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Special Issue on

UTOPIAS

THE GRAND CHALLENGES BLOG

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Special Issue on Utopias

Faculty for Economics and Business University of Lausanne, Switzerland

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Preface

The utopia with a thousand faces

In 1516, Thomas More invented a hybrid genre, the enduring power and strength of which is still evident in this little book in your hands in 2025. That genre is utopia. Five centuries ago, the British philosopher surely did not realize that he was discovering a literary equivalent of dynamite. Neither entirely political nor completely fictional, utopia advances in disguise, and this is all the better for pushing our certainties into the ropes. Utopia is a tool for critical and democratic thinking. It invites us to use our imagination to hold up a mirror to society. It slips into our consciousness that simple phrase with which all real collective transformation begins: "What if it were different…?" What if private property did not exist (*Utopia*)? What if the world were governed by scientists (*City of the Sun*)? What if the protection of life took precedence over the quest for profit (*Ecotopia*)? Utopia opens up the field of all possibilities and therefore *any* possibility. This is why it is a non-place: *u*-topos. Nowhere really in action, it is everywhere in potential.

Like the character of Ulysses or the "Hero" of philosopher Joseph Campbell, utopia has a thousand faces. Thus, over time, it has acquired sisters: dystopia (a description of a world going from bad to worse, as in George Orwell's *1984*), uchronia (an investigation of a time that did not happen, as in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*), and prototopia (a depiction of a world under construction, for better or for worse, as in Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future*). In all cases, the aim is to set thought in motion and cultivate our political imagination. Far from producing an idealistic vision of the world, utopia is pragmatic. It encourages, stimulates, shifts, criticizes, and shapes. It pushes boundaries and, in doing so, disturbs those who want to keep them fixed. Conservatives mistrust it, the ruling elites call it unrealistic. But that doesn't matter, because utopia has rarely been on the side of power. Under the monarchy, it was socialist (Fournier); in the face of the Inquisition, it advocated reason (Campanella); in the days of Stalinism, it was humanist (Zamyatin). Today, as you will read, it is environmentalist.

Colin Pahlisch

Researcher in literature and sustainability at UNIL
Director of the *Écotopiales* festival

Editorial Note

This special issue was stems from the idea that what we can imagine in our minds can eventually become true. However, we do not see desirable futures as solely an exercise in imagination but above all a lived endeavor facing up to the multiple challenges at hand: with the ecological conditions necessary for the survival of species deteriorating and extreme right-wing and anti-democratic movements being on the rise, our ability to live well together within safe and just planetary boundaries is jeopardized.

At universities, meanwhile, ideas of imaginaries and desirable futures gain traction as students protest on the streets and scholars attempt to reimagine academia in the face of urgent global challenges. In this context, the "performativity of ideas" helps to recognize that what we picture in our minds, can indeed become real. One source of inspiration for this Special Issue on *Utopia* was the ingenious book "The Ministry for the Future", by novelist Kim Stanley Robinson. In this book, he popularized the genre "climate fiction" visualizing both the horrors of a world under accelerated climate change, but also the creative human potential to deal with it. In this spirit, in the year 2024, we – a group of early career researchers in the social sciences – sought to provide a forum for ideas that can grow into more desirable futures. We hence invited contributions that sketch *Utopias,* reimagining the role of academia, the economy, and politics in the 21st century. One year later we are impressed by the variety of angles with which our contributors tackled the very idea of utopia. One of them, Andrea Mathez, traced it back to the term (O)u-Topia coined in 1516 by Thomas Morehich in essence means no-place, and which quickly came to be used to refer to a non-existent good place in many languages. What is this non-existent good place? Well, considering that it effectively resides in our ideas (and dreams), our Special Issue allowed us to at least get a little closer to examining it!

Laurence Jeangros, Lilly Felber, Philipp Censkowsky, Robin Schimmelpfenning
Lausanne, Summer 2025

The contributions can be clustered in three categories:

Utopias in the present reappropriate the idea of utopias as emanating from our immediate experiences and thereby reject the idea of a unified desirable future towards which society should and could linearly tend.

Utopias in motion brings together texts by authors who propose concrete solutions to concrete problems that could bring us closer to a better state of the world, without explicitly opining on the desired overarching vision.

Utopias in the future contains texts by authors who dared to think boldly about the future societies' needs, thereby drawing up concrete utopias.

Utopias in the present

Should we really talk about utopias as these are defined as “something that does not or cannot happen”? Esteban Arcos, environmental philosopher, takes us on a journey of inquiry. In his contribution, he questions the term utopia and instead proposes the term possibilism making desired futures more tangible. He questions how freedom, one pillar of western value system, is to be reconceptualized in the Anthropocene. While the concept of planetary boundaries confronts us with the materiality of our existence (and therefore our freedom), he argues along feminist philosophers, that freedom should not be seen as an individual characteristic but in relational terms. Accordingly, nature and our relationship with it is a prerequisite for our freedom and is not detached from it.

But what if it is hard to imagine a desired future? *Andrea Mathez*, geographer, takes us along her ethnographic research into alternative modes of food production in Morocco and Switzerland. She challenges the idea of utopia as a clear, defined goal towards which society can linearly strive, along with the promises of modernity. Instead, she observed quiet, embodied utopias in the communities she has worked with. Farmers deal with uncertainty daily, and their future aspirations, rather than being formulated, are felt in their bodies, sensing what is right and wrong, feeling enchanted by the nature they work with. Consequently, she proposes *embodied utopias* as an alternative to the idea of a speculative, universal utopia.

Geographer *Mathilde Vandaele* has observed a similar phenomenon while working with neo-farmers, farmers who do not come from a farming background but choose to engage in agricultural activity. They embody and assert a different mode of life from the traditional urban-rural divide, navigating the frictions and compromises between these two worlds, and creating through their existence a new way of being in relation to nature.

Utopias in motion

Utopias are crafted by humans’ minds, but how can they be crafted by their hands? Marvin Hanisch, associate professor in the Department of Innovation Management & Strategy at the University of Groningen, explores how the individuals that we call entrepreneurs can be utopian and set the world on a better path. He defines “utopian entrepreneurs” as entrepreneurs that succeed to envision a future and design innovations that disrupt entire systems. He gives as example The Ocean Cleanup created by a young entrepreneur that imagined a large-scale machine to remove plastic from the ocean. He warns, however, against dystopian entrepreneurs, those who have deviated from their initial utopian goals, either through unintended effects or through the use of the disproportionate influence placed in their hands. This last point brings to mind some of Silicon’s recent technologies, which are increasingly involved in the construction of public opinion.

And while individuals have a role to play in shaping their future, ultimately it is institutions that set stable paths for the future. So how can institutions enable and encourage the emergence of desirable futures? *Max Schmidt*, climate policy specialist at Perspectives Climate Group, reflects on an international process designed not to deliver utopia, but to guard against the drift into dystopia: the COP (Conference of the Parties) of the UN convention on climate change. He shows how this institution is failing to deliver on its promise and instead explores different alternatives to it: the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative, Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance (BOGA), and Statement on International Public Support for the Clean Energy Transition (CETP). He urges countries, organizations, groups and individuals to leverage these initiatives to overcome the shortcomings of the COP.

Similarly, *Igor Shishlov*, executive director of the climate & business program (HEC Paris), and *Zuriñe Bidaurreta*, head of legal department at Ikusi, plead business schools to urgently integrate and mainstream sustainability and climate education in their curricula to ensure that future generation have the right skills to drive sustainable innovation and transformation. They underline the need for collective action and new forms of collaborations between academia, education, business and politics to meet the pressing and major challenges posed by climate change and environmental degradation.

Utopias in the future

Dovev Lavie, professor of strategic management at Bocconi University, draws his utopia from a lucid perspective on our present: our current economic system incentivizes opportunistic behavior over prosocial behavior, thereby penalizing acts of kindness and reciprocity. He proposes to change the incentives system to create a "cooperative economy", which involves a redistribution system through the subsidization of prices flowing from high-income consumers to low-income consumers. This would enable us to pursue a profession of choice and starting a business with financial security, thereby encouraging entrepreneurship. Further attributes of the cooperative economy include a stronger sense of community through increased interactions, digital platforms that protect fair competition, and protect from opportunistic behavior, a reduction in salary differences and the prevention of concentration of wealth and power.

In the same spirit, *Sandra Waddock*, professor of management à Boston College Carroll School of Management, invites us to think about the future of businesses, by asking what role enterprises can play in a world in polycrisis. She describes a new form of leadership, "stewardship", as answering to this new reality by taking care of whole systems including people and planet. Stewards are catalyzers of transformation, with a particular skillset to transform the way organizations and communities function by connecting, cohering and amplifying. Accordingly, organizations need to value and make space for those carrying these new skills, and universities need to make sure to integrate these skills into their curricula.

Lastly, *Elena Hofferberth*, senior post-growth researcher at the University of Lausanne, and *Matthias Schmelzer*, professor for social-ecological transformation at the University of Flensburg, reflect on degrowth and post-growth alternatives for our economic system. Particularly, they reflect on how these alternativities lead us to rethink deeply political questions such as democracy, power, and deliberative change. They provide a range of examples of initiatives taking place in the present that allow us to take a leap in a post-growth world. By scrutinizing these initiatives against comparable criteria and in a deliberative manner embedding experiences and voices from marginalized communities, these different models can help us reflect about desirable and adequate futures abiding ecological and social goals.

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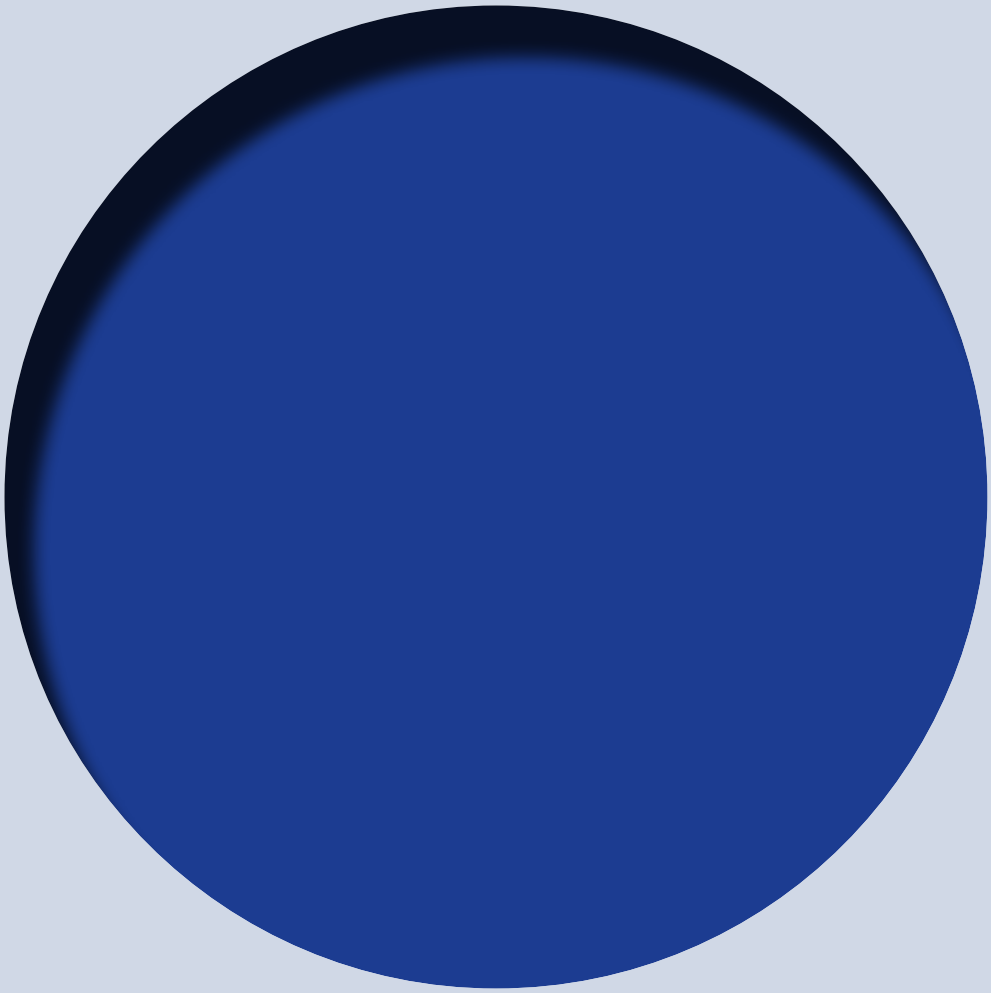
UTOPIAS IN THE PRESENT



Utopia, Autonomy and the Anthropocene

ESTEBAN ARCOS is a philosopher and holds a doctorate in law, ethics, and the economics of sustainable development. He defended a dissertation in environmental ethics and philosophy on autonomy in the age of the Anthropocene (2023). He is a research fellow at the University of Lausanne.

