

PROSPERITY WITHOUT GROWTH

An Emerging Agenda for European Cities



European Cities Programme
Roundtable, 02 November 2022

Ben Rogers, Bloomberg Fellow in Government Innovation
LSE Cities, London School of Economics and Political Science



CONTENTS OF THIS PRESENTATION

1. Introduction: The European Cities Programme
2. The rise in post-growth thinking in Europe
3. Urban post-growth trends and themes
4. Next steps
5. Questions for discussion



THE EUROPEAN CITIES PROGRAMME



THE EUROPEAN CITIES PROGRAMME

A research, engagement and capacity building programme on the future of European cities supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

The programme:

- Builds a knowledge hub on European cities and city leaders
- Develops research and recommendations on how European cities can tackle their most pressing problems
- Explores the needs and opportunities for capacity building programmes for European city leaders and future city leaders



INAUGURAL ROUNDTABLE

- Organised on May 4th, 2022, with 25 experts from 14 organisations and institutions
- It looked back on the transformations of European cities in the last two decades:
 - Despite discourses of decentralisation and empowerment - 'Mayors should rule the world' - European cities have received relatively few new powers
 - Europe's cities have retained or increased their soft power, even as Europe's hard power has declined
 - They have often led the way on global urban agendas
 - But many are struggling to manage the increasing demands on them – especially just-transition
- The discussion focused on the challenges and opportunities facing European cities today.
 - Building a fair and sustainable society (just transition) is not just a technical or economic challenge. It involves developing new social imaginaries and new ways of living together
 - European cities, densely built and progressive, are well positioned to lead the way

PROSPERITY WITHOUT GROWTH – AN EMERGING AGENDA FOR EUROPE'S CITIES

Phase 1: Understanding good growth

June-November 2022

Phase 2: Implementing good growth

December-April 2023

Phase 3: Recommendations

April-July 2023

Phase 4: Publication and launch event

Sept 2023

- How has 'post-growth' thinking developed over the last 25 years ?
- What might an urbanist post-growth agenda look like?
- What influence is post-growth thinking having at the level of the city?
- How do approaches to 'post-growth'-differ among European cities and what is driving these differences?

A map of Europe with various colored dots (red, blue, green, yellow, orange) scattered across the continent, representing data points. The dots are more densely packed in Western and Central Europe. A semi-transparent white horizontal bar is overlaid across the middle of the map, containing the title text.

THE RISE OF POST-GROWTH THINKING IN EUROPE

'POST-GROWTH' IDEAS HAVE A LONG HISTORY, BUT HAVE ATTRACTED MOUNTING INTEREST IN RECENT YEARS AND HAVE GONE MAINSTREAM



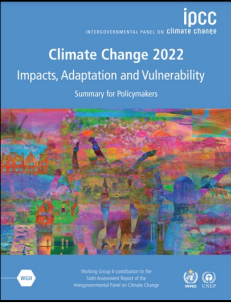
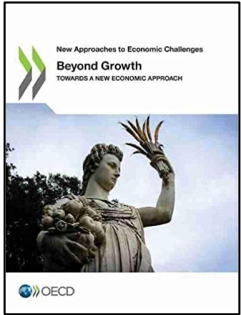
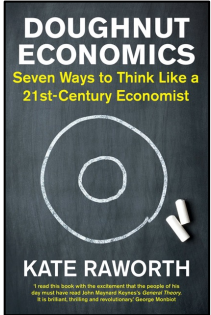
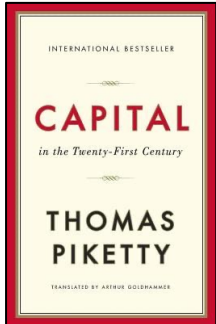
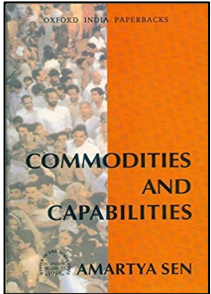
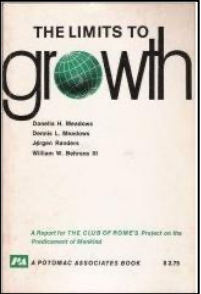
1970s

1980s

1990s

2010s

2020s



THE CASE AGAINST GROWTHISM

1. Environmental limits and the impossibility of “absolute decoupling”
2. Persistent and rising inequalities
3. The treadmill of work
4. Diseases of excess consumption
5. Falling wellbeing and poor mental health
6. Declining social capital / community



