versus manufactured materials, technical versus political knowledge, and engineered versus wild bodies. This approach is reflected in their writings, zines, and interviews, where they describe combining mechanical, synthetic, in vitro, and even biogenetic methods to redefine themselves as an “insurrectionary socially-reproductive cyborg class.”

Paula Pin, a member of the group, explains that body-hacking allows GynePunk participants to see their bodies as “a technology to be hacked,” exploring everything from fixed ideas of gender and sex to developing their own forms of knowledge and tools. Another member, Kinki Klau, argues that gynecology must be decolonized, pointing to its roots in the violent experiments carried out by J. Marion Sims, often called the father of modern gynecology, on enslaved Black teenage girls, which led to the development of modern instruments like the speculum. Although members of GynePunk have since moved on to other projects, their work helps us imagine new ways of resisting the systems of capitalist production and their influence over reproductive labor, both physical and social.

Strategies of Transformation

This methodology offers participants a cognitive map for thinking about systemic change in a post-growth context. It shows that a profound transformation of the economy does not arise from a single strategy, but rather from a combination of different approaches - building alternatives, advocating for non-reformist reforms, and building movements. These strategies can reinforce one another, but they can also create tension. The methodology helps us understand why it is not enough to simply create examples of good practice; we must also work with power and political institutions if we want to bring about change on a larger scale. At the same time, it raises the question of how to overcome conflicts between individual strategies and, instead of competing, seek meaningful combinations of them. The personal level is also an important component: participants have the opportunity to relate the individual strategies to themselves, realize which ones resonate most with them, and identify where they can play a role in the ecosystem of systemic change.

Duration: 90 minutes (1 hour and 30 minutes)

Number of participants: 8-30 participants

Tools: projector, computer, flipchart paper, markers, downloaded presentation

Tags: group work, strategy

Topic: building utopias, reforms that aren't really reforms, confrontational movements

Program objectives:

- **Understanding different strategies for systemic change:** Participants will gain a basic understanding of how to think about changing the economic system - what approaches exist, how they differ, and what their advantages and limitations are.
- **Analyze the relationships between strategies:** Participants will be able to describe how individual strategies can reinforce one another (synergies) or undermine one another (risks), and identify these tensions using specific examples.
- **Relate the strategy to your own role:** Participants reflect on which strategies resonate with them personally, what appeals to them, and where they can leverage their strengths within the ecosystem of systemic change.

Program implementation

Introductory Context:

If we want to strive for a more profound transformation of the economic system, it makes sense to look at how people have attempted to bring about change in the past—and what we can learn from their strategies today. Various movements that have responded to injustice, exploitation, or environmental crises have employed different approaches to achieving change. Within the post-growth movement, the debate on strategies draws primarily on the work of sociologist Erik Olin Wright. Based on historical experience, he distinguishes three basic types of strategies for systemic change. We will now briefly introduce these strategies so that we can work with them further.

Strategies for systemic change - ➤ Presentation (15 minutes):

1. Building alternatives (nowtopias, from the English “interstitial strategy”)

This strategy involves creating alternative institutions and practices today - “in the cracks of the system.” These are what are known as “real utopias”: existing or emerging forms of organization that operate on principles different from those of the dominant economy - such as co-operation, solidarity, or democracy. The goal is not to wait for the system to change, but to begin putting it into practice here and now.

Examples:

- cooperatives
- community energy
- food initiatives (community-supported agriculture)
- shared and commons-based projects

This strategy draws heavily on the anarchist tradition—it emphasizes change from below and outside the state.

2. Non-reformists reforms (symbiotic strategies)

This strategy seeks to bring about change through existing institutions, particularly through the state and public policies. However, these are not ordinary reforms that merely “fix” the system, but rather ones that gradually undermine its logic of growth and open up space for deeper transformation. The goal is to use existing structures to bring about change that will bring us closer to a world where everyone’s needs are met within planetary boundaries.

Examples:

- reducing working hours
- strengthening public services
- regulating corporations
- decommodification policies (e.g., affordable housing)

This strategy uses the state as an instrument of change.

3. Ruptural Strategy (Building Movements and Conflict)

This strategy relies on collective action and direct pressure on power structures. It is the most confrontational and directly challenges the interests of those in power. It challenges the legitimacy of the current system and seeks to shift the social consensus. Without this pressure, fundamental changes often do not occur.

Examples:

- protest movements (e.g., the climate movement)
- workers’ strikes
- direct actions against corporations or institutions

This strategy brings the group into open conflict with the state or economic powers.

After the presentation, ask the participants if they have any questions and allow time for them to be answered.

Which strategy is the most effective? (10 minutes):

Then ask the participants to stand up. Write the names of the three strategies on pieces of paper and arrange them in a triangle around the room.