Utopia is not an appropriate term to reflect on the idea of autonomy. Utopia is a mystifying term. If utopia "is something that does not and cannot happen", then to frame autonomy as a utopia is self-defeating. It implies that autonomy does not and cannot happen[1]. I will therefore use the term *possibilism*, as opposed to utopia, as a more appropriate framework for autonomy, the constitutive idea and legitimizing value of modern societies[2]. My purpose here is to give an overview of the idea of autonomy, as opposed to the ideal of freedom underpinning contemporary consumerist culture, to confront the crises that the Anthropocene epoch brings[3].

The crisis of legitimation of the ideal of freedom in the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene posits the transition to a new geological epoch where humans have become a *geological force* altering Earth living conditions[4]. The Anthropocene, as an event for social theory, questions, the society/nature, subject/object, divides on which we constructed our social ideals of autonomy, justice, and democracy[5], as well as the alliance that the ideal of autonomy has established with abundance (growth): "Nothing is more material than freedom", writes Pierre Charbonnier[6]: abundance has sustained the emancipation of individuals and groups by making it a tangible reality[7]. It is this pact between these two ideals of modernity, abundance and freedom that the Anthropocene epoch demolishes. This can be illustrated by the "planetary boundaries" framework. The overstepping of these limits affects the possibility of the continuation of this pact, the material conditions of freedom.

What is freedom today? As Benjamin Constant (1997) put it, "the peaceful enjoyment of private independence", i.e., the infinite variation of the means of personal happiness. "The aim of the moderns is to be secure in their private benefits: and *liberty* is their name for the guarantees accorded by institutions to these benefits."[8] I will not go into the pathological forms of this freedom, *l'ère du vide*, where a *culture of narcissism* has led us. Suffice it to say that *our* freedom is entirely anchored, to a material substrate, and that every act of *that* freedom brings us one step closer to crossing the planetary boundaries defining the safe operating space for humanity.

As long as the fundamental question of freedom is not renewed as a collective social-historical project, rethinking economics (what we have called here the ideal of abundance), will remain an effort of imaginable and desirable futures, or a utopia (but we have seen what this term implies).

1 Cornelius Castoriadis, ScRios Políticos (2005).

2 Axel Honneth, "L'autonomie décentrée. Les conséquences de la critique moderne du sujet pour la philosophie morale," in Psychologie morale, ed. M. Jouan (Paris: Vrin, 2005), 347–363, at 15.

3 On this point see: Carleheden, Mikael, and Nikolaj Schultz. "The ideal of freedom in the Anthropocene: A new crisis of legitimation and the brutalization of geo-social conflicts." Thesis Eleven 170, no. 1 (2022): 99-116.

4 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," Critical Inquiry 35, no. 2 (2009): 197–222, https://doi.org/10.1086/596640.

5 Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil, and François Gemenne, The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015), Routledge Environmental Humanities.

6 Pierre Charbonnier, Abondance et liberté: Une histoire environnementale des idées politiques (Paris: La Découverte, 2020), https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.charb.2020.01, at 18.

7 Ibid., at 49.

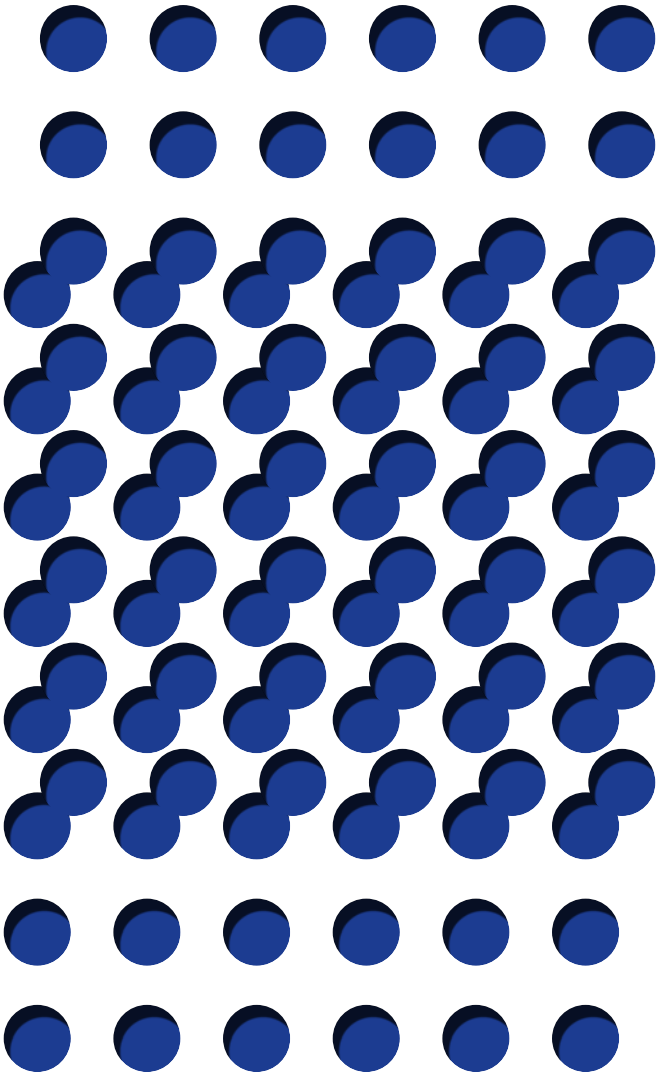
8 Benjamin Constant, Écrits politiques (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), [orig. 1814–1819].

Rethinking freedom in the Anthropocene

I have said that the Anthropocene questions the society/nature divide on which ideals such as freedom, justice and democracy have been built upon. Conceptually, this poses the important and arduous task of (re)legitimizing freedom. It is not the first time that philosophy has faced this task. I use the related concept of *autonomy* which has been subjected to much criticism in the last century[9]. The specificity of the new critique is the intrusion of nature as a limit to autonomy (the planetary boundaries framework captures this limitation).

I have argued that we can think of nature, not in opposition, but as a constitutive condition of autonomy defined as the *self-realisation of individual identity*[10]. My claim is that nature must be one aspect, among others (self-confidence, self-respect, self-esteem[11]), of individual self-realisation. Interaction with nature can promote personal autonomy; and the care, respect and protection for nature can be a motivation for the autonomous individual. If this is true, then there is no contradiction between autonomy, as we have just defined it, and nature, since nature is understood as a condition of self-realisation.

The key point here is to understand autonomy in *relational* terms. Feminist philosophers have coined the term "relational autonomy" to convey the sense that the relations of dependency and interdependency in which we are immersed are constitutive of autonomy[12]. Thus, in contrast to the myth of the self-made man, autonomy, or relational autonomy, to be precise, articulates the idea that individuals are socially embedded and that our identity is shaped by these social determinants.



I add nature must be seen as another sphere of relations of dependency and interdependency that promotes autonomy. Eco-psychological research supports this, showing that we have an innate affection for nature. Experiencing nature is, therefore, a source of self-definition[13]. That is, as I have argued, a constitutive relation of personal autonomy.

9 Monique Jouan, Comment Penser l'Autonomie: Entre Compétences et Dépendances (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009).

10 For a more detailed account see my 2024 text.

11 These are the relations to self within the three spheres of recognition (love, rights, shared-values within a community) in Axel Honneth's social theory. These are intersubjective conditions that allow and promote personal autonomy.

12 Jennifer Nedelsky, "Reconceiving Autonomy," Yale Journal of Law and Feminism 1, no. 1 (1989): 7.

13 Susan Clayton, "Environmental Identity: A Conceptual and an Operational Definition," in Identity and the Natural Environment: The Psychological Significance of Nature, ed. Susan Clayton and Susan Opotow (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

The ontological basis of autonomy in the Anthropocene

Environmental philosophy, especially ecophenomenology, has introduced the notion of *relational values* to go beyond the subject/object dichotomy. Here subjects and objects are less important than the dynamic web of relations that is the world. Meaning does not depend on the evaluations of the subject or the properties of the object, but emerges from the relationship between the two[14]. If this is so, then our description of the world can only refer to the state of processes without a subject[15].

This metaphysics of events raises the question of the concept of the subject that is required for autonomy. If we follow Bernard Charbonneau's existential defense of freedom, freedom *is* in a subject; "freedom", he writes, "is the first person"[16]: 'I am (*je suis*)'. It follows that freedom, for Charbonneau, "is no longer one value among others, but the original act that creates them all"[16]. While I cannot develop this argument here, it illustrates the enormous challenge that a process ontology, which, let us remember, seeks to overcome the subject/object divide, poses to the question of agency, autonomy, and the status of the subject. I will leave this point aside.

Let me conclude by sketching an ontological description of the world that might be adequate for autonomy. I borrow Arne Naess' (2018) notion of *possibilism*[17]. For Naess, possibilism is "the assumption that the future is in principle completely open, offering unimaginable surprises"[18]. He summarizes this idea with the following sentence: "Anything whatsoever can happen at any time"[19]. It reflects a description of the world that was familiar to the ancient Greeks and that we can find in Aristotle's philosophy. At the heart of this description of the world is the notion of *contingency*. This notion is not so far removed from the notion of *uncertainty* that the Anthropocene carries.

My claim is that action (autonomy) moves within the realm of the contingent, that is, of *what can be other than it is* (τὸ ενδεχομενον αλλως εχειν). This description of the world implies that human action creates an ordered world in the flow of uncertain events. Possibilism, based on metaphysics of contingency, not utopia, is what the social-historical project of autonomy is.

by Esteban Arcos, April 11, 2025

14 Caitlin Gilliand, "Experiencing Values in the Flow of Events: A Phenomenological Approach to Relational Values," Environmental Values 30 (2021): 715–736.

15 Vincent Descombes, Le Complément de Sujet: Enquête sur le fait d'agir de soi-même, Tel 421 (Paris: Gallimard, 2018), at 32.

16 Bernard Charbonneau, Je fus: Essai sur la liberté (Pau: Impr. Marrimpouey, 1980), at 390.

17 Arne Naess, Life's Philosophy: Reason and Feeling in a Deeper World (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018).

18 Ibid., p. 4.

19 Ibid., pp. 4-5.

Researching Utopias: From Aspiration as a Moral Obligation to Embodied Utopias

ANDREA MATHEZ has a graduate assistant-PhD position in the Institute of Geography and Sustainability.

I have been exploring alternative agricultures in Morocco and Switzerland through ethnographic research methods. Despite working explicitly on *quiet alternativity* – concrete agro-ecological and everyday practices with potentially beneficial socio-ecological outcomes, which are however not promoted, experienced or described as *alternative* or *disruptive* by the people who practice them – I realized that I often felt surprised when farmers could or would not really answer my questions about their aspirations and their opinion on how food should be ideally grown in their places in the future. Neither in Switzerland nor in Morocco did these questions provoke extensive answers nor even interest in the way I had hoped. Facing this lack of enthusiasm to answer this type of question, I started to reconsider utopias an embodied and embedded experience, where the mind-body duality collapses, to broaden what utopia can mean beyond purely speculative thinking.

Le Corbusier once said: "Man walks straight because he has a goal: he knows where he is going, he has decided to go somewhere and he walks straight there"[20]. This emblematically expresses the idea inherent in *modernity* that there is a linear path of *progress* leading to an End of History. Modernity's end of history utopia relies on the widely accepted moral assumptions that *being human* means the capacity to look forward instead of living day by day. Yet, this seems increasingly disconnected from a vast majority of people's daily experiences in which the future seems uncertain. Hence, my initial surprise that many farmers rarely expressed any aspirations of how the world should ideally look was probably tainted by a certain moral obligation to have a clearly articulated image projected to the future. This meant not only ignoring the privilege of some to plan ahead, while others are busy finding strategies to cope with daily life but also that hope can express itself as a feeling manifested *quietly* in bodily practices and ways of being. Seeing the mind and body as inseparable, *feeling* that the world is wrong becomes a lived and embodied experience. Ernst Bloch in his seminal work Principle of Hope defines hope as an *Agens* driving us forward, which does not necessarily mean that we have a picture of a utopia to put in place for the world which feels wrong nor that it can easily be translated into a coherent discourse and vision[21].