BEYOND ECONOMICS

Post-growth thinkers vary in their position towards growth:

- Degrowth vs. growth-agnosticism

But they are united in:

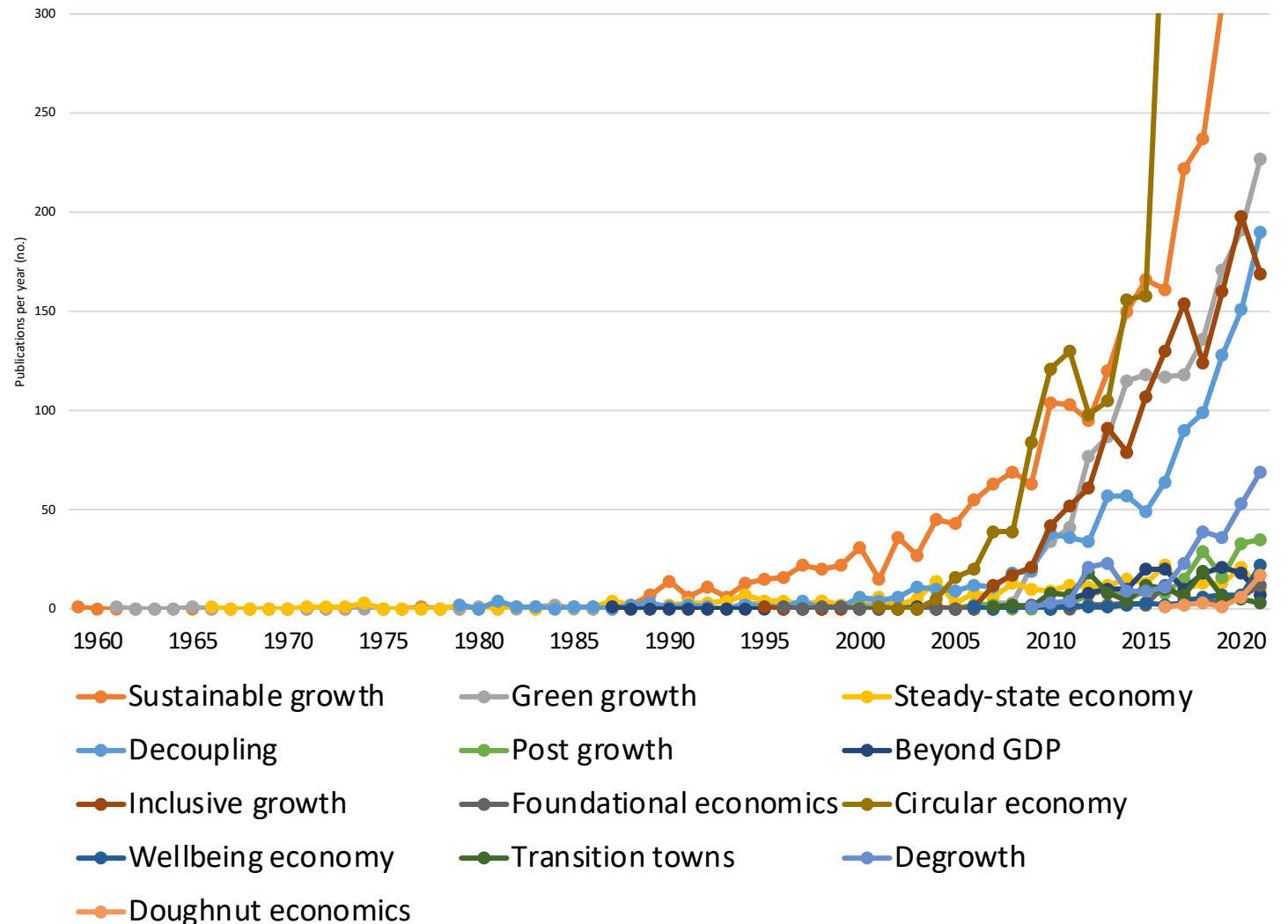
- Seeing problems as linked by growthist mindset and metrics (GDP)
- Attachment to circular, regenerative economies, redistribution over growth, leisure, caring, sharing
- Advocating for a greater role for deliberative democratic decision-making
- Making a virtue of flat-lining productivity



ACADEMIC INTEREST IN POST-GROWTH TERMS HAS TAKEN OFF IN THE PAST 20 YEARS

- Oldest searches are 'sustainable development' and 'green growth', the former taking off in the late 1990s.
- Circular economy has rocketed up since the mid-2000s, with a surge of interest in 'degrowth' and 'Doughnut economics' in last few years.