Explain to the group that they should position themselves according to which strategy they find most relevant and effective for today. Based on this, the group will split into three groups - it is not possible to stand “somewhere in between”; everyone must now choose one strategy. In smaller groups, they will then have 8 minutes to discuss why they think their strategy is the best and what advantages it has over the others. If there are more than 5 people in the group, it is advisable to divide it into smaller subgroups so that everyone has a chance to participate.

Questions for discussion:

- *Why did I choose this particular strategy?*

- In what ways do I think it's better than the others?

Identifying synergies and risks (25 minutes)

Preparing the flipcharts before the activity: Prepare a matrix to be filled in on the flipchart. The matrix has three rows and three columns. In the top left corner, the strategy of the given group is written, and next to it are the names of two other strategies to which they relate.

The rows have the following headings:

- Potential synergies
- Potential risks

Flipchart for the group: Building alternatives (nowtopias)

Building alternatives	Non-reformists reforms	Building protest movements
Potential synergies		
Potential risks		

Flipchart for the group: Non-reformists reforms

Non-reformists reforms	Building protest movements	Building alternatives
Potential synergies		
Potential risks		

Flipchart for the group: Building protest movements (people power)

Building protest movements	Building alternatives	Non-reformists reforms
Potential synergies		
Potential risks		

The goal is to form groups of 4-5 people and give each group a flipchart with the strategy they identified as the most effective. If there are more participants for a particular strategy (e.g., around 10), divide them into two smaller groups and give each its own flipchart. Smaller groups will allow everyone to participate in the discussion.

Group assignment: Consider how the other two types of strategies can support your own strategy - that is, where synergies might arise between them. At the same time, identify ways in which they might pose a threat or present a risk to you. Do not discuss the general pros and cons of individual strategies. Instead, always view the given strategies from the perspective of your own. You have 20 minutes for the discussion. Write down the individual synergies and risks in a way that is understandable to others who are not in your group.

For example: if we are an “utopia-building” group, we ask:

- In what ways can the strategy of confrontational movements be useful to us?

- *In what ways, on the other hand, might it pose a threat or a risk to us?*

In this way, we analyze the relationships between strategies, not the strategies themselves.

Also remind participants to use concrete examples as much as possible. For example: Imagine I'm setting up an energy cooperative - how might a climate movement that blocks fossil fuel infrastructure be useful to me? A discussion based on specific situations is more productive, more applicable, and easier for others to understand. If you stay on a very abstract level, it's harder for some people to engage, and the debate tends to be less lively.

Ask the group to choose one person to present the findings at the end (about 3 minutes).

✓ **Facilitator's tip:** As they work, walk around among the groups and make sure they are really focusing on the relationships between the strategies (synergies and risks), not just on the general pros and cons of each strategy.

Group presentations (15 minutes):

Before the presentations, remind the participants to always illustrate general principles with specific examples. It is much easier for the audience to understand and more interesting when statements are grounded in real-world examples.

Example:

- **General statement:** Building a movement can polarize society and prevent certain reforms from being implemented.
- **To give a concrete example:** Building a movement can polarize society and hinder the implementation of certain reforms—for example, when the climate movement blocks fossil fuel infrastructure or organizes radical protests against mining, it can provoke a strong backlash from parts of the public and political actors. They may then reject even more moderate measures, such as regulating energy companies or supporting renewable energy sources, because they perceive them as part of an “overly radical agenda.”

Each group has about 3 minutes for their presentation. Afterward, the other groups will have a chance to ask any questions they may have.

Reflection (20 minutes)

Activity overview

- What insights did you gain about the strategies of change during the discussions and presentations?
- Which strategy do you think is the best? (The objective here is to demonstrate that all strategies are necessary—although their significance may vary depending on the context. For instance, during periods of relative stability, building alternatives might be the most logical approach, while in times of crisis, applying pressure through movements and pushing for non-reformist reforms is often more effective.)
- Did any controversial issues or disagreements arise?

- Do you now view some strategies differently than you did at the beginning?

Generalization

- Which of these strategies do you think is most lacking in the Czech Republic?
- What strategies make sense to adopt, for example, during an energy crisis (or other current situation)?

Reflection through individual writing

- Where do I see my role in these transformation strategies?

First, let the participants answer individually through a short writing exercise. Afterwards, they can share in pairs, and optionally with the whole group, what they are taking away from the activity.

Key academic studies and books related to the topic

Wright, E. O. (2010). *Envisioning Real Utopias*

Wright presents an influential typology of strategies for systemic change that helps move beyond the simplistic “reform vs. revolution” dichotomy. He distinguishes three complementary approaches - building alternatives, non-reformist reforms, and mobilization (ruptural) strategies - and demonstrates that historical change arises from their combination. A key contribution is the emphasis on “real utopias”: existing or conceivable institutions that disrupt the logic of capitalism while remaining practically feasible. The text provides a powerful analytical framework for thinking about strategies for change as an ecosystem, rather than as competing paths.