Trying to "look around rather than ahead"[22], I started to investigate quiet expressions of hope, namely, to explore utopia not just as something that is thought and said but as something that is embodied in a specific experience and embedded in a specific place in the world. This implied recognizing supposedly mundane practices and experiences as powerful sites of transformation, sustainability, and political action without dismissing them as secondary to *real material* struggles and aspirations of *progress*. Embodied experiences of utopias in one form or another kept coming up in my research. Yet, it took me a while to recognize those as such. Much like "disgruntled political economists"[23] seduced by the elegance of certain abstractions, I was trained to see an ocean of sameness: capitalist relations at work

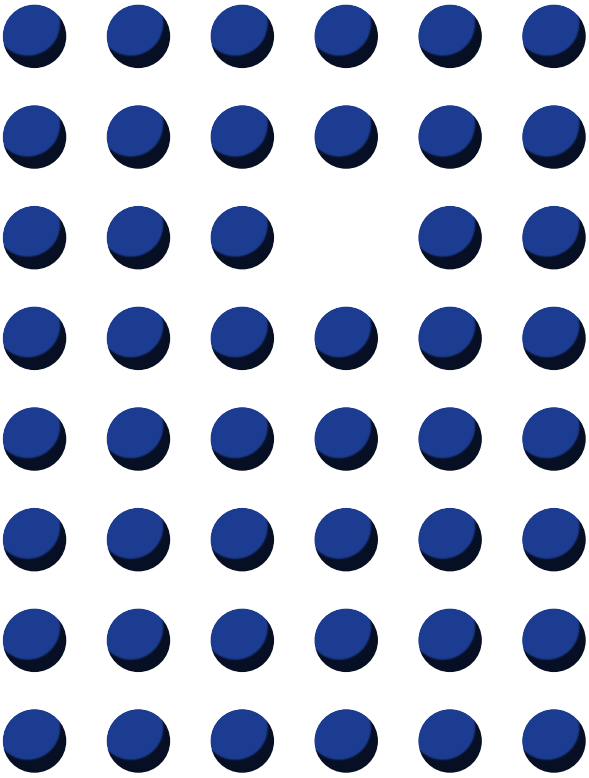
20 Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme* (Paris: Les Éditions G. Crès et Cie, 1925).

21 Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1959).

22 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 22.

23 Michael Carolan, "Adventurous Food Futures: Knowing About Alternatives Is Not Enough, We Need to Feel Them," *Agriculture and Human Values* 33, no. 1 (2016): 141–152.

resulting in environmental destruction and social inequality. I felt less equipped to "read for difference", as the feminist geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham put it, in order to open up spaces for aspirations of change. Hence, while I felt that many stories that farmers told me were important to the people who shared them with me, I was first hesitant to theorize those positive experiences, as I have rather been trained to focus on *negative* pressures which dismiss such moments as *secondary* to the *real material struggles* people are facing. Yet, I increasingly felt that they are *not*, that dismissing such stories reduces the multifaceted life experiences of the farmers I encountered, and thereby fails to explain why they engage in alternative agricultures. Here is one of these stories:



At an event called "A taste of tomorrow's agriculture" on a farm in Switzerland, a farmer told the public that two years before his retirement, he changed from conventional to organic farming. He said he had started again to walk through his fields instead of only driving through them on his tractor, thereby observing the insects and studying the weed growing on different patches on the soil to understand the material characteristics of his soil and accordingly the different *needs* and possibilities of each patch. All of which made farming for him suddenly more interesting and satisfying. He later explained to me: "economically speaking this was an absolute non-sense. But one day, I was sitting on my tractor, I had almost finished applying an herbicide when I suddenly realized that this made no sense. I just knew that I would not continue."

With this and other stories farmers told me, I slowly came to understand embodied utopia in terms of enchantment, an experience which can feel like "a transitory sensuous condition dense and intense enough to stop you in your tracks and toss you onto new terrain, to move you from the actual world to its virtual possibilities"[24]. Enchantment, an experience of wonder which gives life its meaning[25] is a relationship between two subjects – where the other subject can be almost anyone or anything: the first barley germs sprouting after a hot and dry summer, the silence in the morning, the liveliness of a little patch of soil, or the cuddling of a goat. From this understanding of enchantment, it is only a little step to mystical theorizations of utopia. Corbin (1976) explains that while the term *Na-Koja-Abad*, coined by Sohravardi, a Persian philosopher and mystic, etymologically and literally means no-where-land[26], it is fundamentally different in its meaning from the term *(O)u-Topia* coined in 1516 by Thomas More which in essence means no-place, and which quickly came to be used to refer to a non-existent good place in many languages. Even though both terms refer to a *situs* that does not exist in a physical place and is discernible by sensory organs, Na-Koja-Abad, unlike

24 Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11.

25 Patrick Curry, *Enchantment: Wonder in Modern Life* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2019).

26 Henry Corbin, *Mundus Imaginalis: Or, the Imaginary and the Imaginal* (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1976).

(O)utopia, designs a site that is discernible by suprasensory organs. El Wardany, an Egyptian novelist, nicely and effectively puts it:

It is not a place you can inquire about by asking *Where*. It is the nowhere that surrounds us everywhere, whose chasm can yawn open at any moment, whose winds may sweep suddenly through the present. [...] it is more than just a Sufi limbo, pure and removed from our profane world, or an alternative one to which we might escape, but signifies instead a place on earth, somewhere where the *No* can go to work, forcing fractures in the status quo.

El Wardany's idea of the "No who can go to work" relates to the disruptive force of enchantment. Enchantment, an embodied utopia, cannot be instrumentalized, but it can create openings to see the world a bit differently, and thereby lead to another way of being in the world.

Consequently, researching utopias not just in terms of speculative thinking and *loud alternativity* – practices and ways of life promoted as alternative by those who live them – but also in terms of embodiment, allowed me to get closer to the *Agens* which leads farmers to engage with alternative agricultures. I found that hope is more often a feeling manifested *quietly* in daily practices and ways of being than in *loud* speech and political agendas. People change practices and spaces in ways that are often overlooked – especially when we try to capture transformation through overly rigid concepts that do not travel easily across different contexts. Hence, theorizing embodied utopias builds on the insights of the potentially *quiet* nature of socio-ecologically beneficial practices and invites us to stretch our imaginations to detect the traces and contours of not-yet-articulated common agendas. In my research, this meant recognizing these *quiet* and *loud* experiences already there and their underlying motivations as a first step to imagining and enacting more broadly ecologically sound and just agri-*cultures*. Beyond my research, I propose embodied utopias as a proposition of transversality to explore the inner worlds shaping people's actions. Contrary to utopias as speculative thinking, embodied utopias are transcendental experiences where the body-mind duality collapses and while they do not necessarily translate into a concrete image of utopia, they can still push you into new realms, leading you to object dominant ways of subjectivation.

by Andrea Mathez, February 27, 2025

Based on: Mathez, A. 2024. Glimpses of Embodied Utopias, Why Moroccan and Swiss Farmers Engage in Alternative Agricultures. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-024-10598-9.

Néo-farmers: Agroecological Utopias in a Dystopian Agricultural Landscape?

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Summary

Néo-farmers (fr. Néo-paysan-ne-s) are farmers who do not come from an agricultural background, who inherited neither land nor a farm from their family. They dispose of motivations to transform towards more sustainable agroecological systems, their trajectories question dual categories of urban-rural, and they cast doubt on linear pathways of 'progress' as a universally desirable. In the context of de-agriculturalization in high-income economies, néo-farmers are now increasingly trying to establish themselves and access land for experimentation, often with alternative farming practices. Based on a multi-year ethnographic fieldwork in the Canton of Vaud, Switzerland, this blog post sketches the challenges as well as the relational realities and dreams of néo-farmers as a desirable alternative to the current (dystopian) system of agro-industrial agriculture.

The agri-food system at crossroads: increasing agro-industrialization or alternative development pathways?

The industrialization of society begins, and ends, with agriculture. In Switzerland, as well as elsewhere, agri-food systems have come at crossroads. To achieve a genuinely sustainable agroecological transition, we must divert from the acceleration of agro-industrialization and the fantasma of freeing humans from working the land. First, because industrial agriculture has proven to lead to tremendous environmental impacts, whether land erosion, biodiversity loss, disruption of the nitrogen, phosphorus, and water cycles or global climate change etc.[27] Second, we lack evidence that liberalized, digitalized and automated agriculture (i.e., smart-farming) can be sustainable to equitably satisfy human needs within planetary boundaries, its capital gains rather deepen the pockets of agrifood empires while the world faces multiple food crises[28]. Third, because theory and practice show that maintaining functional agrifood systems, adapted to their territory and planetary boundaries[29], means to maintain an active agricultural work force[30].

Trajectories of agriculture intensification are currently shaped by three variables[31]: surface area, capital/fossil energy and labor (both human and animal). Increasing arable surface area is hardly possible, both for economic and ecological reasons, since land farming competes with other land uses and ecological habitats. Increasing intensification through fossil capital (e.g. via mechanization or chemical inputs) only lead to dystopian horizons: Capital-intensive agricultures and their economies of scale above all serve economic interests, yet prove inapt when it comes to climate adaptation, energy yields and organic matter recycling. The narrative of a highly technological development that decouples yields from fossil energy use therefore remains a tale that is historically unfounded and agronomically erroneous[32]. Meanwhile, in

27 Olivier De Schutter, *Rapport du Rapporteur spécial sur le droit à l'alimentation* (New York: Assemblée générale des Nations Unies, 2011).

28 Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, *The New Peasantries: Struggles for Autonomy and Sustainability in an Era of Empire and Globalization* (London: Earthscan, 2008).

29 Johan Rockström et al., "Planetary Boundaries Guide Humanity's Future on Earth," *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment* 5 (2024): 773–788.

30 Michel Calame, *Comprendre l'agroécologie* (Paris: Charles Léopold Mayer, 2016).

31 Marcel Mazoyer and Laurence Roudart, *Histoire des agricultures du monde: Du néolithique à la crise contemporaine* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002).

32 Michel Calame, *Enraciner l'agriculture: Société et systèmes agricoles, du Néolithique à l'Anthropocène* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2020), *L'écologie en question*.

Switzerland, political leaders have historically considered such large agricultural enterprises as more modern, and therefore, more effective for agricultural development[33].

Today, numerous researchers argue that labor – the third variable – is the cornerstone to combine production imperatives and environmental conservation and integration. They support the "re-peasantisation" of agriculture, by setting up small, diversified, knowledge-intensive farms that better conserve natural resources and resist climatic pressures[34]. Hence, the agroecological transition is intrinsically linked to the intensification of *living labor*, in Marx words, and the condition for reducing dependance on fossil energy and dead labor (i.e., farming machinery), as well as environmental externalities from our agri-food systems.

The future of Swiss agriculture: néo-farmers and their claim for access to land

Current land use policies – enforced by the economic and political agricultural framework – are paving the way to a Swiss agriculture empty from its farmers. This progresses by the swift disappearance of farms – an average of 2 to 3 a day in Switzerland[35] (labelled by some as "structural evolution"[36]). Where farmers used to retire, and the next family generation took over, today there are fewer children interested in farming careers and related lifestyles, which is why farmer's land is absorbed by neighboring farms. Even though half of all Swiss farmers will reach retirement age in the next fifteen years[37] and only two-thirds of them expect their family to take over the farm[38]. However, the state and majority farming union refuse to address access to land and farming sector as a challenge for our common futures[39].

This results in a paradox: the number of students attending agricultural schools is increasing (largely due to the growing number of néo-farmers – who do not come from farming families[40]), economic, legislative and relational (e.g., lack of professional network) factors prevent these new stakeholders from setting up on their own farm. This renewed motivation to work the land represents indeed an unhoped potential for tackling the socio-ecological issues of food sovereignty, ecologizing agro-industrial systems, and transforming territorial development. Yet, despite their growing professionalism, time and resource investments, the farming projects of néo-farmers are often disqualified as 'unrealistic' and 'utopian' by the established farming community.

Utopias as a relational pathway: working the land amongst pre-established farming community

Based on a multi-year ethnographic fieldwork in the Canton of Vaud, Switzerland, in my doctoral dissertation I have documented the diversity of interests in *working the land* that néo-farmers embody and claim with their settlements, to show how these narratives collide, but also resonate, with existing and historical ways to be farmers. The frictions and complexities emerging from this territorial coexistence show how these embodied narratives – still depicted as impractical *utopias* – take on all their

33 Judith Auderset and Peter Moser, *Die Agrarfrage in der Industriegesellschaft: Wissenskulturen, Machtverhältnisse und natürliche Ressourcen in der agrarisch-industriellen Wissensgesellschaft (1850–1950)* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2018).

34 Robert Netting, *Smallholders, Householders: Farm Families and the Ecology of Intensive, Sustainable Agriculture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

35 van der Ploeg, *The New Peasantries*, 45

36 Federal Statistical Office (FSO), *Agriculture et alimentation: Statistique de poche 2023* (Neuchâtel: Office fédéral de la statistique, 2023).

37 Yvan Droz and Véronique Miéville-Ott, *On achève bien les paysans* (Geneva: Georg Editeur, 2001).

38 Andreas Zorn, "Kennzahlen des Strukturwandels der Schweizer Landwirtschaft auf Basis einzelbetrieblicher Daten," *Agroscope Science* 88 (2020): 31.

39 This is demonstrated by Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin's response to the petition launched by the Association of Small and Medium-sized Farmers, *Every Farm Counts – Stop the Disappearance of Farms Now.*

40 OrTra AgriAliForm, *Évolution du nombre d'apprentis dans le champ professionnel de l'agriculture et de ses professions* (2023).

meaning in a relational perspective, politicizing previously sterile territorial development trajectories[41]. Meanwhile, my findings show that because néo-farmers have no prospect of taking over land through intrafamilial transfer their contribution to agroecological transition pathways is incompatible with the institutionally promoted model of Swiss agriculture[42]. Much rather, their presence and claims to experiment practical *utopias* is perceived as disturbing, especially when they advocate for facilitating access to land, revising agricultural training and denounce land concentration in the hands of a few landowners[43].

