Chapter VI
Less is more – Outline of a post-growth economy

What is the alternative to a form of existence that is based on economic growth? To develop a post-growth economy systematically and as a self-contained concept, it must be based on eliminating the structural and cultural growth drivers outlined earlier in this book as far as possible. The first of those mentioned can only be alleviated by a trend towards shortening or simplifying complex production chains. The resulting reduction in external supply can range from regional to local supply and even self-supply, in other words subsistence. Subsistence is not a question of either or, but of more or less, so it can be used as an element of combined supply services with different levels of external supply.

By contrast, cultural growth drivers can only be relieved through sufficiently shaping our own demands — as trivial and simultaneously strenuous as that may seem. Consequently, the foundation of a post-growth economy rests on a theory of subsistence and sufficiency, the outlines and main characteristics of which will be presented in this final chapter.

Economy of proximity: Relieving structural growth compulsion

Cutting production chains down to local or regional supply can reduce the monetary demands of the capital input if the potential of the shorter distances it entails between the capital investors and acquirers is utilised. Such an "economy of proximity" is distinguished by the following characteristics:

Transparency: If, given a sufficiently short distance between both sides of the market, the product consumers are also the capital investors for their regional producers, trust can develop based on the transparency this creates. A direct relationship between capital acquirers and investors reduces the insecurity used to justify high monetary risk compensation.

Empathy: If the interaction between regional market actors includes both the products and the capital, this enhances the social embedding of the economy. Direct relationships that go beyond anonymous market interaction increase the likelihood of the logic of pure profit and capital maximisation being broken down by informal social norms and relationships between those meeting each other in the framework

of economic transactions. Such effects are strengthened by the fact that the actors identify with their region and therefore with its economy.

Congruent interests: In a sufficiently small-scale economy, if the capital investors, who are simultaneously the consumers of the products created by the capital acquirers, were to increase their yield or interest demands, they would inevitably damage their own position. This is because the capital acquirers would have no option in the long term but to respond to the increased interest and yield obligation by raising prices.

Usage control: If capital investors themselves have the chance to determine and control in which fields of activity their capital is used, they would not be "forgoing" anything if they were to reduce their yield and interest demands. This is because they thereby act in support of their own ethical orientation, for instance by investing their savings in regional, ecological, social and artistic projects or businesses that harmonise with their political convictions. This principle will and has already been put into practice by the funding programme of the German GLS-Bank and the former Ökobank.

There are other positive effects of small-scale economies. These consist of shorter transport routes and improved opportunities for closed cycles. Far more important in this context however are the two further structural effects of de-globalisation. Gradually turning away from spatially unrestricted value added structures would necessarily involve more decentralised and smaller average production capacities, because the output volumes corresponding to the absorption of increasing economies of scale could not be sold within a spatially restricted market. That transformation would make many capital-intensive value added stages unnecessary, which only serve supra-regional logistics and distribution. In the case of lower output quantities, capital-intensive technologies would be relatively less attractive.

The "intermediate" or "convivial" technologies recommended by Leopold Kohr, Ernst Friedrich Schumacher and Ivan Illich as a counterpoint to industrial mass production are characterised by lower degree of spatial reach and labour productivity, because they go hand in hand with a reactivation of craftsmanship, i.e. less capital-intensive value added. If one could invert the universal principle of maximising labour productivity, a reduction in the gross national product growth rates would in any case be necessary to maintain a certain level of employment. Thus shorter value added chains in the sense of less specialisation and consequently lower capital requirements reduce growth pressures in many ways!

Regional complementary currencies, such as the "Chiemgauer" or the "Bremer Roland" could support decentralised spatial relationships. Being only valid within a limited radius,

they shorten value added chains. An additional effect that also reduces growth pressures would be achieved if such "Regios" were given interest-free circulation guarantees. The money would then not only be interest-free, but would even lose value if it were not spent within a certain period. That would remove all incentive for hoarding and speculation. A fee would also be charged for converting Regios back into the main currency, which would not be abolished, but only partially replaced. This would increase the motivation for retaining the money in regional cycles.

Such de-globalisation leads to a situation where a businessman who earns Regios then seeks regional suppliers who will accept that money. Those companies in turn seek suppliers from the region to pay for their purchases with Regios. If employees were then prepared to receive part of their wages in Regios and municipal and financial authorities were even willing to accept the currency, the regional value added chain would have a real opportunity to develop. Naturally this would only affect goods that were appropriate for this purpose. The remaining value of all things that cannot be produced regionally could continue to be paid for in Euros: As regional as possible, as global as necessary.