Barlow et al. (2022) *Degrowth & Strategy*

This publication explores strategic thinking on post-growth transformation in the context of the ecological crisis and builds on Wright’s typology. It emphasizes that no single strategy is sufficient and that consciously combining them is key (the “both/and” approach). The text emphasizes decommodification, care, and the reproductive sphere as the core of transformation, while also reflecting on the power struggles that inevitably accompany change. It is valuable in that it links abstract strategic frameworks to specific sectors (energy, housing, labor) and demonstrates what a coordinated post-growth strategy might look like in practice.

From Enterprise to System: Scaling Cooperatives

How can cooperatives and the solidarity economy develop in a way that prevents them from becoming mere isolated islands within the capitalist economy? This workshop will present five case studies from different parts of the world—from northern Italy to Uruguay and Kerala, India, to Preston, England, and present-day Budapest. Participants will explore together the role played by the broader ecosystem of cooperation in the development of cooperatives: relationships between cooperatives, support from labor unions, municipal governments, or the state. The goal of the workshop is to shift the perspective from individual enterprises to the broader structures that enable cooperatives to grow, collaborate, and transform the economy over the long term.

Duration: 90 minutes (1 hour 30 minutes)

Participants: 8–30

Tools: printed case studies, writing materials, paper

Tags: working with case studies, vision, strategy

Topic: cooperatives, scaling, solidarity economy

Program objectives:

Participants will:

- identify and analyze the barriers that hinder the creation and development of cooperatives and other non-capitalist enterprises (e.g., financial, legal, cultural, or institutional),
- understand that the development of cooperatives depends not only on the establishment of individual enterprises, but also on a broader institutional and political ecosystem that includes collaboration with actors such as cities, labor unions, civic initiatives, or the state,
- be able to describe specific strategies and mechanisms that have contributed to the development and scaling of cooperatives in various contexts (e.g., public procurement, the role of trade unions, municipal policy, cooperation among cooperatives),
- be able to reflect on what strategies, allies, or institutions could support the development of cooperatives in their own region or context.

Program Implementation

Introductory Framing:

In this analysis, we now want to move from the company level to broader systems and specific strategies that can be successful in scaling and growing post-growth enterprises—that is, enterprises that are primarily non-profit in nature, where profit is not the goal but a means to an end, ownership is shared, and businesses are managed democratically (details on post-growth enterprises can be found in the Post-Growth Entrepreneurship methodology).

Evocation (15 minutes)

Ask the whole group: *Why do you think there aren't more cooperatives or other non-capitalist enterprises? What are the barriers to their spread? If you wanted to start such an enterprise, what obstacles would you likely encounter?*

Write down the answers on a flipchart. Typical barriers might include:

- low awareness of cooperatives
- lack of funding
- competitive pressure from for-profit companies
- legal barriers, it's more difficult to set them up
- lack of experience
- a dominant culture of individualism

You will use this list in the next part of the workshop.

Working with Case Studies (20 minutes)

Framing: *While discussions about post-growth enterprises are relatively new in society, criticism of traditional profit-maximizing private companies has a long history. People in various parts of the world have sought to meet their needs through cooperatives. Therefore, if we are thinking about expanding post-growth*

enterprises, it can be very inspiring for us to look at places where the cooperative economy is thriving and to learn from its strategies in our own context.

We will then divide the group into five groups of ideally equal size, as we will be working with five case studies. Each group will receive a sufficient number of copies of one case study.

Instructions for groups: Read the case study together and then discuss the following questions:

- What interested you most about this case study?
- What specific strategies helped the development or spread of cooperatives in this case?
- Which barriers from our list do these strategies help overcome? How?

Each group member will write down specific strategies on a Post-it note. You will then use these to share during the next group activity, where you will be in different groups.

Encourage the group to be as specific as possible. You can also support this by walking among the groups during the activity and making sure their strategies are specific enough. If they aren't, there's a good chance the other groups won't understand how the strategy works.

- e.g., instead of "public contracts" -> anchor institutions set public procurement rules so that local cooperatives can win them
- e.g., instead of "financial support" -> members of such a federation contribute 3% of their profits to a fund to support the creation of new cooperatives

Sharing in Mixed Groups (30 minutes)

Form new groups of five so that each group includes a person with a different case study. To speed up the process of forming new groups, you can, for example, mark the case studies with a symbol or distribute them on colored boards right away, so that by the end, the groups will include all the case studies.

Each person will briefly present their case study to the others and also present the specific dissemination strategies that their group identified using Post-its. They will then explain to the others which barriers from the flipchart these strategies help to overcome.

Finally, try to create a list of financial, institutional, or legislative strategies, or collaborations with specific stakeholders, that enable us to overcome the barriers we identified earlier.