Meanwhile, as part of a relational utopia, *néo-farmers* tend to refuse conflicts and embrace the complexity to construct farming territory with established farmers[44]. Oftentimes, néo-farmers bear a diversity of visions and values of working with and relating to the land, which tends to help reclaiming agency that other agricultural actors feel they have lost[45]. They refuse to assign agricultural world to a minority whose knowledge is often misunderstood and devalued. Their settlements become hence a vehicle for dialogue between an urban world with growing environmental convictions and romanticized visions of rural areas, especially during an increasingly vocal agricultural sector whose social mobilizations are visible across Europe.

In my dissertation, I argue that the presence of atypical agricultural development pathways can be a source of new social dynamics, fruitful alliances and more effective farming models, both intra- or extra-familial. Through imaginations that accompany their arrival, néo-farmers force us to question extant trajectories of disappearance and structural concentration of farms conceived as the exclusive path to territorial development[46]. Thus, they refute the narrative that imaginaries of the future leave no room for alternative interpretations of the past, opening new possibilities of engagement in the present. Through their day-to-day experimentation, they produce heterogeneous landscapes which break with the singular terms of the agro-industrial model.

Far from being bubbles of fantasized, atomized utopias, néo-farmers settlements unfold like a network of relational utopias under permanent construction, navigating with frictions and compromises within a territorial development policy. By bridging the rural and the urban, they allow us to project ourselves into desirable futures. Néo-farmers pose a decisive question to society: which narratives are fertile and need to be nurtured? The ones of a society fantasizing about its freedom from working the land? Or thoughtful 'landings'[47], to use the words of Bruno Latour, offering the opportunity to rethink the normative presuppositions of land access as means of subsistence, experimentation and living environments in line both with food sovereignty requirements and planetary boundaries? In this spatial story, néo-farmers could be less the *utopians* than the *revealers* of the dystopian and dominant nature of agro-industrial intensification.

by Mathilde Vandaele, January 3, 2025

41 Anne Mathez and Mathieu Vandaele, "La polyphonie des agricultures alternatives en Suisse romande," *Développement durable et territoires*, under review (2024).

42 Simone Contzen and Julian Forney, "Family Farming and Gendered Division of Labour on the Move: A Typology of Farming-Family Configurations," *Agriculture and Human Values* 34, no. 1 (2017): 27–40.

43 Mathieu Vandaele, "Le mouvement de retour à la Terre en Suisse romande: Quelles possibles coévolutions entre monde agricole et mouvement néopaysan?" in *Retours à/de la Terre: Vues d'Europe et du Japon*, ed. Laurence Granchamp and Katsuya Muramatsu (Québec City: Éditions Septentrion, 2024), under review.

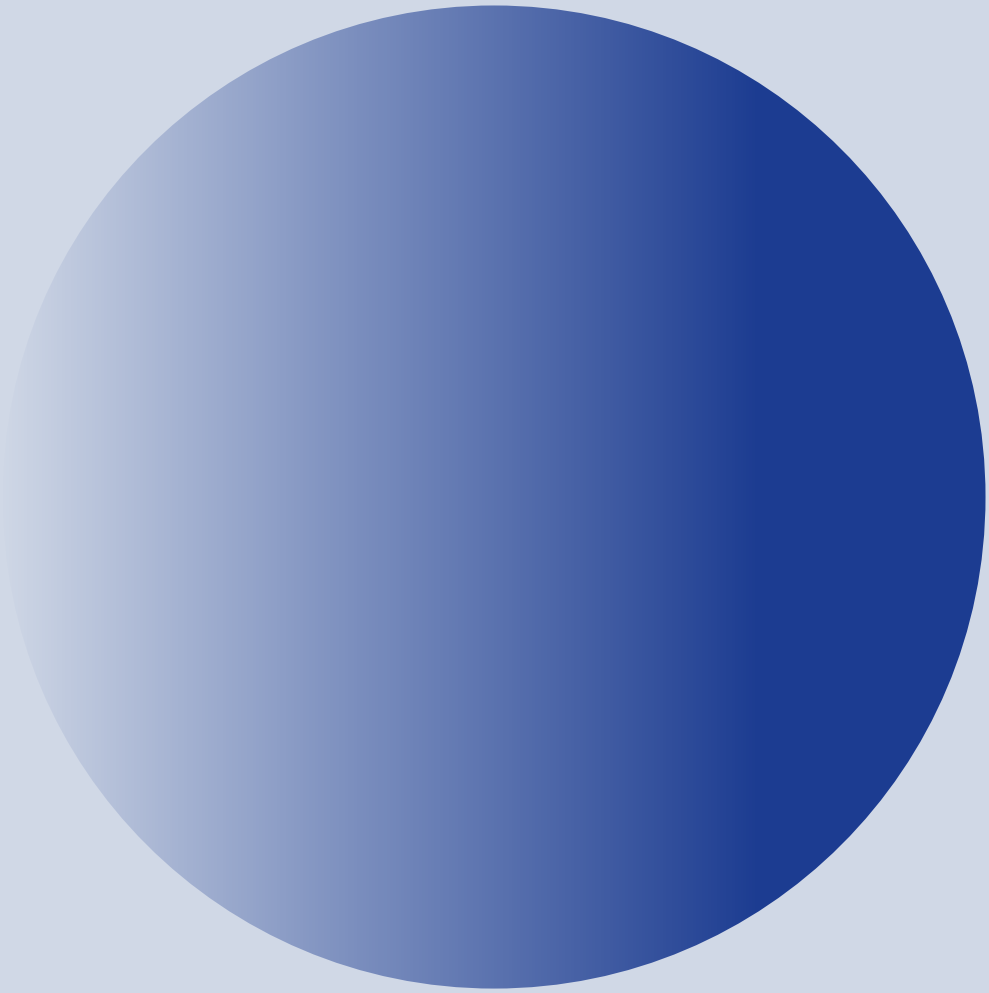
44 Jonathan Forney, Julie Vuilleumier, and Marion Fresia, "Constraint and Autonomy in the Swiss 'Local Contract Farming' Movement," in *Community Food Initiatives: A Critical Reparative Approach*, ed. Olivia Morrow, Egbert Veen, and Stefanie Wahlen (2023), 101–116.

45 Yvan Droz and Julian Forney, *Un métier sans avenir? La grande transformation de l'agriculture suisse romande* (Geneva: IUED, 2007).

46 Dominique Barjolle, Jean-Michel Chappuis, and Claude Eggenschwiller, *L'agriculture dans son nouveau rôle*, *Collection Savoir Suisse* (Lausanne: EPFL Press, 2008).

47 Bruno Latour, *Où atterrir? Comment s'orienter en politique* (Paris: La Découverte, 2017).

UTOPIAS IN MOTION

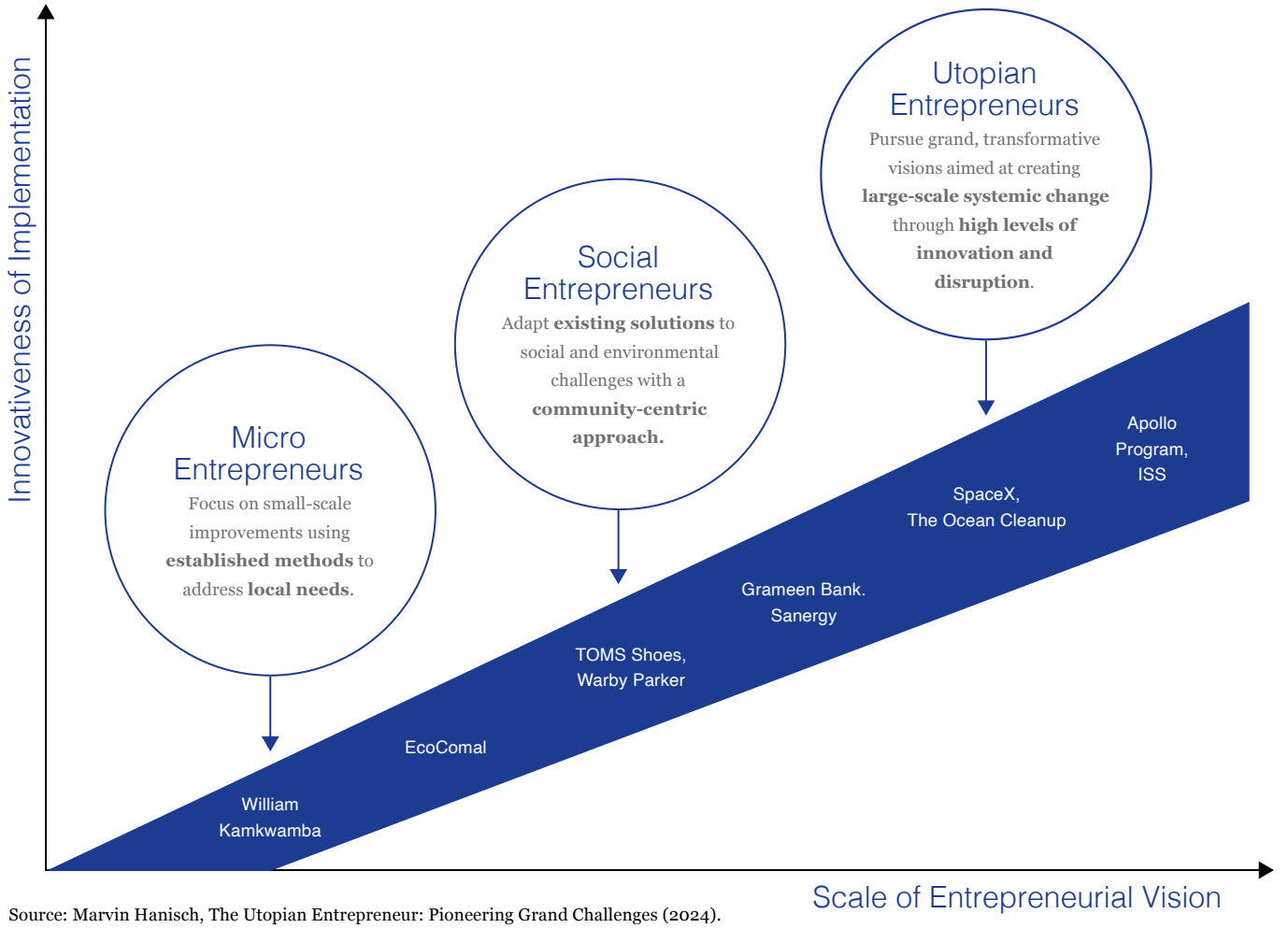


The Utopian Entrepreneur: Pioneering Grand Challenges

MARVIN HANISCH is an Associate Professor in the Department of Innovation Management & Strategy at the University of Groningen. He specializes in governance and leadership issues in high-tech domains, including digital platforms, open-source software, blockchain networks, and biopharmaceutical alliances.

Entrepreneurship has always been a powerful force for societal change, but its transformative potential is especially crucial today. As we face climate change, digital transformation, aging populations, and large-scale migration, utopian entrepreneurs can make a significant contribution to tackling these grand challenges. Whether it is Tony's Chocolonely's hope for a chocolate industry free of child labor and slavery, Barefoot College's ideal of accessible education, or Sanergy's vision of clean sanitation services for low-income communities, these entrepreneurial initiatives embody one element essential of utopian entrepreneurship: a grand vision. What makes an entrepreneur truly utopian, and what sets them apart from social entrepreneurs, is the combination of grand visions with high levels of innovation in their implementation.

Utopian entrepreneurship is the intersection of a grand, aspirational vision and a high level of innovation to realize it. It goes beyond addressing immediate social problems to reimagining and transforming entire systems and industries in pursuit of an idealistic future through high levels of innovation. Utopian entrepreneurs are visionaries who challenge and disrupt the status quo, striving for broad, systemic change toward an idealized future.



Source: Marvin Hanisch, The Utopian Entrepreneur: Pioneering Grand Challenges (2024).

Examples:

William Kamkwamba:	built a windmill from spare parts and scrap	SpaceX:	develops space technology to eventually colonize Mars
EcoComal:	produces energy-efficient stoves for rural households	The Ocean Cleanup:	designs and deploys systems to remove plastic from oceans
TOMS Shoes:	donates a pair of shoes for every pair sold	Apollo Program:	conducted manned missions to the moon, advancing space exploration technology
Warby Parker:	provides affordable eyewear and donates glasses to those in need	ISS:	serves as a multinational research laboratory in low Earth orbit
Grameen Bank:	offers microloans to impoverished entrepreneurs		
Sanergy:	provides sanitation solutions in low-income urban areas		

Source: Marvin Hanisch, The Utopian Entrepreneur: Pioneering Grand Challenges (2024).