And that is not all: By designing Regios as a "shrinking currency", i.e. without any interest, an added effect is created that can ease the interest-related tendency towards excess whenever Regios are available as foreign currency. Regional economies correspond with small businesses, which can inherently be controlled in a more transparent and democratic way, especially if it is not a public limited company—which would be out of place anyway in a post-growth economy—and take the form of a cooperative. Business forms with an institutional structure, spatial proximity and manageable size that allow them to be developed with an orientation towards directly supplying demand, rather than achieving maximum yields, are rarely compatible with global networks.

Deconstructing the industrial complex in such a way that distances between consumption and production become smaller is on one hand only practical in specific cases and in a gradual process. Yet some demands can be satisfied through even shorter supply chains, namely by one's own local work and subsistence, making no money necessary at all.

Put very simply, three categories of supply systems can be defined, which are characterised by a different length of value added chain and the role of money as means of payment. Demonetarised local provision, regional economic systems based on non-interest, complementary currency and—a remainder that should be minimised as far as possible—performance from the global division of labour, could all be combined to satisfy demand as growth-neutrally as possible, after exhausting the maximum possible sufficiency potential.

However, the partial deglobalisation this involves can only be had at the price of lower purchasing power and

fewer options. This reduction would be partly compensated as sufficiency performance and also through modern subsistence practices. But precisely the same result would come about if all products based on the industrial division of labour were burdened with external costs along their entire value added chain: a significantly reduced purchasing power and a change in the relative prices in favour of goods produced regionally and locally.

Creative subsistence as a replacement for industrial output

The shortest value added chain represents complete or "pure" subsistence. For instance anyone who jointly manages a garden with other users contributes to a provision pattern that knows no money, hardly any capital, no profit, no interest and therefore no pressure to expand. By shortening the hours of paid work, subsistence and third party supplies could be combined so that the dependence on monetary income fell. In addition to voluntary, community-oriented, educational and artistic activities, urban subsistence can generate three output categories through which industrial production can be partially replaced.

1. Use intensification through communal use: Anyone borrowing a consumer item from a neighbour, baking him bread in return or installing the latest Linux update, contributes to substituting material products through social relationships. Objects such as cars, washing machines, communal rooms, gardens, angle grinders, digital cameras, etc. can be appropriate for use intensification in different ways. They may be communally acquired or belong to an individual who makes them available to others in exchange for a different subsistence service. Communal goods can also prove suitable for this purpose.

2. Extended use periods: Particular value is placed on the care, maintenance and repairs of all kinds of goods. People using craftsmanship or manual skills for improvising solutions that extend the useful life of consumer objects (including careful handling to prevent early wear) replace material production with productive performance, without having to forego previous exercised consumption functions. Let us assume it were possible to double the average useful life of goods in enough consumer goods categories through one's own or exchanged manual maintenance measures. The production of new objects could be halved accordingly. In this way, a reduction in industrial capacity would not entail a loss of consumption functions for the affected goods.

3. Subsistence production: Precisely the field of demand that would threaten our very survival if it collapsed, i.e. food production, embodies the absolute opposite of resilience, due to its exorbitantly high dependency on oil. Where food

is concerned, household gardens, rooftop terraces and especially communal gardens and other forms of urban agriculture represent a dynamic trend. This field should not be underestimated for one thing because conventional value added chains in the agricultural and food sector cause such serious ecological damage that any even partial substitution creates appropriate relieving effects.

In addition to the food sector, subsistence practices in many other fields are possible, for instance in artistic and craftmanship services ranging from the creative re-use of discarded objects, to individually-produced wooden and metal objects and semi-professional "home-made" brands. Exchange networks, neighbourhood help networks and the "transition towns" movement are only some examples of locally produced services allowing an exchange of services at local level extending beyond individual consumption. This especially applies to locally produced goods in the form of services such as lectures, teaching, training, consulting, artistic performance, care services, etc.