List of strategies:

- financial strategies
 - cooperative financial institutions (Italy) – members of the federation contribute 3% of their profits to a fund designed to support the creation of new cooperatives, the conversion of conventional capitalist enterprises into cooperatives, or the expansion of existing cooperatives
 - cooperative insurance companies (Italy)
 - low-interest government loans (Uruguay)
- legislative strategies
 - a law exempting cooperatives' undistributed profits held in reserve funds from corporate tax (Italy)
- institutional strategies
 - cooperative federations (Italy) – tax advice, accounting, legal advice, consultations on workplace safety, collective bargaining, or investments

- training centers (Italy), cooperative incubator (Hungary)
- cooperative federations (Uruguay)
- anchor institutions and progressive use of public procurement (England)
- Preston Cooperative Development Network – connecting existing cooperatives in the region and supporting the creation of new ones (England)
- Ministry of Cooperation (Kerala) – drafted key cooperative legislation to support the professionalization of cooperatives, their financial stability, and the development of technological innovations
- collaboration with specific stakeholders
 - Solidarity-based value chains (Italy) – which enable the maximization of value circulation within the cooperative ecosystem and prevent value leakage outside of it
 - Cooperation with the labor movement (Uruguay, Hungary)

Reflection (25 minutes)

Now let's revisit the barriers we identified and the strategies you found in the case studies that help overcome them. We'll go through each barrier one by one and have the group explain which strategies help overcome them.

Then ask: *Which actors were key in which of these case studies?*

Possible answers:

- an active civil society group in Budapest
- unions in Uruguay
- cooperatives -> a cooperative federation in Italy
- the Labour Party in Preston
- unions and a political party in Kerala

✓ **Facilitator's tip:** Here, you can also highlight the fact that these actors have varying degrees of power in different situations. For example, in Budapest, efforts to promote cooperatives are just beginning, while elsewhere (Kerala, Preston), political parties that actively support cooperatives are in power.

To wrap things up, ask two reflective questions in pairs:

- *Which case study offers the most relevant inspiration for your local context, and why? What could we apply here?*
- *What are you taking away from this session on strategies for scaling post-capitalist enterprises?*

Let 3 to 5 people share their thoughts.

Case Study I – Northern Italy: An Ecosystem Instead of a Monolith

Emilia-Romagna is a region in Northern Italy with nearly five million inhabitants. The importance of cooperatives in the local economy of this region is enormous: **over 40% of GDP is generated by cooperatives**, which operate in nearly every sector of the economy. In Bologna, the regional center, two out of three people are members of at least one cooperative. Their well-connected network shows how economic cooperation can thrive and create a parallel structure to corporate capitalism.

Cooperativism in Italy has deep roots going back to the 19th century, with origins in both Christian thought (with its emphasis on cooperation as a fundamental aspect of human relations) and the tradition of socialism. Emilia-Romagna therefore had an active cooperative network even before World War II. Emilia-Romagna was the most devastated Italian region during World War II, and after its end, the left came to power and actively supported cooperatives. Cooperatives further strengthened their position when the then government affirmed their importance with a new article in the constitution about cooperatives and their role in society, and ensured state support for them.

In 1977, the Italian state adopted a **law exempting undivided cooperative profits held in reserve funds from corporate tax**. This measure significantly supported the self-financing of cooperative federations and syndicates and contributed to the **creation of cooperative financial and insurance institutions as well as development and training centers**, which allowed cooperatives to continue to multiply.

Diversity and balanced representation of different sectors and areas is the foundation of success in the Northern Italian example. Four types of cooperatives operate concurrently here:

1. **User cooperatives** bring together people who want to use or purchase a product or service more advantageously together. They are typical for retail networks, insurance, credit, or housing. Consumer cooperatives of the Lega federation are the largest retail network in all of Italy. This category also includes housing cooperatives.
1. **Producer cooperatives** bring together small individual producers so they can sell their products under one cooperative brand, which facilitates distribution, promotion, and processing. This includes agricultural cooperatives.
1. **Worker cooperatives** refer to cooperative enterprises that are directly owned by the workers, who also participate in their management.
1. **Social cooperatives** offer social services for different types of disadvantaged people. They bring together social workers who want to help the community or meet individual needs in a democratic environment, and connect them with their clients. At the same time, they employ people with various types of disadvantages.

A key factor is that cooperation in the Northern Italian cooperative model does not only mean cooperation within cooperatives, but also between cooperatives – as prescribed by the sixth cooperative principle. This cooperation manifests in many ways.

Cooperatives in the same region or economic sector further associate into so-called secondary cooperatives, which are a typical asset of the Northern Italian model. Similarly oriented cooperatives join together for the purpose of cooperation into federations and associations and create

shared infrastructure. **Cooperative federations** offer their members services such as tax consulting, accounting, legal advice, consulting on occupational safety, collective bargaining, or investments.