For example, Boyan Slat's The Ocean Cleanup aims to remove plastic from the world's oceans entirely, envisioning a future free from pollution and developing new techniques for capturing plastic across large areas. Similarly, Elon Musk's SpaceX pursues the ambitious goal of making human life multiplanetary, aiming to enable new forms of space travel and ultimately colonize Mars. These expansive and radical approaches distinguish utopian entrepreneurship from social entrepreneurship, which typically focuses on solving specific problems with existing or slightly modified technical solutions.

At the heart of utopian entrepreneurship is a *grand vision*, imaginaries that aim to construct a "better" future at a grand scale[48,49,50]. Aligned with this visionary pursuit, utopian entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in society, pushing the boundaries of human endeavors, reimaging societies and human life, and developing technologies to achieve previously unattainable goals. While many companies boast ambitious vision statements, utopian entrepreneurs stand out for taking ambitious steps toward their realization, *defying significant social and/or technological obstacles*. This often involves employing previously nonexistent or untested methods, which come with considerable uncertainty and a high risk of failure.

However, *strategizing* around utopia is far from simple for entrepreneurs. They encounter a unique set of obstacles, from the inherent risks and setbacks in pioneering technological innovations to the nascent or undefined markets for radical ideas, and the challenge of operating within often ambiguous or nonexistent regulatory frameworks[51]. Additionally, ideological differences among stakeholders on both visions and methods can lead to significant conflicts and impasses. Overall, utopian entrepreneurs may face intensified scrutiny and skepticism, hindering their ability to secure funding, attract talent, and be taken seriously due to their challenge of established norms and assumptions.

Against this backdrop, pivoting can be a key success factor for utopian entrepreneurs. Pivoting, which involves making strategic adjustments in response to evolving circumstances, is crucial for sustaining progress toward ambitious goals[52]. It is a pragmatic approach to realizing a vision within the constraints of the present. By embracing adaptability and making iterative changes, entrepreneurs can navigate around roadblocks and maintain the essential momentum needed to bring their grand visions to fruition. The Wright brothers, dreaming of powered flight, pivoted through numerous design iterations to achieve success with the Wright Flyer in 1903. Similarly, Thomas Edison, after famously going through "10,000 ways that won't work"

48 Gabriel Augustine, Stefan Soderstrom, Douglas Milner, and Klaus Weber, "Constructing a Distant Future: Imaginaries in Geoengineering," *Academy of Management Journal* 62, no. 6 (2019): 1930–1960.

49 Ali Aslan Gümüsay and Juliane Reinecke, "Imagining Desirable Futures: A Call for Prospective Theorizing with Speculative Rigour," *Organization Theory* 5, no. 1 (2024)

50 Markus Hanisch, "Prescriptive Theorizing in Management Research: A New Impetus for Addressing Grand Challenges," *Journal of Management Studies* 61, no. 4 (2024): 1692–1716.

51 Howard P. Segal, *Technological Utopianism in American Culture*, 20th Anniversary ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

52 Jacquelyn Kirtley and Siobhán O'Mahony, "What Is a Pivot? Explaining When and How Entrepreneurial Firms Decide to Make Strategic Change and Pivot," *Strategic Management Journal* 44, no. 1 (2023): 197–230.

finally developed a practical electric light bulb in 1879, transforming how we illuminate our world.

To overcome resistance, utopian entrepreneurs can try to generate excitement and, occasionally, hype around their ideas, initiating a virtuous cycle where attention leads to recognition, acceptance, and broader support.[53] Crucially, any promise must be grounded in reality. The perils of overpromising are starkly illustrated by Elizabeth Holmes's downfall with Theranos, where claims about the company's revolutionary blood testing technology proved to be fraudulent, fueled by overzealous ambition. A counterexample of an entrepreneur who coupled ambition with realism is Muhammad Yunus, the founder of Grameen Bank. Yunus started with the vision of alleviating poverty through microfinance, offering small loans to the impoverished without requiring collateral. While the idea of microcredit was revolutionary and met with skepticism, Yunus's approach was grounded in practicality and a deep understanding of the local economy.

Dystopian Entrepreneurship: The Perils of Unintended Consequences

While utopian entrepreneurs strive for societal betterment, there exists a shadow counterpart: *dystopian entrepreneurship*. This phenomenon can emerge when well-meaning intentions take a negative, often unintended turn. A prime example is Meta's Facebook, which began with a grand vision—to unite the world online and fundamentally alter social paradigms. However, when Facebook paved the way for repeated privacy violations and the spread of misinformation, along with contributing to mental health problems and threats to democracy, it exemplified the thin line between utopian promise and dystopian reality. Of course, whether and when such lines are crossed often depends on perspective. The conflicting morals surrounding the Manhattan Project, with its vision of ending World War II and saving thousands of lives while creating a weapon capable of destroying humanity, is perhaps the most extreme example of this dilemma. Given the large-scale disruption that utopian initiatives can trigger, it becomes exceedingly difficult to anticipate their consequences. The speed of change can quickly outpace and overwhelm regulatory responses, posing a real threat to society.

In conclusion, utopian entrepreneurship is not just about dreaming big; it is about having the courage to *pursue those dreams despite significant social and technological challenges*. It is about inspiring change and taking ambitious steps toward achieving a "better" future. As society continues to face grand challenges, the role of utopian entrepreneurs becomes ever more critical, serving as a beacon of hope and a testament to the power of human ingenuity and perseverance. However, utopian entrepreneurs must remain vigilant against the pitfalls of overzealous pursuit of their visions, acknowledge the inevitable and sometimes unforeseen obstacles along the way, and be aware of the negative consequences that radical change can bring. Utopian entrepreneurs must be prepared to face significant setbacks and respond to legitimate concerns that inevitably arise. But even if a utopian entrepreneur is unsuccessful, they may *lay the groundwork to inspire others* to follow in their footsteps and work toward a brighter future.

by Marvin Hanisch, June 18, 2024

53 Danielle Logue and Matthew Grimes, "Living Up to the Hype: How New Ventures Manage the Resource and Liability of Future-Oriented Visions within the Nascent Market of Impact Investing," *Academy of Management Journal* 65, no. 3 (2022): 1055–1082.

Towards Fossil-Free Energy Futures: Why (and Where) We Need to Look beyond the UN Climate Regime

MAX SCHMIDT holds an MSc in Research for International Development from SOAS, University of London and BA degrees in political sciences and sociology. As a climate policy specialist at Perspectives Climate Group, he specializes in transforming 'negative' climate finance into 'positive' climate finance, ranging from export credits, L&D (Loss and Damage), and renewable energy finance.

At the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) of the UN's climate regime, most countries agreed to triple installed renewables (RE) capacity by 2030. This has been widely considered to signal the "beginning of the end" of the fossil fuel era[54]. But the COP process, that some seek to reform[55], itself is not sufficient to get us there: This blog post will discuss several initiatives outside the COP process that aim to rapidly realize fossil-free energy futures.

First, the yearly COPs have not helped to end the 'fossil era': Sometimes mocked as 'climate expos', for almost 30 years discussions around fossil fuel phase-out (and Loss and Damage) were virtually absent[56] from the official agenda. It was only in 2023 at COP28 – ironically in the oil and gas-producing United Arab Emirates (UAE) – that the term 'phasing down' fossil fuels was taken up in a final decision and thus went "from sidelines to headlines."[57] And with three petrostates (UAE, Azerbaijan and Brazil) hosting COPs in a row, chances are slim that the main culprits of the climate crisis – those countries and companies profiting from fossil fuel expansion – change their course of action. But even if they wanted to, how could they if, in the consensus-based COP process, any country could prevent an agreement about the needed fossil fuel phase-out in final decisions? For example, in 2021 India and China watered down the COP26 decision text[58] by calling for a 'phase down' instead of a 'phase out' of coal at the last second; previously, it was mostly Saudi Arabia that prevented any references to fossil fuels[59], but in the future it could even be smaller countries such as Guyana that just discovered oil and gas (O&G)[60].

In recent years, scientists increasingly called for an international norm against new fossil fuel supply projects to avoid excessive damage from global warming and reach international climate targets. I argue here that novel initiatives supplementing the COP process are imperative to achieve this: Not only can they go ahead without the strict need for consensus as for the COP process and thus create smaller or more specialized spaces for well-defined issues by like-minded countries. Initiatives outside the UN climate regime can also bring together so-called 'non-state actors' (including not internationally recognized countries such as Palestine) that have no formal voting power

54 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, "COP 28: What Was Achieved and What Happens Next?" last modified 2023, https://unfccc.int/cop28.

55 Lisa Gomez-Echeverri and Benito Müller, "Good COP? Bad COP? Time to Reform COP!" Oxford Climate Policy Blog, February 13, 2024, https://blog.oxfordclimatepolicy.org/good-cop-bad-cop-time-to-reform-cop/.

56 Julie-Ann Richards and Tricia Jowahir, "The Loss and Damage Fund and Pledges at COP28: Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day? Or to the Annual Earnings of a Megastar Footballer?" Loss and Damage Collaboration, November 30, 2023, https://www.lossanddamagecollaboration.org/pages/the-loss-and-damage-fund-and-pledges-at-cop28-shall-i-compare-thee-to-a-summers-day-or-to-the-annual-earnings-of-a-megastar-footballer.

57 Jocelyn Lo, "How Fossil Fuels Went from Sidelines to Headlines in Climate Talks," Climate Home News, January 17, 2024, https://www.climatechangenews.com/2024/01/17/how-fossil-fuels-went-from-sidelines-to-headlines-in-climate-talks/.

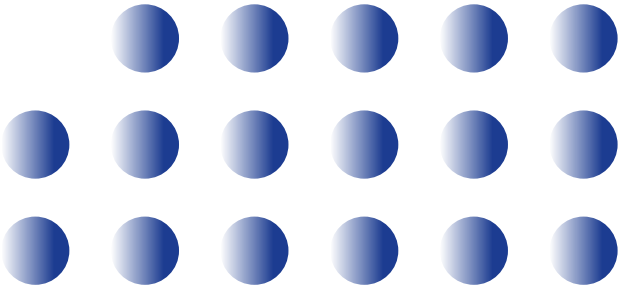
58 Damian Carrington, "Alok Sharma 'Deeply Frustrated' by India and China over Coal," The Guardian, November 14, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/14/alok-sharma-deeply-frustrated-by-india-and-china-over-coal.

59 Henry Fountain and Liam Stack, "At COP28, Saudi Arabia Says Quiet Part Out Loud on Fossil Fuels," The New York Times, December 10, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/10/climate/saudi-arabia-cop28-fossil-fuels.html.

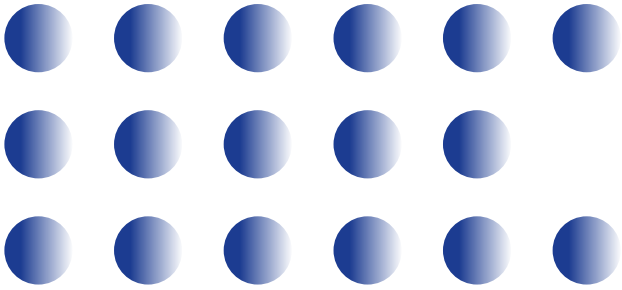
60 Reuters, "Exxon-Led Group Strikes New Oil, Gas Discovery off Guyana," *Reuters*, March 15, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/exxon-led-group-strikes-new-oil-gas-discovery-off-guyana-2024-03-15/.

in the COP process (and the UN system more generally). In the following, I provide three examples of such initiatives.

Most prominently, the *Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative* ('Fossil Treaty')[61] has already been endorsed by over 700 elected officials from 85 countries[62], more than a hundred cities and subnational governments, hundreds of thousands of individuals as well as faith, health, intellectual and scientific leaders. Inspired by the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the initiative aims to foster international cooperation to accelerate a transition to RE for everyone, end the expansion of coal, O&G, and equitably phase out existing production in keeping with the best-available climate science. While the COP process is a promising avenue to set global targets for 'low-hanging fruits' such as RE and energy efficiency, the Fossil Treaty is designed to supplement the guiding Paris Agreement that aims to limit global heating to 1.5°C. Whether the initiative will ever lead to the development of a separate treaty or not, it already sparks crucial conversations around climate justice that are silenced by countries in the Global North all too often.



Second, the international *Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance (BOGA)*, an initiative founded in 2021 by the governments of Denmark and Costa Rica to facilitate managed phase-outs of O&G production worldwide[63]. Today, there are already 15 core members that "commit to end new concessions, licensing or leasing rounds for oil and gas production and exploration and to set a Paris-aligned date for ending oil and gas production and exploration on the territory over which they have jurisdiction". In addition, the alliance attracts other countries as associate members (California and New Zealand) and 'friends' (Chile, Colombia, Fiji, Finland, Italy, Kenya, and Luxemburg) with somewhat lower direct commitments. Among those, Colombia is the largest O&G producing country to join BOGA so far – and endorse the Fossil Treaty. That countries like Colombia and sub-national governments like California are stepping up as climate leaders does not mean that the historically biggest polluters can continue with business as usual. Rather, new and additional climate finance in the trillions of USD per year must finally be flowing to such countries in the Global South to support this transition, e.g., as part of the New Collective Quantified Goal[64] to be agreed on at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan.