If these three output categories (communal use, extension to useful life of goods and subsistence production) are combined according to one's own affinities, abilities and local conditions, they can create a rich source from which to draw complementary services in a post-growth economy involving significantly lower monetary income. The effect they have means for instance that halving industrial production and therefore waged labour would not necessarily involve halving material prosperity: If consumer objects are used for twice as long and/or twice as intensively, half as much industrial production is sufficient to extract the same quantum of consumer functions or "services" from the same goods. Despite superficial similarities with the efficiency debate, this interpretation of urban subsistence, which is aimed at service markets, is actually its counterpart. Why?

Firstly the unburdening effects of the subsistence forms above described are not based on ecologically decoupling the industrial division of labour, and instead require its reduction. Secondly, these are not commercial businesses that, as providers of property-replacing services (e.g. car sharing, leasing models, commercial rental systems), ultimately maintain the external supply regime—albeit on the basis of increased usage efficiency. Instead, the users themselves gradually transform from consumers into "prosumers" or "coproducers" and thereby gain economic sovereignty by means of their own substantial, manual and social competence in replacing industrial production. In as far as the resulting decommercialisation would make money as a means of exchange unnecessary, because subsistence services are produced locally, value added chains would not exceed a certain complexity. Such processes require no or only negligible investment, i.e. no loan or equity capital, and would therefore induce no structural growth pressures in general.

The three basic forms of urban subsistence may be described as complementing a significantly reduced industrial system and partially substituting its former output, but they also create a synergetic link to industrial artefacts. After all, it is objects originating from industrial production based on the division of labour, the useful life of which is extended and/or intensified through the addition of one's own subsistence input. Such subsistence inputs represent market-free goods. They can be divided into three categories:

1. The individual's own time, required to carry out craftsmanship, substantial, manual or artistic activities.
2. Craftsmanship competence and skill at improvisation to practice the options for subsistence and extending the useful life of products *single-handedly*.
3. Social relationships, without which subsistence-related communal usage is unthinkable.

Creative subsistence can combine several input and output categories. Let's assume that Prosumer A has his broken laptop repaired by Prosumer B, who is sufficiently skilled to do so, in exchange for organic carrots from the communal garden. This transaction is firstly based on social relationships, which person A maintains both with person B and the communal garden. Secondly, it is based on manual skills (A: vegetable growing; B: repairing a broken hard drive and installing a new operating system) and thirdly, it is based on one's own time, without which both manual activities would be impossible. In this example, the outputs include subsistence production (vegetables), extending usage (repairing the notebook) and communal usage (communal garden).

Naturally subsistence practices that do not involve the whole range of possible subsistence inputs and outputs are also practicable. Those who cultivate their own garden, extend the useful life of their clothing and textiles by repairing them themselves or care for their children themselves instead of consuming day-care services, use no social networks, but do use time and "manual" skill. In this example, the outputs involve extending usage and subsistence production.

In as far as subsistence combinations replace industrial output in the above sense, we require less money. So a prerequisite for a lower level of external supply is a balanced process of dismantling industry and building subsistence. In this way, the reduced monetary income and industrial output could be managed in social terms.

Sufficiency and time

The cultural rebound described in Chapter V, whereby growth creates the need for further growth, has other negative effects, since contentment is also based on human relationships, the integrity of the social environment, recognition of abilities, self-efficacy, health, security and the perceived intactness of the environment. Exploiting such potential en-

courages happiness and requires time instead of money. On the other hand, financing an ever-higher material standard of living means maximising waged labour. That leaves less time for market-free tasks that were formerly performed by people themselves, such as bringing up children, social commitment, maintaining the household or the garden, which now also have to be transformed into acts of consumption or services, and which in turn increase the demand for waged labour and therefore cost time.

In as far as the range of buying options is practically exploding, yet the day continues to contain only 24 hours, this conflict is worsening because ultimately even the time available for consumption becomes too short. This is the key to a new understanding of sufficiency, namely going beyond abstinence. Often, reduction or a return to a manageable or controllable measure is the right way to optimise the benefits of an object or activity. What is a well known fact in medicine applies equally to consumption and mobility: A substance that has a healing effect when taken in small doses can in a higher dose become a life-threatening poison.

For consumer activities to provide any benefits at all, a minimum of one's own time and attention must be invested in them. Since from a personal perspective available time cannot be increased, there is the risk of escalation: A limited, not increasable quantum of time must be distributed between an ever-larger number of consumer objects. Each of these is allocated an ever-decreasing quantum of time.