Cooperatives also create **solidarity-based value chains** among themselves, which allow for the maximization of value circulation within the cooperative ecosystem and the prevention of value leakage outside it. This enables them to keep a large part of the local economy under control outside the capitalist market – and to face capitalist competition. For example, agricultural cooperatives supply local parmesan primarily to consumer cooperative stores with which they have good relationships. Such a relationship allows them to avoid profit-oriented intermediaries and maximize benefits for small farmers on one side and consumers on the other.

Finally, cooperatives also build **cooperative financial institutions**. This allows them to become independent from capitalist banks and to develop different parts of the local economy according to their own needs, rather than according to what is profitable for distant shareholders and investors. These institutions include cooperative development funds, managed by one of the cooperative federations. Members of such a federation contribute 3% of their profits to the fund to support the creation of new cooperatives, the transformation of regular capitalist businesses into cooperatives, or the expansion of existing cooperatives. Cooperative banks provide their members with favorable loans to develop their activities and at the same time guarantee ethical investment of savings. There are also cooperative insurance companies, founded by a group of cooperatives to insure their members, which also offer complementary forms of life or accident insurance. Some large Italian cooperative insurance companies (for example, Unipol) also invest their reserves into further development of cooperatives.

Source

Zamagni, Vera. “Learning from Emilia Romagna’s Cooperative Economy.” 2016.

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Case Study II – Uruguay: Mutual Aid Out of the Housing Crisis

The Uruguayan Federation of Housing Cooperatives, FUCVAM (Federación Uruguaya de Cooperativas de Vivienda por Ayuda Mutua), was established in 1970 as an association of cooperatives whose members build their homes collectively and own them jointly. The foundation works on the principle of mutual aid: members of the cooperatives contribute thousands of hours of manual labor to the construction of their own homes and at the same time participate in all decisions related to the planning, construction, and later management of the shared property. This model has enabled hundreds of thousands of low-income people to access dignified housing outside of the real estate market, often in better conditions than those offered by commercial or state housing.

From the beginning, FUCVAM focused on population groups for whom owning a home was unattainable—especially workers, public sector employees, or the unemployed. It began without financial or state support, but even so, it succeeded in demonstrating through several pilot projects that mutual aid and collective ownership as a path to affordable housing do work. At the end of the 1960s, it managed to secure legal recognition of its cooperative model and **access to low-interest state loans**, which allowed the entire network to expand rapidly. A real alternative emerged to the individualistic concept of ownership and the private housing market—one that was both economically efficient and socially just. At the beginning of the 21st century, the federation encompassed hundreds of cooperatives and thousands of housing units across Uruguay. Individual cooperatives operate autonomously, but share the rules set by the federation and benefit from its experience as well as legal and technical support provided through practical training and ongoing mentoring.

Collaboration with the Uruguayan labor union movement played a major role in the development of FUCVAM. Many of the cooperative founders were themselves unionists or political activists. The cooperatives served not only as a tool to secure housing, but also as a space for political education and organizing. In some cases, unions helped cooperatives with construction work or logistics, while FUCVAM members in return provided unions with space or support during demonstrations. When a military dictatorship was established in 1973, unions and political parties were banned, and many of their members were imprisoned or exiled for many years. However, FUCVAM—thanks to its seemingly apolitical activities—managed to continue functioning and, at times, served as the only legal structure where people could meet collectively, organize, and express dissent. Despite being under surveillance, it succeeded in continuing construction and spreading the values of solidarity, equality, and democracy.

Under the dictatorship, any form of collective organization was viewed with suspicion, and so cooperatives often became the target of repression. Some of their members were monitored, others lost their jobs, or were forced to emigrate. Still, the federation survived. It played an important role in the defeat of the dictatorship and the restoration of democracy. When the regime attempted to change the law to abolish collective ownership and allow cooperative homes to be privatized, federation members gathered more than 300,000 signatures in a single day in 1984—a tenth of the country's population—against this change. After the return of democracy, the cooperative federation became one of the victors and played an important role in rebuilding the welfare state. It was active in negotiating new conditions for cooperative financing, contributed to housing policy development, and expanded international cooperation.

Its model was adopted in several other Latin American countries and also served as an inspiration for cooperative housing networks in Europe and Africa.

FUCVAM emphasizes that housing is not a commodity but a basic human right. In all its activities, it links people's practical needs with a political struggle for structural change—it is not just an alternative form of enterprise, but also a social movement. It opposes privatization, gentrification, and land speculation. Beyond construction, it engages in education, cultural activities, and community-based care. In many cases, cooperatives have contributed to the revitalization of deteriorating urban neighborhoods without displacing their original residents. The success of FUCVAM is not based on new technologies or investor favor, but on long-term collective work, trust among people, and the ability to confront adverse conditions. What began as a self-help response to the housing crisis is today a powerful social movement with a clear political vision and the ability to act and advocate for its interests at both local and national levels.