Third, at COP26 in Glasgow, a UK-led initiative of now 40+ signatories (mostly Western countries and financial institutions) launched the *Statement on International Public Support for the Clean Energy Transition (CETP)*. CETP signatories committed to end new direct

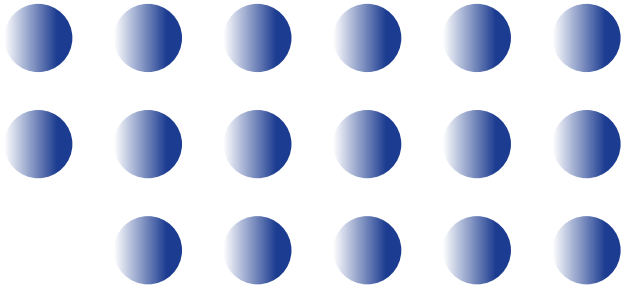
61 Fossil Fuel Treaty, "Join the Global Network Calling for a Fossil Fuel Treaty to Manage a Global Transition to Safe, Renewable & Affordable Energy for All," last modified June 6, 2025, https://fossilfueltreaty.org/.

62 Fossil Fuel Treaty, "Endorsements: Governments Supporting the Fossil Fuel Treaty," last modified June 6, 2025, https://fossilfueltreaty.org/endorsements/#governments.

63 Price of Oil, "Colombia Joins the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance and Confirms International Climate Leadership," *Press Release*, August 31, 2023, https://priceofoil.org/2023/08/31/colombia-joins-the-beyond-oil-and-gas-alliance-and-confirms-international-climate-leadership/.

64 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, "New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance," last modified March 10, 2024, https://unfccc.int/NCQG.

public support for international 'unabated' fossil fuels by the end of 2022, except in limited and clearly defined circumstances. This pledge alone has the potential to shift USD 28 billion into clean energy – annually.[65] Only a few months after COP26, however, the Russian invasion of Ukraine began which shifted political leaders' priorities: In the course of 2022, signatories shifted only USD 5.2 billion to clean energy. This illustrates a caveat of 'side deals' at the COP – they are not legally binding which means their implementation depends more strongly on political circumstances. Nonetheless, the CETP achieved to create a momentum among policy makers and may pave the way for a virtuous cycle of ambitions at future COPs.



To summarize, determined climate leadership outside the COP process already exists. Building on this momentum is urgently needed so that lighthouse initiatives by 'like-minded' countries, organizations, groups and individuals can overcome the shortcomings of the COP.

by Max Schmidt, July 9, 2024

65 Natalie Jones and Byung Mun, *Putting Promises into Practice: Clean Energy Transition Partnership Signatories' Progress on Implementing Clean Energy Commitments* (International Institute for Sustainable Development, November 28, 2023), https://www.iisd.org/publications/report/putting-promises-into-practice-cetp-commitments.

Beyond Dichotomy: Why Business Schools Must Integrate Climate Change into their Curricula

IGOR SHISHLOV is executive director of the Climate & Business Program (HEC Paris) and head of Climate Finance (Perspectives Climate Group).

ZURIÑE BIDAURRETA is the head of the Legal Department (Ikusi – Velatia Group).

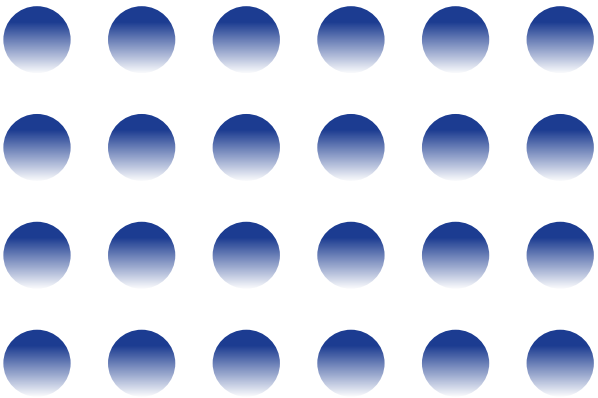
After the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015, the clock is ticking down to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. Numerous companies are pledging Net Zero commitments, but their level of *ambition and transparency varies* greatly. These pledges are increasingly scrutinized by key stakeholders – consumers, investors, public opinion, and NGOs. Regulators are also becoming more vigilant against greenwashing practices, with the European Union and its state members at the forefront. The newly enacted *Directive 2024/825* against unfair practices and improving access to information aims to empower consumers in the green transition. In the meantime, the number of *climate-related litigation* cases has been steadily increasing, while France even *introduced penalties for corporate directors* who fail to comply with the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD).

Committing to carbon neutrality is straightforward, but taking hands-on action requires a deep understanding of the challenges, the necessary trade-offs, and the skills to lead a holistic business transformation and navigate the evolving regulatory landscape. Business schools, positioned as active social agents and pivotal links between research, companies, and global talent, should be equipping current and future leaders with the hard and soft skills necessary to tackle one of humanity's most pressing challenges.

Here are three compelling reasons why:

1. Risks to business continuity.

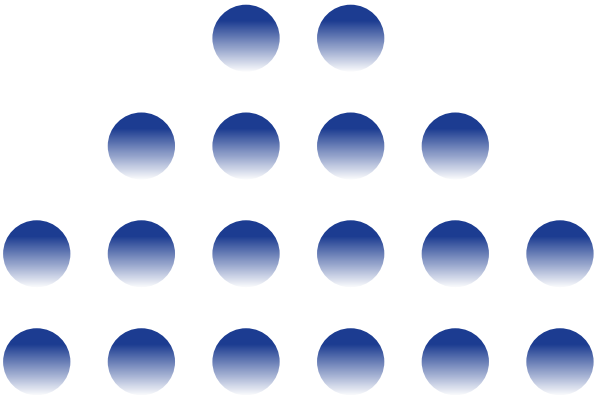
The effects of climate change pose significant risks to the continuity of companies and business-as-usual. Leaders must adapt their organizations to a changing environment influenced by natural, regulatory, and social conditions. For example, the *International Labour Organization (ILO) predicts* that by 2030, more than 2% of total working hours worldwide could be lost each year due to excessive heat or because workers need to slow down their pace. Regulations such as carbon pricing – that already *cover around a quarter of global emissions* – put further pressure on companies. Additionally, companies and financial institutions are increasingly facing the *risk of assets being "stranded"* due to the energy transition.



2. Opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship.

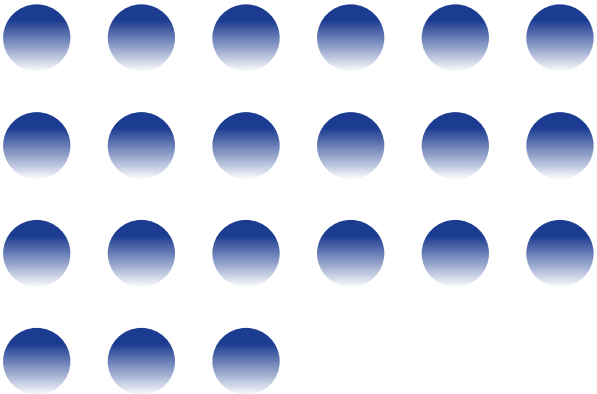
While climate change threatens business-as-usual, the transition to Net Zero presents vast *opportunities for value creation* through innovation and entrepreneurship. Business leaders who can successfully navigate these challenges and innovate within their sectors will gain a competitive advantage. Equipping business leaders with the necessary tools to understand the problem, develop business

transformation solutions, find resources to finance the transformation, and become agents of change is crucial for future organizational survival. Furthermore, climate change knowledge is increasingly relevant for all traditional business functions including strategy, marketing, finance, and corporate governance.



3. Changing consumer and employee preferences.

Citizens are becoming more conscious in their daily choices as consumers, investors, and employees, increasingly preferring to buy products with a lower environmental impact and work for companies with purposes beyond shareholder value creation. A recent survey by the *IBM Institute for Business Value (IBV) demonstrated* that 71% of employees and employment seekers find environmentally sustainable companies more attractive, and 50% are willing to accept a lower salary for more meaningful jobs. Academically, students are also choosing business programs that integrate climate change considerations, eager to redirect their careers towards roles with a positive impact.



Climate change education journey at HEC Paris

Recognizing these trends, in 2022, HEC Paris launched the five-week long *Climate & Business Certificate* program, which received the *HEC Foundation Award* for Teaching Innovation in the following year. Through a holistic approach, participants are familiarized with the big picture of the problem from scientific, economic, and political perspectives before moving on to finding practical solutions and financial resources to implement them. The program also includes hands-on experience with real business cases led by representatives of partner companies. The journey culminates in the *HEC Climate Day*, a flagship conference gathering prominent speakers from businesses, governments, and civil society. The program content is tailored to engage a diverse range of backgrounds, aiming to transform students into agents of change across their careers and communities. The creation of the Climate & Business Certificate together with the launch of the *Climate & Earth Center* is part of a broader effort to mainstream sustainability into the curriculum of the school, spearheaded by the *Sustainability & Organisations Institute*.

Photo: Logo of the Sustainability and Organizations Institute at HEC Paris

The importance of collective action

Collaboration initiatives play a vital role in amplifying the impact of climate change education. By pooling resources, expertise, and networks, institutions can create more comprehensive and effective programs. Recognizing the potential impact of academia, in 2021, eight leading European business schools, including HEC Paris, joined forces to launch *Business Schools for Climate Leadership (BS4CL)*. BS4CL's mission is to generate, disseminate, and amplify

evidence-based research, actionable insights, and thought leadership for corporate executives, students, educators, and policymakers at the forefront of driving the climate transition.

It is important to recognize that businesses alone cannot drive the transition to a sustainable future. While companies play a critical role in innovation and implementation, the broader systemic change required to address the climate crisis demands smart and comprehensive policies from governments and international bodies. Effective policies create the framework within which businesses can operate sustainably, providing incentives, setting standards, and ensuring accountability. Conversely, without the active participation and commitment of businesses, policy efforts alone will fall short. Businesses are the engines of economic activity and possess the resources and ingenuity needed to develop and scale solutions. A synergistic approach, where policies and business initiatives reinforce each other, is thus essential for achieving meaningful progress.

Embracing the responsibility of business education

To truly address the challenges posed by climate change, we need a collective effort from all sectors of society, and education is the foundation of this effort. Sustainability education should not be seen as a dichotomy or a trade-off with business education. It is integral to it. Business schools must integrate climate change into their curricula to stay relevant and effective. They have a unique responsibility and opportunity to mold the leaders who will navigate this transition. By embedding climate change into their curricula, business schools can ensure that future leaders are not only aware of the challenges but are also equipped with the skills and mindset to drive sustainable innovation and transformation. Now is the time for business schools to act. Faculty, administrators, and students must advocate for and embrace curricula that prepare future leaders to tackle climate change head-on. The stakes are high, but the potential for positive impact is even higher. The future is unwritten and – as Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said – "your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it."

by Igor Shishlov and Zuriñe Bidaurreta, September 17, 2024

UTOPIAS IN THE FUTURE

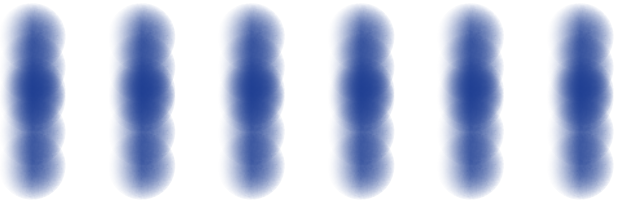
Can We Solve Societal Grand Challenges by Designing a Prosocial Economic System?

DOVEV LAVIE is a Professor of Strategic Management at Bocconi University with a PhD from the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. He studies societal grand challenges, the interplay of competition and cooperation, and value creation and capture in alliances and ecosystems. Further Readings, in my book, I elaborate on the problems with our economy, consider the limitations of existing solutions, and discuss the design of the cooperative economy. For more information visit the website www.cooperativeecoomy.net.

Business scholars have taught generations of students and executives how to create and capture value. Among the richest that have mastered that doctrine are the Big Tech firms with their digital platforms. They have captured dominant market positions that cannot be easily contested, with antitrust regulation and enforcement failing to restrain them. The Big Tech firms have attracted consumers with free apps but oppressed society. Nevertheless, these firms, like many others, cannot be blamed for mastering the rules of the economic system which allows profit maximization to override societal values such as sustainability and well-being. In my book, The Cooperative Economy[66], I identify several problems that our economic system has created.

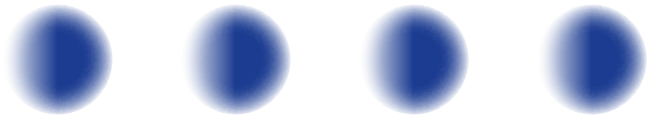
1. Wealth concentration and economic inequality

In the United States, three individuals possess wealth that is greater than that of half of the population. Whereas the income share of the rich has increased, their tax liability has not. Economic inequality has been related to shortened life expectancy, illness, corruption, and political instability. Although some UN SDGs focus on reducing inequality and ending poverty and hunger, government policies have not served well these aims.