We have by now lost ourselves in an over-stimulated atmosphere of consumer choice. The amount of time-consuming innovations, choices and information related to these is increasing steadily. Modern societies have therefore reached a point at which not purchasing power, but time represents the bottle-neck factor in our search for happiness. Sooner or later, a point is reached whereby there is just about enough time to seek, identify, compare, check, purchase, receive and accommodate consumer goods—and then perhaps not to use them, simply because the necessary time has been used up by the countless selection and purchasing activities. The waves of innovation, choices and associated information, which require time to perceive and process, effortlessly overtake us via an omnipresent digital infrastructure.

We no longer find any peace because wherever we stand, walk or look at a display, we are bombarded with new opportunities for self-expression that must be perceived and made use of. Under the regime of time pressure, the growth of individual options is bought at a terrible price, namely superficiality—which makes no-one happy and instead encourages burnout. Many promises of the modern age have come true: We are free, have money and can constantly decide how we can make the best of our lives. And it is precisely all these things that have now become stress factors—what an irony! The French sociologist Alain Ehrenberg speaks of the "exhausted self" (1998/2009). He characterises depression as

the result of failing to fulfil a compulsion to exercise liberated self-expression. If it is impossible to make the most of all the many options and chances in order to attain maximum happiness, this threatens to create a "tragedy of insufficiency".

Elisabeth von Thadden stated the following on the subject in an issue of the German weekly publication, *Die Zeit* (2004): "One can detect how unhappy people are from the side effects of a medicine that is supposed to make you happy: Prozac has been found in British drinking water. The antidepressant has seen a consumption increase over the last decade from nine million to 24 million prescriptions in England alone. The excreted remains of the psychotropic drug, which are not filtered out by water treatment plants, are flushed out by waste water systems and make their way into the ground water. What was intended as a way of aiding well-being has become a health risk for all."

In his book "L'Euphorie perpétuelle : Essai sur le devoir de bonheur" (2002) published in English as "Perpetual Euphoria: On the Duty to be Happy" (2011), French writer Pascal Bruckner describes the excessive demands of today as a "curse of the modern age" and asks: "How can one know if one is happy? Who sets the standards? And what should one answer to those who miserably confess: I can't cope?" By now there are well-established therapy proposals ranging from optimised time management to human multitasking. Self-help literature is also experiencing a boom—yet helplessness is growing at an even faster rate. No wonder, since the one possible solution can only be found outside the consumer logic of growth.

Help can be provided by focusing on a manageable number of options, so that enough time and attention are available to truly relish these things. Those who elegantly jettison the burden of escalating consumption and mobility are protected against losing their way in the rat race of acquisitive self-expression. According to the Federal Environment Ministry, every German citizen owns an average of 10,000 possessions. The ability to elegantly consume in a way that would make us happy is therefore based on unburdening ourselves from the trash of affluence that clutters up our lives. Sufficiency confronts the desperate search for further increases in possessions and convenience with a simple counter-question: From which energy slaves and consumer and convenience crutches could our excessive lifestyles and ultimately our entire society free themselves? Self-determination does not depend on having much, but on needing little.

Reduction, for those who are in danger of drowning in the diversity of material options, is not an act of renunciation, but instead of liberating oneself from excess. Furthermore, cleverly freeing oneself of burdens that consume a great deal of time, but are only of minimal benefit, also leads to greater independence from volatile market events, from money and waged labour. The art of reduction also means freedom from fear. Those who need less are also less vulner-

able to attack. Wherever sufficiency and modern subsistence complement each other, lifestyles become robust. Those who practice this kind of self-protection are not only able to smile unperturbed about Peak Oil and the next financial crisis, but are also equipped for a post-growth economy, since this would only be achievable though an effective and meaningful reduction in the external supply system.

The role of businesses

Reduction is followed by conversion. The remainder of the industrial system would have to be transformed so that the production of new goods, which would have to be much more durable and repair-friendly, would play a far less important role. The focus would be on maintaining, revaluating and enhancing existing stocks of goods, for instance through renovation, optimisation, the extension of useful life and usage intensification. Producer companies (in the physical sense) would increasingly be replaced by providers that are less oriented towards a further expansion of material objects and would instead focus on optimising and refurbishing. This would affect those aspects of stock maintenance, with which prosumers would be overstretched. Creative subsistence and business performance could complement each other to jointly enable a constant scale of economic flow and stock levels. This conforms to a condition Herman Daly describes as "Steady State Economy" (1992).