Benjamín Nahoum, an engineer and long-time technical director of the federation, in his text marking the fiftieth anniversary of its existence, notes that its success—besides many years of patient practical work and accumulated knowledge—is also based on **four principles**, which he calls the "**four heresies**" because they go "directly against the paradigm imposed on people in today's capitalist world" and "show that other values are possible."

The **first heresy** is **solidarity**, embodied in the practice of mutual aid. The stronger and wealthier help the weaker and poorer; the more educated and experienced help the less educated and less experienced. Those who already have homes help those who do not during "solidarity days." Individual enterprise and competition are replaced by a collective, planned activity that allows the power of cooperation to be maximized.

The **second heresy** is **self-management**. Cooperating on such a demanding undertaking as collectively building homes is not easy. For it to work, people must take on shared responsibility and find a path to mutual trust. But when they are given the right conditions and support, they can succeed—without bosses or subordinates.

The **third heresy** is **collective ownership**. The homes are not owned by individuals through private shares—as in typical Czech housing cooperatives—but by the cooperative itself. Individuals only have use rights to the apartments and participatory rights in decision-making. They cannot sell or inherit them. They build together, decide together, live together.

The **fourth heresy** of FUCVAM is **state support**. Contrary to the neoliberal dogma that the economy should be ruled by private capital doing as it pleases, with the state merely clearing its path, FUCVAM advocates for a model that is explicitly based on state support. According to FUCVAM, housing is a universal human right. The state should take responsibility for fulfilling it and facilitate access to it through financial support, land provision, urban planning, and other forms of assistance.

Source

Nahoum, Benjamín.

"Forty Years of Self-Management in Popular Housing in Uruguay: The 'FUCVAM Model.'" In *Cooperatives and Socialism: A View from Cuba*, edited by Camila Piñeiro Harnecker. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1057/97811372777569>.

Case Study III – Preston, England: Building Community Wealth on a Post-Industrial Periphery

The story of Preston, in the north of England, can serve as a model example of successful collaboration between local government and the broader community, showing how the development of a solidarity economy can significantly improve the economic situation of peripheral regions left behind by the unevenly distributed economic growth of neoliberalism. With a population just over one hundred thousand, Preston is the fiftieth largest city in England, similar in size to the Czech city of Liberec.

Over the past four decades, the city has faced unregulated deindustrialization, economic stagnation, and budget cuts. As in the afflicted inner peripheries of other European countries, government efforts to stimulate the economy—typically through generous investment incentives to attract corporate investors—have done little to change the situation. Projects based on creating poorly paid and undignified jobs in call centers, distribution warehouses, or shopping malls only deepened the outflow of value from the local economy and the overall decline, which was sealed by another wave of cuts and restrictions following the 2008 economic crisis.

After the 2011 elections, the city council, led by the local Labour Party, decided to try something entirely different: stop hoping for salvation through external private investment, rely on resources under local control, and—with the involvement of the wider community—develop solidarity and social enterprises, including worker-owned cooperatives. The council adopted experiences from poor regions of the United States and the Basque Mondragón, adapting them into the concept of “**community wealth building**,” a term now synonymous with what is known as the **Preston Model**.

The Preston Model is based on a successful combination of interconnected strategies:

- Identifying so-called **anchor institutions**: local institutions funded by public budgets that still possess significant resources and thus economic power that can be leveraged—such as city councils, universities, schools, and hospitals. An internal analysis of such institutions then reveals how much of their spending leaks out of the region—in Preston's case, this was 61%.
- Systematically seeking ways to redirect as much of this spending as possible to local producers of goods and services (with consideration for social and environmental criteria and working conditions), known as **progressive procurement**.
- Filling gaps in the local economy by **creating cooperatives and other solidarity economy institutions based on collective ownership**. The city council deliberately identifies sectors where local businesses have low capacity to meet demand, and in these areas begins to support the establishment of new enterprises democratically controlled by workers and the local community. In this way, **Preston created the Preston Cooperative Development Network**, which began connecting existing cooperatives in the region and supporting the creation of new ones. Today, the city is home to an IT cooperative, a cooperative taxi service, and a cooperative educational center, with new initiatives planned in care work, cleaning services, construction, translation, and reintegration of former prisoners.
- Saved and accumulated resources are intentionally **invested into further development of local quality of life and community-owned assets**. Preston became the first local government in northern England to commit to paying all its employees a minimum living wage, and it plans to invest millions of pounds into municipal housing, renewable

energy, and the construction of a new cultural and leisure center owned by the city. Thanks to local ownership, all surpluses can be reinvested into further local economic development, and in the future, Preston aims to found its own nonprofit community bank, together with neighboring towns and regional institutions.