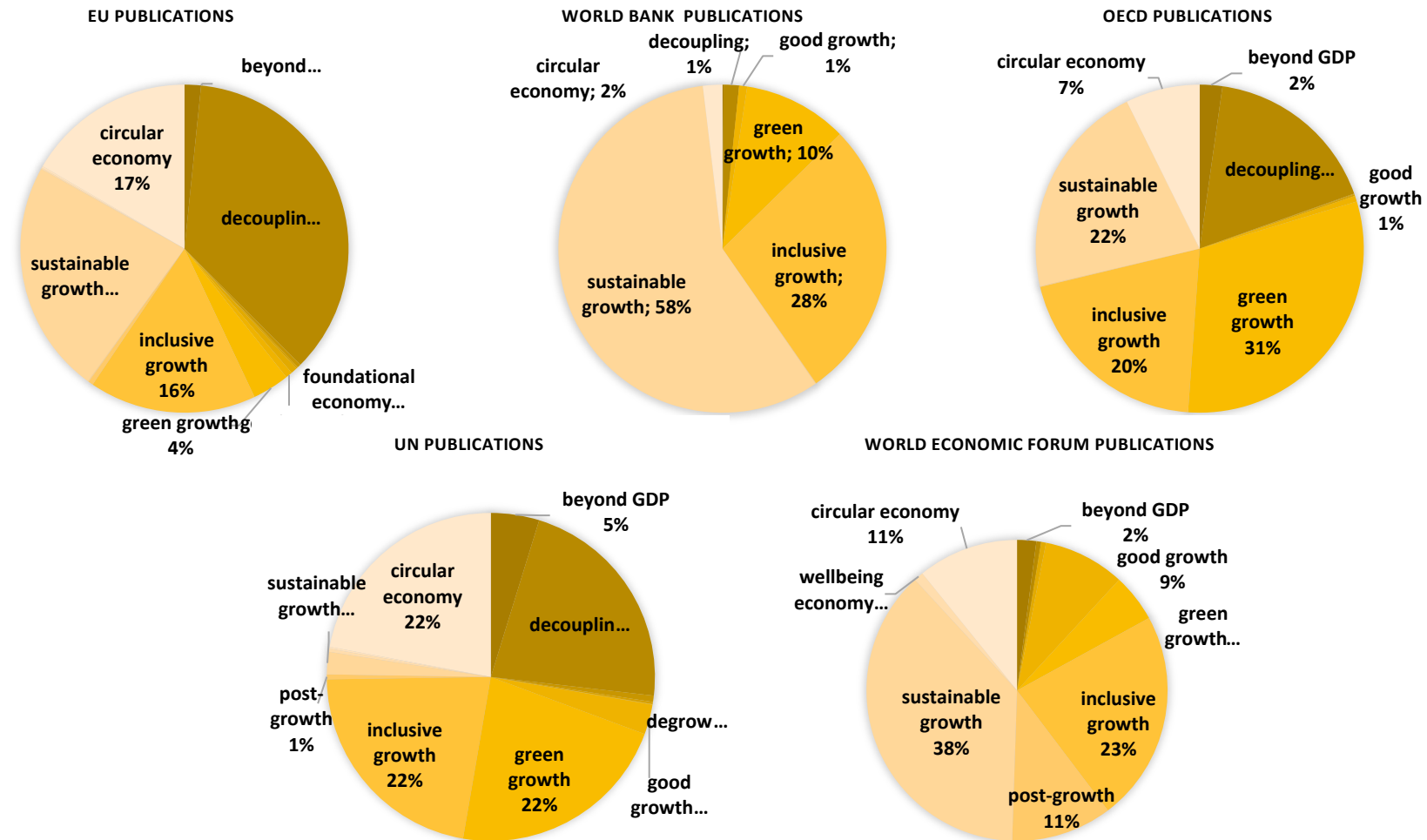
Trends over time in usage of post-growth related terms in academic literature



POST-GROWTH CONCEPTS ARE ALSO EMERGING IN INTERNATIONAL POLICY AGENDAS

- The weight of focus is on 'eco-modernist' concepts: 'sustainable growth', 'inclusive growth' and 'green growth'.
- But 9% of publications from OECD and 27% from the EU address the 'circular economy' or 'beyond GDP'
- 25% from the World Economic Forum and 28% from UN address 'circular economy', 'beyond GDP', 'wellbeing economy' or 'post-growth'