Many of the issues elaborated above allow the following conclusions regarding how companies could contribute to a post-growth economy:

- Shortening value added chains and strengthening creative subsistence
- Working time models: Measures that facilitate the reduction and redistribution of working time feed the subsistence input of "one's own time"
- Local and regional acquisition, to disentangle supply chains
- Support for and participation in regional currency systems
- Direct and regional marketing
- Developing modular, repairable product designs oriented towards reuse and physical and aesthetic durability, to facilitate urban subsistence
- Prosumer management: Beyond manufacturing products and services, companies could provide courses or training to enable users to care for, maintain and repair products.

Through renewal strategies in the spirit of "conversion, not construction", further uses would be extracted from existing goods and infrastructures by adapting them both functionally and aesthetically to current requirements, therefore retaining them within the cycle of efficient use for as long as possible. Markets for used, refurbished and overhauled goods would also contribute to reducing new production. Such "material zero sum games" represent the physical-

material dimension of growth neutrality. They involve two perspectives:

- Changes focus on converted usage, refurbishing and recombining already used ecological resources and manufactured objects. Material additions are minimised.
- If there is an addition of material objects or consumption of ecological capacities, it must be combined with a subtraction, through which resources and spaces are freed to the same extent elsewhere.

Businesses that are oriented towards material zero sum games would be recognisable as:

Maintainers, who by means of preservation, maintenance, preventive wear minimisation and advice ensure the durability and functioning of a hardware stock that is to be expanded as little as possible;

Repair service providers, who prevent goods from being discarded prematurely;

Renovators, who extract further uses from existing goods by adapting them functionally and aesthetically to current requirements;

Converters, who recombine, change or reallocate existing infrastructures and hardware to create new usage possibilities;

Providers of services that substitute formerly ownership-related consumption forms through services in appropriate situations;

Intermediaries, who ensure that consumer and investment goods remain in the cycle of efficient use as long as possible by lowering transaction costs of consumer goods retailing; and finally

Designers, who orientate the reduced future quantum of newly produced material objects towards durability and multifunctionality.

What would post-growth politics look like?

Since a post-growth economy would emerge from the gradual reduction in supply systems and infrastructures based on the industrial division of labour, this transformation could be supported by a range of framework conditions. Monetary and financial market reforms could ease growth pressuress inherent in the system, to prevent a situation whereby, after achieving an ecologically stable level of supply, an uncontrollable growth dynamic would re-emerge. In addition to the financial transaction tax demanded by Attac, other regulating measures also seem sensible. A further developed version of the so-called "100% money approach" by Irving Fisher (1935) would also be appropriate to contain the almost unlimited generation of money by commercial banks. Building on this, the "plain money" concept put forward by Joseph Huber and James Robertson (2008) envisages in particular the reinstatement of the state's prerogative to create money, the debt-free circulation of newly created money through public spending and the ending of all money creation by commercial banks.

This approach does not exclude simultaneously strengthening the already mentioned regional currencies. Further to this, cooperative banks would be required that could to support the generation of capital based on lower interest and yield levels through transparency, opportunities for democratic participation in decision-making and a socioecological orientation. In general, modified corporate forms, such as cooperatives, foundations, non-profit companies and approaches based on inclusive economics can play an important role in tempering structural profit expectations.

Another important element of this political strategy would comprise approaches to land reform. Land is not a commodity produced by an individual actor, and is instead a finite resource that is passed on to one generation of users by the preceding generation. Land should therefore be available to everyone as a matter of principle, which is impossible if private property is concentrated in the hands of a few. Private investors would not be prevented from exercising usage, but they could only become leaseholders rather than owners of the resource. This would prevent speculative profit. Users could not profit from the increased value of the resource, in which case all or part of what is known as "ground rent" would be skimmed off and could be redistributed to the wider society. Naturally, the allocation of usage rights would be restricted to an ecologically adequate upper limit.

The "Sky Trust" (2001) proposed by Peter Barnes appears especially interesting in this respect as an environmental policy alternative. The proposal suggests that companies should purchase carbon emission permits from society or local communities.

The scandalous jungle of subsidies (construction, transport, industry, agriculture, etc.) would have to be carefully looked through with the aim of reducing both ecological damage and public debt. This would free up financial resources that could compensate for decreased state income as a result of reductions in industrial output, so that in total sufficient funds to fulfill governmental responsibilities, especially in the social, health and education fields remain.