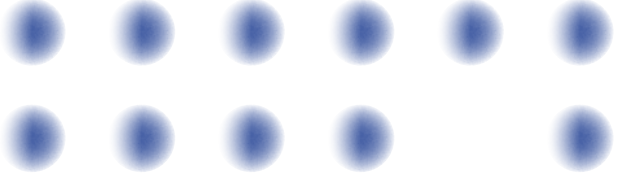
2. The dominance of platform owners

The Big Tech firms control the technological infrastructure and act as gatekeepers that dominate digital markets. They suppress competition with exclusionary practices while their vendors receive less than their fair share; they restrict consumers' choices while increasing switching costs, which eventually reduce quality and increase prices. Policymaking, antitrust laws, and regulations have been too slow to catch up with platform owners who modify their business models at will.



3. The loss of privacy and free choice

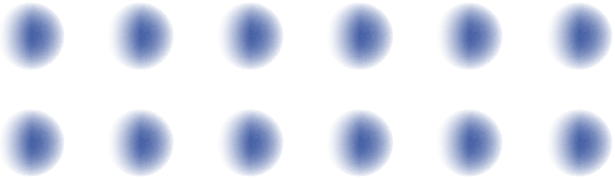
Consumers pay the platform owners for their free services with personal data, which is analyzed, dissected, and reconstructed using advanced algorithms with the aim of mis/guiding behavior per the profit-making interest of the platform owner. Consumers economize on effort but lose their free choice. Recent legislation in Europe seeks to ensure privacy, but it burdens small vendors, thus reinforcing the control of platform owners.



66 Lavie, Dovev. The cooperative economy: A Solution to societal grand challenges. Routledge, 2023.

4. Overconsumption of natural resources

With their relentless profit-seeking, firms have abused our planet's natural resources and fueled overconsumption. The extraction of natural resources has increased substantially. Consumers have also done little to become more mindful about the consequences of their lifestyles. Some firms promote sustainability, but regulation has not fostered responsible consumption. Reducing consumption can restrict consumers' utility and firms' profits while jeopardizing economic growth, so all stakeholders share interest in enduring overconsumption.



5. Drawbacks of globalization

Globalization has fostered economic inequality by increasing the gains to capital owners while depriving the underprivileged. Multinational corporations have optimized their supply chains, reduced costs, and evaded taxes, while gaining power. Globalization has promoted consumerism and overconsumption while making the supply chain more vulnerable. Attempting to transplant societal values into multinational corporations with for-profit mission is unlikely to succeed.

These interrelated grand challenges have taken a toll on society, and their consequences for humanity's well-being seem inevitable. Observers point to greed as the motive that drives opportunistic behavior at all costs. Nevertheless, we should not blame firms for seeking profits or consumers for maximizing utility. It is the fault of the economic system that prioritizes these aims over societal values such as sustainability and well-being. The system rewards opportunistic entrepreneurs while penalizing those who strive for cooperation. While some are more opportunistic than others, the majority tends to be cooperative. So why do we mostly observe opportunistic behavior? It is the design of this system that reinforces opportunistic behavior beyond the tipping point. All efforts to fix the economy via regulation, legislation, innovation, and aid treat only the symptoms, not the root cause.

A prosocial economic system as a possible solution

We cannot amend our economic system, but we can design a new system. The mirror image of opportunistic behavior is prosocial behavior, whereby individuals enhance the utility of others at a personal cost, rather than maximize their own utility at the expense of others. Experiments suggest that about half of humanity is conditionally prosocial, that is, individuals will be kind to others if others are kind to them. Acts of kindness are penalized in the current system, often met with exploitation and lack of reciprocity. By providing incentives and rewarding those who exploit, this system prevents positive reciprocity and drives out prosocial behavior. But new design principles can reinforce prosocial behavior. Such an underlying force can promote economic equality, redistribute wealth, cease exploitation of private data, and restrict overconsumption and abuse of natural resources (see Figure 1).

The cooperative economy is a prosocial digital platform system that prioritizes societal values, while acknowledging resource constraints. The cooperative economy limits consumption and profit making while facilitating economic equality. It serves consumers, vendors, and employees

while preventing the accumulation of power by the platform owner. Unlike the greed that drives the current system, the engine of the cooperative economy is prosocial behavior. The proposed system scrutinizes greedy individuals and penalizes opportunistic behavior such as false disclosure and arbitrage attempts. Once opportunistic behavior becomes a deviant practice, self-reinforcing prosocial behavior can overtake it.

Price subsidization

The main novelty is the subsidization process. In the cooperative economy high-income consumers subsidize low-income consumers. Prosocial behavior is the principle that underlies this process, with consumers enjoying the happiness that comes with donation. Unlike progressive taxation in which the state steps in to impose a burden while depriving taxpayers of their sense of contributing to society, price subsidization creates a perception of mutual support and thus carries the benefits of prosocial behavior. The cooperative economy also provides employees with the freedom to pursue a profession of choice or start a business without worrying too much about failure or financial distress. The system encourages entrepreneurship while discouraging free riding.

Additional design principles

One of the means to promote prosocial behavior is restoring a sense of community that supports face-to-face interaction and mutual support in economic exchange. Switching from a global economy to local economies minimizes transport distances and makes the value chain less vulnerable while enhancing sustainability. Another design principle is consumption per need which entails imposing consumption limits. For their part, vendors must accept reasonable profit caps while redirecting excess profit to consumers. As part of the platform's responsibilities, no attempt is made to influence consumer behavior. The cooperative economy can be implemented as a digital platform, with advanced technologies used not to inflate consumption and abuse consumers but to protect them from opportunistic behavior.

The cooperative economy ensures fair competition by providing new entrants with guaranteed market access. In turn, stricter controls keep vendors at bay, ensuring consumers' welfare. Vendors with higher quality receive priority in fulfilling orders. The cooperative economy also promotes protective and respectful employment and reduces salary differences, thus further enhancing economic equality. Employees, vendors, and consumers are all protected from the platform operator that accepts not to engage in any business besides its platform service provision. To prevent concentration of wealth and power, the system excludes financial shareholders, whereas other stakeholders – consumers, vendors, and employees – receive equal voice in promoting their interests.

by Dovev Lavie, July 16, 2024

Stewarding Enterprises through Polycrisis

SANDRA WADDOCK is a professor of management at Boston College's Carroll School of Management, USA. She is also a Faculty Affiliate at the BC Schiller Institute for Integrated Sciences and holds the Galligan Chair of Strategy, serving as the Carroll School Scholar of Corporate Responsibility.

The advent of polycrisis, the intersecting, intertwined set of civilization threatening crises now facing humanity[67], signals a significant shift in how 'leadership' should be understood and practiced. Indeed, I expect the meaning of leadership in the sense of 'managing others in hierarchical relationships to evolve to one of 'stewardship', in which stewards are caretakers of whole systems. They can be anyone who operates in externally-connected enterprises who is able and willing to step into that role. In this context, this blog identifies some of the core stewardship skills needed to catalyze system change: stewarding the connecting, cohering, and amplifying the work of numerous entities towards shared aspirations.

Stewardship implies the caretaking of, in this case, organizations and whole system for the good of the whole – for the good of others, a goal that is aspirational that needs to be consciously designed and implemented (not an automatic consequence of polycrisis). As networked ways of interacting become more common, and people in all types of positions are expected to cope with the implications of our planetary crises, the idea of stewarding enterprises for the good of the whole of people *and* planet will take center stage.

Arguably, stewarding of both human and natural or planetary resources cannot only come from the 'top' of enterprises. Rather such stewardship needs to emerge from throughout the enterprise in what my colleague Joe Raelin called *leaderfulness*[68], i.e., leadership that is coming from wherever and whomever needed. *Leaderful* stewardship is needed wherever decisions are made to fully align enterprises with the growing recognition that they need to transform purposes and practices to ensure the survival – and thriving – of people in nature.

That means that people in business and other enterprises – as well as management educators—need to begin to take stewardship skillsets into account. These expectations of transformed enterprises shift businesses towards purposes that Donaldson and Walsh define as creating collective value absent dignity violations[69] (of both people and extended to nature's other-than-human beings). Of course, if people an enterprise are to assume new duties, tasks, and responsibility, structural chang throughout es in the enterprise will also be needed that align responsibilities with the relevant decision making authority at different levels, including changing.

Stewardship of human and planetary resources means catalyzing the transformation of how business is done to better align human activities in harmony with the natural world, as I explain in my book *Catalyzing Transformation*[70]. A few examples set the context. For instance, there is an ongoing, still insufficient, energy transition away from fossil fuels, along with growing pressure to incorporate agroecological and regenerative practices in food, forestry, land management, and marine industries, as well as producing healthier food, garments with less ecological impacts, and products that are reusable, recyclable, and of sufficient quality

67 Thomas Homer-Dixon, Ortwin Renn, Johan Rockström, Jonathan F. Donges, and Scott Janzwood, "A Call for an International Research Program on the Risk of a Global Polycrisis," *SSRN Scholarly Paper*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4058592.

68 Joseph A. Raelin, *Creating Leaderful Organizations: How to Bring Out Leadership in Everyone* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003).

69 Thomas Donaldson and James P. Walsh, "Toward a Theory of Business," *Research in Organizational Behavior* 35 (2015): 181–207.

70 Sandra Waddock, *Catalyzing Transformation: Making System Change Happen* (Hampton, NJ: Business Expert Press, 2024).

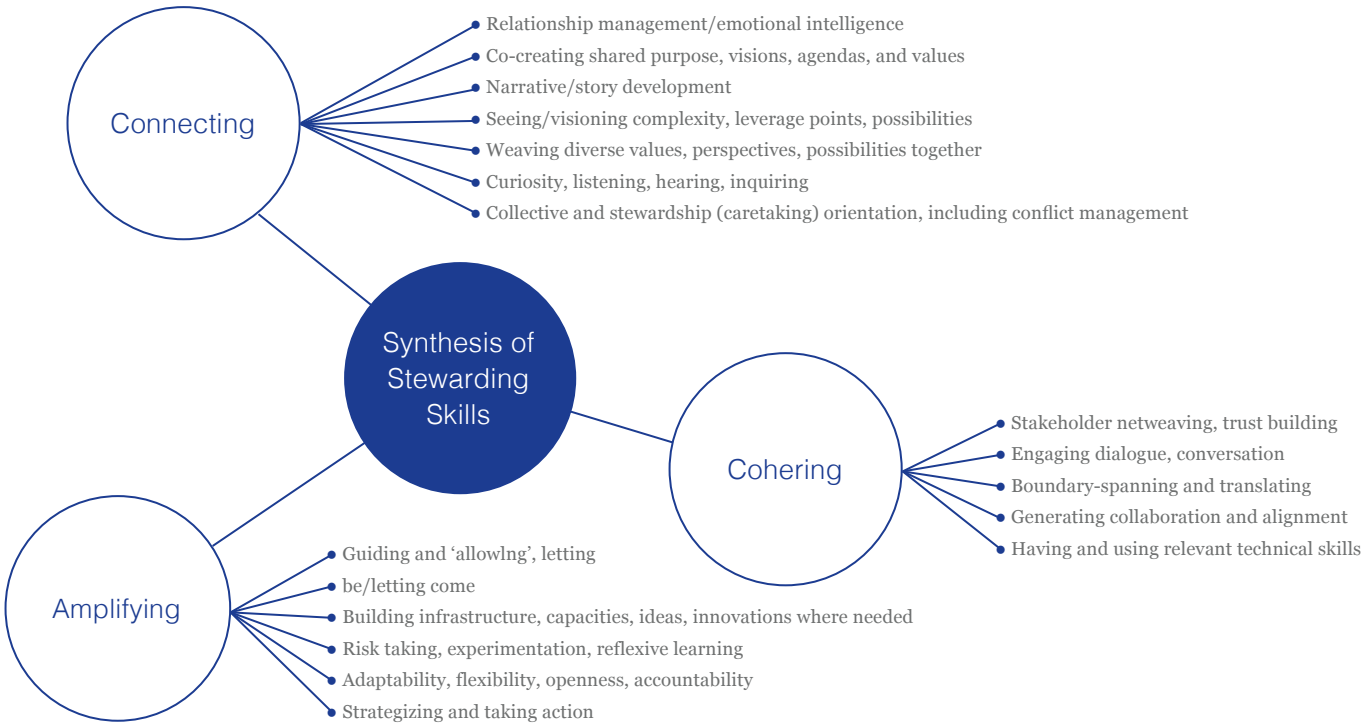
that they last much longer. This burgeoning transformation means there is growing pressure for companies to achieve real – not just incrementally less bad – sustainability[71] in all of their activities. Those pressures could shift corporate purposes and goals away from their current almost solely profit-driven focus towards greater emphasis on ensuring wellbeing for all – stewardship for the good of the whole.

