

## Getting ready for a post-growth society?

There has been a long debate about limits to growth and it has been recognized that the ecological boundaries of our planet are not infinitely flexible. But until now modern societies have not been able to overcome the growth paradigm and thus into a sustainable future. There are many terms and concepts around this topic: degrowth,

beyond growth or more holistic ones like the [common welfare economic](#); I just wanted to borrow the title "post-growth" to hint to a society where the growth paradigm has been overcome or fundamentally changed.



I am curious if we can identify recent developments in society that hint to a post-growth society (or on the contrary?). Especially two areas of change, which crossed my path quite often in recent times, will be touched upon in this post. One is how people relate to **work** the other how people relate to **stuff**.

Burnout, which is actually a nice image for our growth economy based on fossil fuels just translated to the human ecosystem, has been a pressing issue especially for the generation of the so called baby boomers and more so the generation X. Those people might have changed their life after a burn out, they needed this shock, others just kept on going and yet others never really recovered. Will the Earth recover after a burnout?

In my generation this phenomenon is not so present (yet). But depression is a much bigger problem in our generation, that just on a sidenote.

Lots has been written about my generation, the so called Gen Y, Millennials or Digital Natives, and I find a few things very promising on the way to a post-growth society.

The importance of work-life-balance has increased, but also the wish to do meaningful work. We do not just want to have a job and then have as much fun as possible in our free time, the job has to be fun as well. We ask enterprises to change: flexible working hours, family friendly working conditions and CSR is important. We ask ourselves if the product or service is really needed or just satisfies insatiable wants. We do not want to make careers if that means only to tell others what to they have to do, spend most of the time in meaningless meetings not seeing the direct results of our work. We have a problem with hierarchies and authority. And why should we work in a leading position? Just to maximise the shareholders value? We believe in cooperation instead of competition, because networks are much more

powerful than hierarchies and at the sametime do not ask for giving up your identity. We want mentors and instant feedback instead of bosses that tell us what is right and wrong. People that want careers and leading positions create their own company.

We are happy with a 50 -75 percent part time job because we do not have a car or a homestead (yet). And this is where our relation to stuff comes into the equation. In the internet it is the open source movement, and initiatives like the [creative commons](#). Why should everybody reinvent the wheel and then patent it to make it worthwhile? If we share things we do not waste time and resources. Ideally it is a give and take relationship built on trust, that if we share stuff others will also share stuff if we need it. Offline there are many amazing initiatives that also reduce the environmental impact a lot. Classics like cloth-swaps, car sharing or [netcyclers](#) (using the internet again). One example I stumbled upon last week is a little startup and a prime example of what I am talking about. [Why Own It](#) tells a story of students that are building a start up around a smartphone application with the aim to share things. Their slogan: "Buy less, borrow more!"

Sharing stuff means that you don't own it (meaning, that you cannot exclude all others) but that you have access when you want to use the stuff. Our generation is interested in this functional side of stuff. It is not about everybody having a car, but everybody being mobile. At such a point we can start designing environmental friendly solutions towards these aims.

Another related development is the do it yourself (DIY) movement. By division of labour our economy has become very productive but also very disconnected. People want to have the time to build stuff themselves. They want to reconnect with their environment, the stuff they use and the people that produce it. No mass products Henry Ford style anymore. Platforms like [Etsy](#) and movements like urban gardening or community supported agriculture ([CSA](#)) show this desire.

Working less with higher aspirations to social and environmental impact, using the free time to do things yourself and exchange in knowledge in a network can decrease resource consumption and environmental destruction following different principles.

First, we are more sufficient by working less. We will have less money to buy stuff we don't actually need.

Second, we are more efficient by sharing knowledge and stuff in networks. We like durable and unique products, knowing how it was produced and by whom. And we like the [five "Rs"](#) that help for a better efficiency.

Third, we try to get a hold on consistency by using the free time to experience ourselves, our community and nature in innovative and creative ways. Most of these experiences have a background in new ways of education, in my view the most important starting point towards a sustainable society.

Well, but how does all this relate to cities?

I think in cities we feel the growth-society more than anywhere else and it is the cities where people start fighting the downsides of how we organize our societies until now. Most of the jobs and workplaces are in cities. Sharing networks are much more efficient in cities. The disconnectedness in cities is more striking than in rural areas. Urban agriculture, co-working spaces or bike-sharing are just some manifestations of this development.

There are many more hints towards a post-growth society I just want to mention a few. The idea of a basic income, to actually separate work from income, which kind of hints into the same direction as the idea of a functional society: People need income and stuff has to be produced, but the two should not necessarily be dependend on each other (at the moment there is a popular demand in Switzerland to introduce a basic income, only available in [German, French and Italian](#))

Local currencies that work with no, or negative interest rate to solve the growth problem that is inherent in the interest and to foster local economy.

Direct democracy that help people to design new ways how we want to live together and lead the way to post-growth societies, parallel to the power game of political parties that are not able to solve problems, let alone change the current growth paradigm.

Is there really substantial hope for a paradigm shift?

Is what I am talking about only present at a small fringe of society, a green bubble that surrounds my perception?

Are we not consuming more stuff overall? I am just thinking about the environmental footprint of all this young people and [LOHAS](#) flying around the world in their Birkenstocks in search for true knowledge and insight on the purpose of life and their task on this planet?

Is this discussion a luxury problem of some Western societies and their spoiled kids which is not at all applicable to other countries and societies that just need jobs, more stuff and growth to reach decent living standards?

What is your perception? Are we getting ready for a post-growth society?

More info at: [SustainAbility](#), [NY Times](#), [Shareable](#) and you know how to use a search engine...