The extremely damaging subsidies are mostly revealed to be desperate attempts to keep a growth machine in motion that would otherwise not be able to function. Thus political strategy must first ease off the accelerator, rather than using the emergency brake, if it is aiming for a post-growth economy. Incidentally, the problem of debt could also be solved without economic growth, if this occurred within the framework of burden sharing as proposed by Harald Spehl.

Both a strict moratorium on all projects resulting in further land areas being sealed off land or affecting landscapes, and programmes to dismantle infrastructures would be ab-

solutely essential. Naturally, atomic and fossil fuel power plants would be the first affected. The current expansion of coal power stations that is going more or less unnoticed would certainly need to be halted. A significant proportion of industrial facilities, motorways, vehicle parking and airports (the greatest climate killers in the foreseeable future) would have to be closed, dismantled or renaturalised as far as possible. Alternatively, facilities for generating renewable energy could be installed at these locations to ease the catastrophic consumption by these technologies of land and landscapes. In accordance with the material zero sum game, the further extension of capacities for energy production or storage would be coupled in a way that provided the required space exclusively through closing and dismantling other infrastructures. A resource strategy setting upper limits for ecological consumption would represent a further support measure.

The education sector would also need to be reformed to match the conditions of a post-growth economy. In affluent middle-class families, and even more so in all educational institutions, we train young people in the practises of excess and global mobility that are more ecologically ruinous than anything that former generations could ever allow themselves. At the same time, the potential for disappointment, pain and violence is maximised: What if this lifestyle, based as it is on an unbridled optimism about progress, were suddenly no longer possible to maintain? How would the hosts of young hedonists react if, apart from abstract knowledge, they have been taught nothing more than iPad compatibility and unrestricted globalism as a way of life?

It may be sensible to shift the focus from abstract to manual skills, as well as towards a more settled lifestyle. Children and young people require the tools with which to shape a responsible life within ecological limits. In terms of policy measures, establishing sustainability as a compulsory subject in education, namely on the basis of the subject orientation mentioned above, would be the minimum. In the 21st century, anyone who is not even able to reflect upon their own lifestyle from the viewpoint of global transferability will never be able to contribute to sustainable development, let alone to a post-growth economy.

Not only building upon that, but in the spirit of lifestyle politics, companies could be obliged to label all products and services with a CO_2 or ecological footprint along their entire life cycle. Restrictions or the (targeted) banning of advertising could be considered, especially in public spaces and where children and young people are affected.

Distribution and taxation policy could include upper limits for income and wealth acquisition. Measures that facilitate shorter working hours and the redistribution of working time, both in the private and public sectors, are essential. During the phase of transition towards a post-growth economy, it may become necessary for social policy to develop suitable forms of Citizen's Income or basic in-

come guarantee. This would however be linked to community/non-profit work and financial need.

Listing all appropriate measures of a post-growth politics would go beyond the scope of this book. In recognition of this, only the most important approaches have been mentioned here.

Beyond this, a post-growth economy would overstretch any political actor, as long as the system logic of contemporary consumer democracies is characterised by political attempts to outdo one another with respect to further promises of freedom and prosperity. That is why attempts to focus on questions relating to power or systems issues have so far gone nowhere.

An excess of trite political demands that will save the world, improve it or make it fairer is confronted with still more blatant deficits in terms of the social behaviour compatible with the situation that would result should the change being demanded come about. If we take the thesis described in Chapter IV seriously, according to which no technical solution to the problem of growth is in sight, there remains no alternative to reduction strategies. These would inevitably affect our lifestyles. But who would choose a policy that calls into question the continued exercise of a lifestyle that one does not wish to give up? It follows that: firstly, viable social criticism—at least in the context of a post-growth economy—must initially address the lifestyle issue, without obscuring political demands in the process. Secondly, future scenarios critical of growth that are completely at the mercy on political agendas for their implementation are simply a waste of time. No democratically elected government is a pioneer of social change, but instead always lags behind in order to avoid risk. So we cannot keep the consequences of necessary change at arm's length by conveniently delegating to either politics or technology. Political decision-makers will only be encouraged to move towards a post-growth politics if they receive enough convincing signals of the readiness and ability of society to cope with that change.

Conclusion
We (still) have a choice!