The results of the Preston experiment are now admired across the UK. In 2020, the city reached its highest employment rate in fifteen years, and in 2018, it ranked higher than London in some quality-of-life indices. A year earlier, the British Labour Party achieved its best general election result in two decades with an economic program based on the Preston experience. The Preston story may be particularly relevant for similar cities in Czech regions affected by deindustrialization or preparing for coal industry transition.

Source

Jones, Rhian E., and Matthew Brown.

Paint Your Town Red: How Preston Took Back Control and Your Town Can Too. Repeater, 2021.

Case Study IV – Kerala, India: Development Without (Economic) Growth

The state of Kerala in southern India has a long history of strong labor movements and union organizing. It also has a longstanding cooperative tradition, which began to develop at the beginning of the 20th century alongside cooperative banking, providing finance for new cooperative projects.

A major surge in cooperativism came in the 1980s, when the Left Democratic Front (LDF)—composed of the local Communist Party and ten other smaller leftist parties—came to power. With brief interruptions, it has governed the state to this day and, together with an active labor movement, actively supports the development of cooperatives. Somewhat surprisingly for a communist-led political force (from a European perspective), its popularity lies in the support of decentralized democratic decision-making structures, involving people in decisions both at the community level (within municipalities) and at the workplace level—through unions and cooperatives.

The government has created a dedicated **“Ministry of Cooperation”** for cooperatives and other forms of democratic economies. This ministry has, for example, drafted important cooperative legislation aimed at supporting the professionalization of cooperatives, their financial stability, and the development of technological innovation. Other forms of state support for cooperatives include favorable loans and a cooperative-friendly public procurement regime.

Cooperatives in Kerala are successful also because they are not isolated—they are interconnected through local governments, cooperative finance mechanisms, and production chains, forming a thriving solidarity economy movement. They manage to compete with large corporations even in key sectors like transportation, agriculture, or construction. Some cooperative projects (such as “Malabar Meat”) successfully link agricultural workers and processing industries: the meat-processing cooperative buys from many local farmers at fair prices and sells the products affordably through its wide network of outlets.

Another successful example of current cooperative initiatives in Kerala is the so-called “Kudumbashree Mission” (“family prosperity”): a state-run program that strengthens women’s economic rights through employment schemes. Each household can nominate one woman to join the program, receiving state support for employment in selected sectors. Groups of four to ten women receive, for example, agricultural land on favorable leases under a cooperative model. The harvest is first distributed among the members, and any surplus is sold at local markets. They receive low-interest loans from the state to buy seeds, tools, or fertilizer. Over 320,000 women and nearly 60,000 cooperatives are involved in community agriculture through this model. The program emerged as a response to India’s deep agricultural crisis, which plunged many families into extreme poverty and caused a sharp rise in farmer suicides. In Kerala, these trends are being successfully reversed thanks to such initiatives.

Today, **almost 12,000 cooperatives operate in Kerala across most important sectors**, including banking. The significant role of cooperatives in the economy, strong unions, and the emphasis on public services such as education and healthcare have led to results admired worldwide—even in the context of the ecological crisis. Thanks to the “Kerala development model,” the state’s quality of life is considered very high by Global South standards: the Human Development Index rates Kerala above average in India in terms of literacy, life expectancy, quality of education, poverty levels, and access to healthcare. All of this is achieved with a relatively low GDP growth rate compared to Indian norms. Development is focused on essential aspects of quality of life, not on the accu-

mulation of private capital. The strength of workers—through cooperatives, unions, and the state—allows them to extract greater benefits from a quantitatively “smaller” economy. These three forces complement each other: **unions raise wages in the private sector, while cooperatives provide market competition.** LDF governments and local municipalities use their economic and political power to support both, and complement them with strong public services.

Thanks to participatory and targeted local development programs, Kerala is set to become the first Indian state to eradicate extreme poverty this year. This success is due in part to a developed and **decades-refined model of decentralized economic planning, coordinated by the State Planning Board.** LDF governments gradually shifted a significant amount of competencies and financial resources to municipalities—unusual by Indian standards. Since 2021, in cooperation with municipalities, the government has systematically mapped all extremely poor households, their challenges, and needs. The household identification process was rigorously validated through four verification steps: by municipal offices, local assemblies, personal interviews, and audit—ensuring accuracy and the prevention of public fund misuse. The survey assessed four dimensions of extreme poverty: lack of food, income, housing, and healthcare. This detailed information allowed interventions to be tailored to each household—from short-term aid (food and medical help) to long-term solutions (support for affordable housing construction or job creation through cooperatives).