Increasingly, however, stewardship of both internal and external systems, communities, and nature is likely to be embedded in manufacturing, resourcing, distribution, customer relations, services, financing, and any of the manifold other responsibilities that people in enterprises perform throughout the enterprise. What does stewardship for catalyzing transformative action look like and what types of skills will stewardship need? Catalyzing transformation involves three core processes. *Connecting* involves bringing key actors or relevant stakeholders who can co-create a transformed system together and helping them 'see' and make sense of the system. These actors will be unique to each system, but should be representative of the entire community and selected because they have (potential) influence over the system, for instance, in a company that would include employees, investors, and customers, among others. In a social initiative, it might involve initiatives that, e.g., are working to improve agricultural practices, for example, farmers, customers, and relevant suppliers, among others. *Cohering* involves developing visioning processes for relevant actors to develop shared and transformative actions and related action plans for changing what needs to change. *Amplifying* involves implementing the action plans, assessing their impact, learning from that, and co-creating new plans – and new infrastructure for ongoing transformation as needed. Each of these actions is associated with a set of skills, as the figure illustrates and briefly discussed below.

Stewarding Skills and Processes in a Time of Polycrisis

Core to *connecting* processes are skills of relationship management and emotional intelligence, which enable stewards to work well with others, managing conflicts that arise. A fundamental aspect of connecting processes, 'seeing' the system involves mapping out the system to figure out who is doing what and where; and telling the 'story' of what is problematic in the enterprise or system and what needs to change. In other words, developing new narratives through visioning processes and weaving together the diverse values that different actors bring to their collaborative interactions. Stewards attempting such transformative actions also need to develop their own curiosity about what might be, as well as their capacities for inquiry and listening to others and really hearing what is being said, as well as an orientation towards the good of the whole system or enterprise, without ego getting in the way.

71 Chris Laszlo, "Quantum Management: The Practices and Science of Flourishing Enterprise," *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 17 (2020): 301–315.



Source: Sandra Waddock, Catalyzing Transformation (Business Expert Press, 2024).

Along similar lines, *cohering* processes involve developing skills that transformation theorists call *netweaving* or network weaving[72], which includes bringing previously unrelated and disconnected actors into engaged dialogues (conversations) where they can cross organizational boundaries to work together in new ways with more potential for impact. Of course, the relevant expertise and technical skills associated with the particular system (e.g., food systems, manufacturing systems, communication systems) are also important, along with willingness and capacity to generate new collaborations and alignments among actors.

Amplifying processes require stewards to assume the role of a guide rather than traditional *leader* because there is a need for collaborating actors to co-create or co-emerge what makes sense to them – a process I label *allowing*, similar to what change theorist Otto Scharmer labels *letting come*, emerging the future that wants to be[73]. Hands-on skills are needed here to build new infrastructure for transformation where needed, help actors evolve new capacities and capabilities, take necessary risks through experimentation and possible failures. All of that requires adaptiveness, openness, and accountability for one's actions, as well as strategic sensemaking.

Teaching these skills will be up to business schools and higher education broadly, as well as in consulting and training roles, to acquire and help others acquire these skills

by Sandra Waddock, October 14, 2024

72 Bruce E. Goldstein, "System Weaving During Crisis," *Social Innovations Journal* 5 (2021).

73 Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Learning from the Future as It Emerges* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009).

Planning beyond Growth: Rethinking Economics to Face Social-Ecological Crises

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The need for democratic macroeconomic coordination beyond growth

Today's interdependent and aggravating social-ecological crises warrant a profound rethinking of our economic system. "Putting people and planet before profit" must not stay a slogan but become a reality. To make this happen, it is pivotal to challenge hitherto dominant paradigms, including economic growth as a dominant goal of economic activity and measure of welfare as well as 'the market' as most suitable mechanism of economic coordination.

Degrowth and Post-growth (DG/PG) scholars have long engaged with these questions by rethinking the way our economy and society can be organized. The focus of DG/PG is on the Global North, which has contributed disproportionately to the environmental crisis and whose material wealth is intricately connected to exploitative relations with other world regions.[74] DG/PG envisions a "planned reduction of energy and resource use designed to bring the economy back into balance with the living world in a way that reduces inequality and improves human well-being"[75]. Such transformation involves technical as well as political challenges. As recently stated in this article of Steinberger et al.[76], the former appear to be surmountable. The main barrier, however, lies in our contemporary, capitalist politico-economic systems, thus, raising questions of democracy, power and deliberate change.

Proposals for transformation range from the establishment of eco-communities and urban gardening at the local level to policy interventions such as the imposition of absolute caps on greenhouse gas emissions and resource use, working time reduction, and the introduction of Universal Basic Services. While all these proposals can play an important role in a transition towards a post-growth economy, there is one crucial blind spot: that of democratic macroeconomic coordination beyond growth.

Why is it necessary?

As we argue with Cédric Durand elsewhere[77], the need for democratic coordination of economic activity arises out of the ambition for a profound and fast social-ecological transformation of the economy. This involves not only technical practicalities but also requires legitimacy and acceptance by the people concerned. A few examples illustrate the challenge. The key demand of degrowth is to establish absolute caps on CO_2 emissions and resource use, which necessitates decisions over the acceptable size of respective budgets as well as societal

74 Hickel, Jason. „Quantifying national responsibility for climate breakdown: an equality-based attribution approach for carbon dioxide emissions in excess of the planetary boundary." The Lancet Planetary Health 4, no. 9 (2020): e399-e404.

75 Hickel, Jason. „What does degrowth mean? A few points of clarification." Globalizations 18, no. 7 (2021): 1105-1111.

76 Steinberger, Julia, Gauthier Guerin, Elena Hofferberth, and Elke Pirgmaier. „Democratizing provisioning systems: a prerequisite for living well within limits." Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy 20, no. 1 (2024): 2401186.

77 Cédric Durand, Eric Hofferberth, and Matthias Schmelzer, "Planning beyond Growth: The Case for Economic Democracy within Ecological Limits," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 437 (2024): 140351.

priorities for their use, i.e. the distribution of remaining CO2 and resource budgets to specific economic activities, sectors, and regions.

Given the size of the necessary emissions reductions in Global North countries, economic transformation will need to entail the reduction of less necessary and emissions-intensive goods and services such as aviation, industrial farming, and luxury commodities – ascribing ecological planning and democratic macroeconomic coordination of industrial downscaling and 'exnovation' utmost importance. These processes of downscaling would liberate resources for strengthening future-fit and socially necessary economic activities, e.g. ramping up sustainable public transport, retrofitting housing, and rewilding – all of which require the allocation of necessary material and infrastructure.

By the same token, (de)prioritizing certain activities and sectors implicates changes to the world of work which would need to be democratically deliberated and governed. The phasing-out of the fossil industry and an increase in care, for instance, imply not only decisions over the quantitative increases and decreases of jobs in respective sectors but also qualitative changes in work patterns as well as education and training. The appreciation of un-commodified work, such as much of care work, heightens the challenge, especially when aiming at its recognition without commodifying it (see Chowdhury for a discussion)[78]. Beyond the fair, just, and sustainable distribution of natural resources and work, decisions over adequate technologies [79] arise.

The elaboration of these decisions and their subsequent implementation pose central challenges for "planning beyond growth"[80]. This is even more so as both elaboration and execution must be fundamentally democratic and participatory, not only to live up to the ambitions of DG/PG but also to cater for people's empowerment through the transformation processes and ensure their legitimacy and acceptance. Accounting for today's globally interconnected economy, the goal of restorative (climate) justice as well as local and regional diversity necessitates decision-making at and coordination of multiple levels. The design of purposeful institutions for the coordinated transformation of our economic system is a necessary and formidable task.

How to move forward?

Luckily, there are rich bodies of literature and historical examples that can serve as inspiration in this undertaking. There is a growing literature that explicitly seeks to elaborate democratic processes with the aim of ensuring wellbeing within planetary boundaries, including *Half-Earth Socialism* by Drew Pendergrass and Troy Vettese or Jan Groos and Christoph Sorg's forthcoming edited volume on *Democratic Planning in the 21st Century and Beyond*. Some older proposals for democratic multi-level economic decision-making and organization continue to be discussed, e.g. the Participatory Economy, originally developed by Michael Albert and Robert Hahnel, and Pat Devine's: 'Participatory Planning through Negotiated Coordination'.

78 Savvina Chowdhury, *The Organisation of Social Reproduction in a Postcapitalist Participatory Economy*, méta Working Paper no. MWP12 (part of the *Towards (a Better) Postcapitalism: A Handy HowTo Guide* series), Centre for Postcapitalist Civilisation (méta), 2022, https://doi.org/10.55405/mwp12en.

79 Vetter, Andrea. „The matrix of convivial technology–assessing technologies for degrowth." Journal of cleaner production 197 (2018): 1778-1786.

80 Durand, Cédric, Elena Hofferberth, and Matthias Schmelzer. „Planning beyond growth: The case for economic democracy within ecological limits." Journal of cleaner production 437 (2024): 140351.

Going beyond theoretical developments, we can learn from the successes and failures of actual attempts at economic planning. This includes a critical scrutiny of socialist planning experiences as well as forms of planning in capitalist economies[81]. A historical example of the latter are analyses of the war economies of the 1910s, in particular the Austro-Hungarian war economy, by Otto Neurath[82]. More recently, the rapid reorganization of the British economy during the Second World War, when the state sought to simultaneously fight Nazi Germany and cater for people's need satisfaction, offers insights into possible measures of strong state interventions, economic coordination, and the rationing of scarce goods and services, as well as their acceptance by the population.[83] Another example is the French Central Bank's use of monetary and credit policy as means to shape size and qualitative orientation of economic activity in the decades after WWII.[84] The experiences of citizens assemblies, instituted in various countries to address the climate emergency, for instance, can teach lessons about the potential of direct citizens' involvement in developing plans for dealing with critical societal questions.[85]

Moving forward, it will be key to scrutinize these models and experiences to extract the technical and political lessons to address the aggravating social and ecological crises of our time. For that, we need criteria to compare and evaluate the adequacy of different models and approaches to abide by ecological and social goals.

In all that, the democratization and diversification of the planning debate itself is pivotal. This means, for instance, learning more from theories and experiences of economic coordination from the Global South and groups that are marginalized or oppressed, e.g., due to gender, race, sexuality, class, nationality, or disability. These views may give rise to very different visions of economic coordination than the hitherto dominant ones. The discussion and development of ecological democratic macroeconomic coordination for the 21st century has only just begun.

by Elena Hofferberth and Matthias Schmelzer, November 29, 2024

81 Chavance, Bernard. «La planification centrale et ses alternatives dans l'expérience des économies socialistes.» Actuel Marx 65, no. 1 (2019): 26-34.

82 Neurath, Otto. „Through war economy to economy in kind." In Empiricism and sociology, pp. 123-157. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1973.

83 Herrmann, Ulrike. Das Ende des Kapitalismus: Warum Wachstum und Klimaschutz nicht vereinbar sind–und wie wir in Zukunft leben werden. Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2022.

84 Monnet, Eric. Controlling Credit: Central Banking and the Planned Economy in Postwar France, 1948 1973. Cambridge University Press, 2018.

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Editorial Team

Philipp Censkowsky

Prior to joining the University of Lausanne, Philipp advised governments on their climate strategies and conducted research on aligning finance flows with 1.5° C – a state of the climate which increasingly locates in the airy spheres of Utopia! This notwithstanding, Philipp uses his cross-cutting experience in climate and sustainability science to make the economic disciplines fit for the 21st century. Because as Donna Haraway noted: in the Anthropocene, societies all over the world can and need to learn how to stay with the trouble – and make the best of it!

Lilly Felber

In her examination and analysis of grand challenges, she incorporates her social-psychological perspective and is particularly interested in social identity dynamics. She believes that we can only address the climate crisis, the shortage of skilled workers, and the democratic backsliding if we understand the social identity dynamics that lead to phenomena such as polarization, dehumanization, and marginalization. In her utopia, societies can conduct participatory discourses in which the human rights of people living today, and in the future, remain inviolable.

Robin Schimmelpfennig

Robin is a behavioral scientist with professional and research experience spanning 8 countries and 4 continents. Growing up with the narrative of economic growth as the ultimate route to human flourishing, he witnessed its profound successes for lifting people out of poverty, but also growth's significant destructive environmental impacts. His current focus lies in exploring viable alternative Utopias that allow growth of wellbeing in accordance with planetary boundaries, and leveraging behavioral science to facilitate the rapid and large-scale societal transformation towards these new Utopias.

Laurence Jeangros

Laurence firmly believes in one thing: in any decent utopia, there's plenty of good, fair, and healthy food. Since graduating, she's been working to bring that vision a bit closer to reality, be it tasting pasta and diplomacy in Rome, or melting into fondue in Lausanne while trying to bridge the gap between science and practice. She subscribes to a quote from Carlo Petrini, founder of Slow Food, who says that "s/he who sows utopia will reap reality", so let's start sowing our own grains of utopias!

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