It goes without saying that the post-growth economy outlined in this book is currently acceptable to a minority at best. The transition town, urban gardening and repair movements are examples of pioneering work that at least foresees some of what the rest of society will experience in future. The transformation of consciousness and culture that has been discussed for four decades, without which a transition to the more modest formation of prosperity expectations would be impossible, points to a phantom debate—as if we had an alternative. The enormously increased vulnerability of an externally supplied and growth-dependent form of existence suggests that its future breakdown is so likely that the only remaining question concerns whether this will be "by design or by disaster".

A lifestyle of consumption and mobility based on the multiplicitous removal of restrictions can neither be economically stabilised nor ecologically legitimised. Those who propagate growth today must believe in no less than two decoupling miracles, namely with respect to scarce resources and ecological damage. Behind the comfortable vision of "green growth" lies not only a distance from reality that is intoxicated by the belief in progress, but also a moral problem: How can we seriously make the fate of mankind dependent on waves of technological advances that have not yet taken place and which we cannot even be sure will ever occur, let alone provide the required problem solutions, given that they may also emerge as "disimprovements"?

By contrast, the post-growth economy outlined in this book is aimed at returning to responsible economic behaviour. This requires the dismantling of a prosperity model that is based on nothing but the ruinous removal of restrictions and cannot therefore be justified by the claim that it is the "deserved" result of human creative power. Consequently the aim must be to rehabilitate the art of reduction as a veritable design principle—with respect to both society as a whole and one's own lifestyle. Accordingly, post-growth economics is essentially an undertaking of creative forbearance rather than additional activity.

We are so fixed on problem solutions that consist of *adding* more things to the world that we overlook a simple fact: Reduction and self-limiting behavioural patterns have the charm of requiring neither capital nor innovations nor political agenda. They generally need no preconditions and cost nothing—and what is more: They even save money. The cheapest and most ecological plane flight remains one that does not take place. The same applies to mobile phones, flat screens, houses, motorways and agricultural subsidies.

The simple practice of omission can be implemented everywhere, unilaterally and quickly. This strategy type is so simple and logical that it is presumably the reason why we have so much difficulty with it. Measures that cost nothing, are not innovative, require no new laws and for which nobody needs a university degree seem suspicious to us. They undermine a cramped view of the world that knows only progress and the conquest of further freedoms, so that the response to the consequences of removing restrictions is the removal of further restrictions.

Another element of the post-growth economy consists of precautions that reduce the impact of dismantling an industrial society based on the division of labour. The resilience described in this book includes alongside unburdening ourselves of everything that makes us dependent and vulnerable, building independence and self-determination and the fair distribution of what paid labour remains. Supply patterns become stable when they are measured, decentralised and diverse and are based on the shortest possible distance between resource extraction and consumption. The shortest distance is equivalent to modern subsistence.

Could such an existence, freed from excess, consisting of a monetarily compensated 20-hour job, complemented by a wealth of subsistence practices, make us happy—so that it is worth making a start for precautionary reasons? Any answer must assume that perceived happiness is also a matter of interpretation. It feeds firstly on expectation perspectives, based on subjective experiences, and secondly on differing attributed meanings within a relevant social environment. If we leave that aside, there are countless reasons for answering the question positively.