Solidarity and participatory structures, together with a strong public sector, make Kerala highly resilient to the crises and challenges of the 21st century. When Kerala was hit by the worst floods in a century in 2018, cooperatives mobilized thousands of their members to volunteer in aid efforts. Construction cooperatives repaired hundreds of homes for free, and Kudumbashree cooperatives raised more funds from their own members than the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck two years later, Kerala handled the outbreak better than any other Indian state, thanks to its strong public health system. Since 2016, the government has also integrated environmental goals into local planning through the Haritha Keralam (“Green Kerala”) program, which includes river restoration, waste recycling, and support for ecological farming. The state aims to produce 50% of its electricity from renewables by 2030, and 100% by 2040.

Sources

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Budapest: Cooperation in Spite of Neoliberalism and Orbán

Contemporary Hungary is not usually seen—by people living west of it—as a place to look for examples of good practice. And yet, some of the most interesting experiments in solidarity economy under conditions similar to ours in Central and Eastern Europe are taking place precisely here.

Unlike Poland or the Czech Republic, traditional cooperativism in Hungary has almost disappeared. Neoliberal economic reforms were introduced by the communist regime itself, and the country later became a textbook example of a successful neoliberal post-socialist transformation. But only two decades later, an unexpected turn took place when the formerly liberal movement FIDESZ won the elections, this time with a national-conservative program that became a model for the far right from Israel to the United States. The Orbán regime, while repressing minorities and organizing nationalist mobilizations against the “oppression” of the European Union, still maintains a favorable “investment climate” and cheap labor for Western (and more recently, Chinese) corporations—functioning in a perverse symbiosis with Western European neoliberal capitalism.

New left-wing initiatives in Hungary have developed in opposition to both the Orbán regime and the neoliberal European mainstream. One of the most important actors among them is the cooperative social center Gólya (“Stork”) in the heart of Budapest. Gólya was founded in 2012 as a small cooperative club in a rented space. After proving successful, the collective used savings and loans to purchase the buildings of a former tram factory (Ganz) in the wider center of Budapest.

Gólya now functions as a collectively owned and shared center that serves the local community in many ways, while also providing infrastructure for a wide range of initiatives. Today, the center includes not only a club, bar, and concert venue, but also a self-managed kindergarten, gym, and community radio station. It also provides a base for other collective entrepreneurial activities, such as a cooperative bicycle courier service that successfully competes with platform-based corporations, and a worker-owned interior renovation business.

Gólya is also a site for producing alternative knowledge: in addition to the main Hungarian left-wing online newspaper *Mérce*, it also hosts the *Periféria* Research Center, focused on housing and labor sociology, and the sociological workgroup *Helyzet* (“Situation”). *Helyzet* was founded in 2010 by a group of students dissatisfied with the hegemonic framing of Hungarian reality in the media and academia, aiming to better understand the post-communist Eastern European condition. Over years of work, *Helyzet* developed a systematic analysis of Eastern European reality based on critical political economy, especially world-systems analysis. It launched the theoretical journal *Fordulat*, which provided systematic descriptions of the deep causes of Eastern European challenges and outlined strategies for overcoming them. One of those strategies, according to *Helyzet*, was the development of a solidarity economy.

This theoretical work is now being practically continued by another organization based in Gólya: the Solidarity Economy Center (SEC). The SEC functions as a **cooperative incubator**, focusing on initiatives in food, housing, and energy—basic human needs—coordinated by thematic working groups. In the area of food, the SEC organizes a community-supported agriculture (CSA) network that currently supplies several hundred people in Budapest. In housing, it helped launch the Association for Cooperative Real Estate Development (ACRED), which links Gólya with other collectively owned buildings and works to open paths toward affordable cooperative housing (similar

to the Czech project Sdílené domy). The energy working group established the Transzformátor Center, which supports the development of community energy in Hungary and has installed a pilot solar power plant on Gólya's roof.

Because the solidarity economy in Hungary lacks both living traditions and public support, the SEC and its affiliated initiatives **systematically work to build ties with Hungarian labor unions and support both union and community organizing**. Many SEC members work as union organizers in sectors such as care work, education, retail, and manufacturing. The SEC actively seeks ways to ensure its initiatives are not just for ideologically driven enthusiasts, but are **relevant and useful to everyday workers**—the majority of Hungarian society. For example, the food network cooperates with care sector unions that help distribute food at workplaces, and with parent groups organized around child care. Thanks to this, the network has reached a scale where it no longer relies solely on volunteer labor, and has become more sustainable. In housing, the SEC carried out a survey among trade union members to identify housing and energy poverty issues, and is currently looking for opportunities where unions can pressure municipalities to support affordable cooperative housing.

Although Hungary's situation is difficult—in many ways similar to the Czech one—a new generation of Hungarian cooperators and unionists is determined to face it with cooperation and creativity. Their example shows that the Eastern European experience does not only offer inspiration to the global far right—and that when we ignore countries to our east, we do so to our own detriment.

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