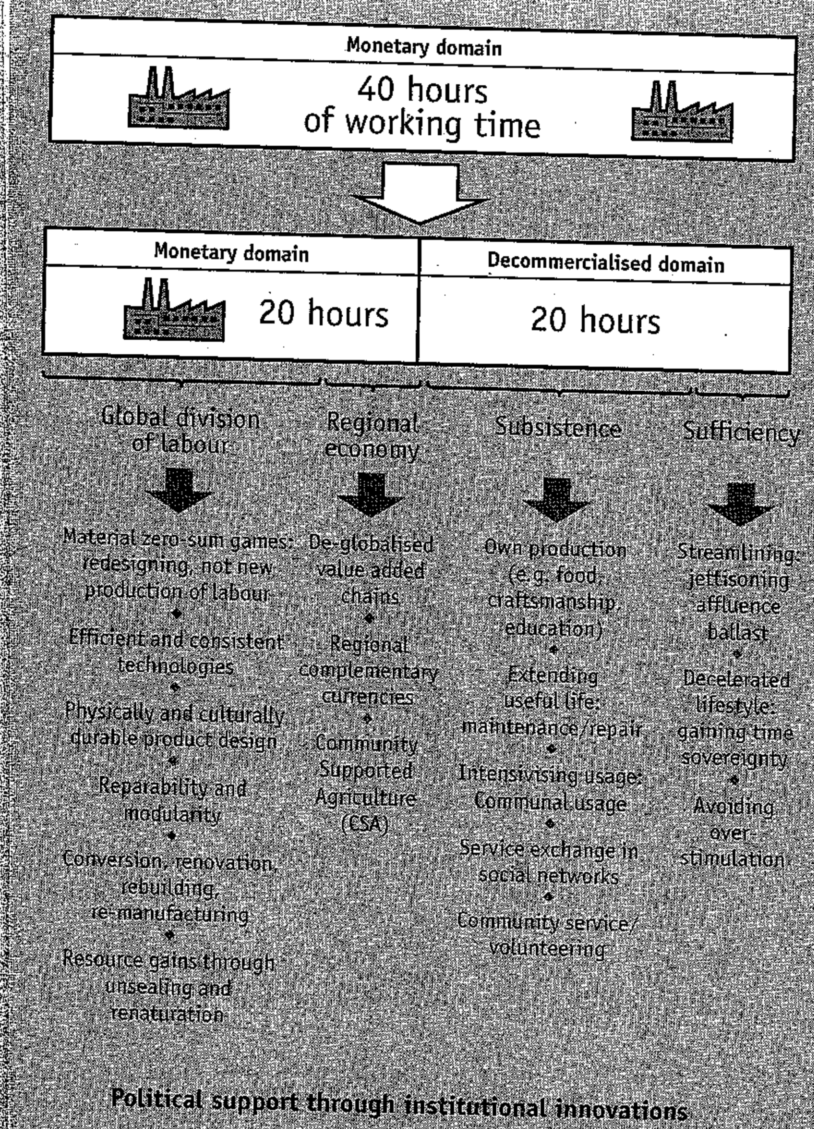
- Relieving as far as possible the external supply burden, which creates need and the threat of control, frees us from the fear of an increasingly insecure future. Needing little and being able to shape as much as possible by one's own efforts, or together with others, is an expression of strength and economic independence.
- The almost unmanageable over-stimulation to we are exposed from all communication channels could be reduced in a simpler, more easily manageable world. This allows focused enjoyment instead of unsatisfying superficiality.
- Modern subsistence creates experiences of success and self-efficacy, particularly through individual production, repairing objects or works of art. The completed product of handiwork, which can be tangibly perceived as such, are positively distinct from the transience of abstract services in the sphere of labour division.
- Buying less and instead organising more together with others, exchanging, using or producing, means reintegrating the social aspect into the economic sphere. Reliability and stable social coherence can replace individualisation. If simple, manual activities regain their status, it will be

possible to integrate those who are currently ostracised due to a lack of money, education or communicative abilities. This accords greater respect to those whose contributions are no longer in demand in a specialised, competitive environment.
- Extreme forms of social imbalance are a logical consequence of the external supply model. Since only monetarily-valued services can be infinitely increased, differences in income and wealth can grow accordingly. A high degree of wealth that is no longer based on money, but instead on one's own ability to produce, levels out differences in material affluence. And we have long known that unfair distribution is detrimental to the happiness of all.

But the happiness that is currently so greatly prized as the highest aim of all economic activity leaves one crucial question unanswered, namely that of responsibility. Can we really rely on a single justification based on human happiness—since things or entire societies can hardly be regarded as subjects that feel happiness? Or does this stipulation entail the risk that the pursuit of happiness, for which all means are sanctioned, might creep back in through the back door, thereby returning us back to the problem we started with?

It may be helpful to introduce the category of enlightened happiness. This would be inseparable from the consciousness of practising a lifestyle that leads to happiness within a responsible, i.e. not unrestricted, operational framework. Those who do not live beyond their ecological means and instead enjoy a happiness not associated with jet fuel and plundering are not obliged to continually find new excuses for their way of life. How much self-deception is necessary to be happy with things which—in view of my awareness of global well-being—I would never be able to justify? Is happiness that is not honest because it requires the tolerance or suppression of contradictions, not ultimately an absurdity? Enlightened happiness would mean not only enjoying, but also having a clear conscience. The post-growth economiy would offer an ideal foundation for this, in addition to its other potential benefits. So what are we waiting for?

An overview of the post-growth economy (diagram)



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