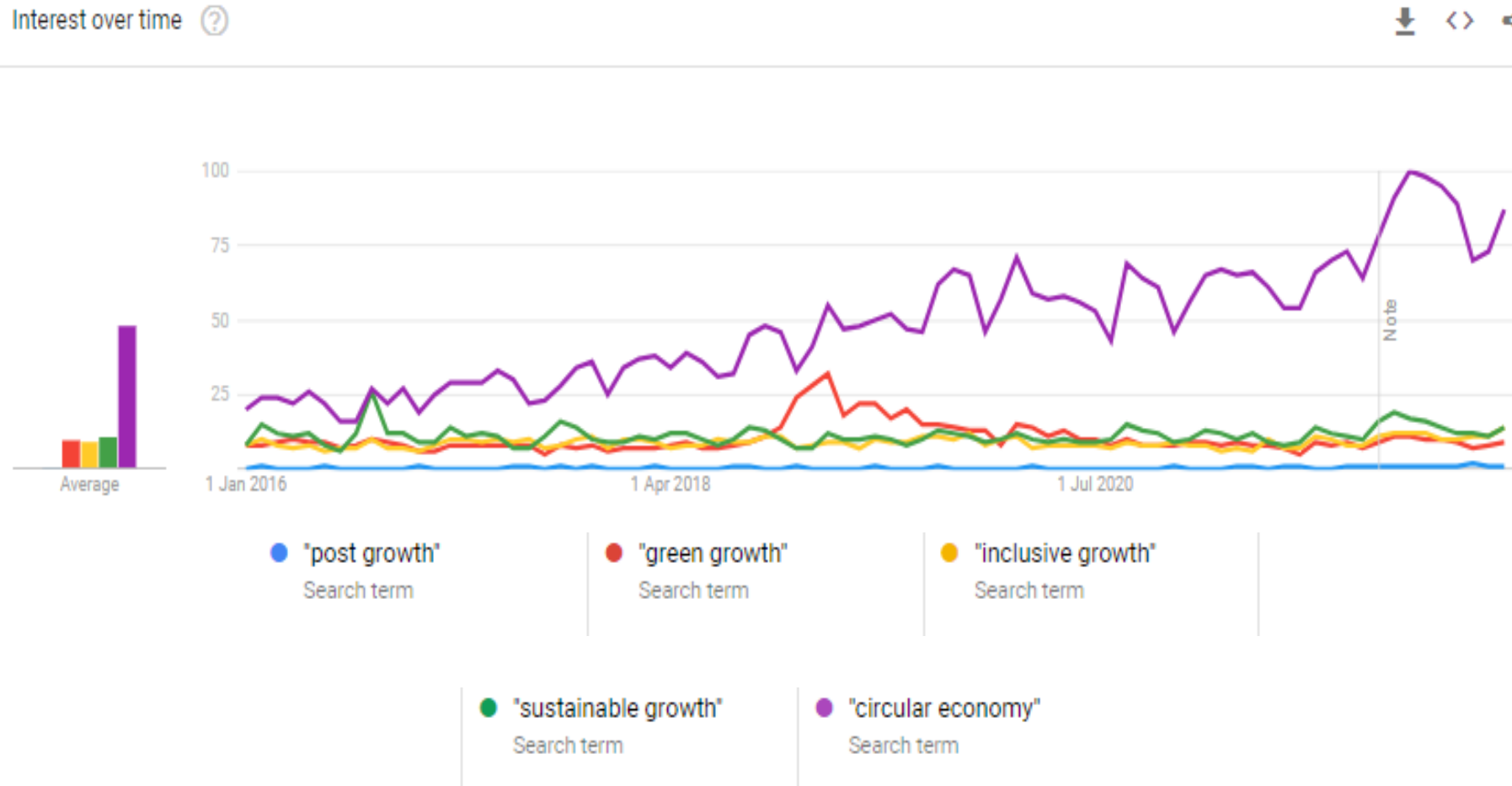
The prevalence of post-growth thinking in the policy literature



THE PUBLIC HAVE ALSO SHOWN INCREASED INTEREST IN POST-GROWTH IDEAS IN LAST FEW YEARS.

Google trends of green/inclusive/sustainable growth and post-growth-related terms

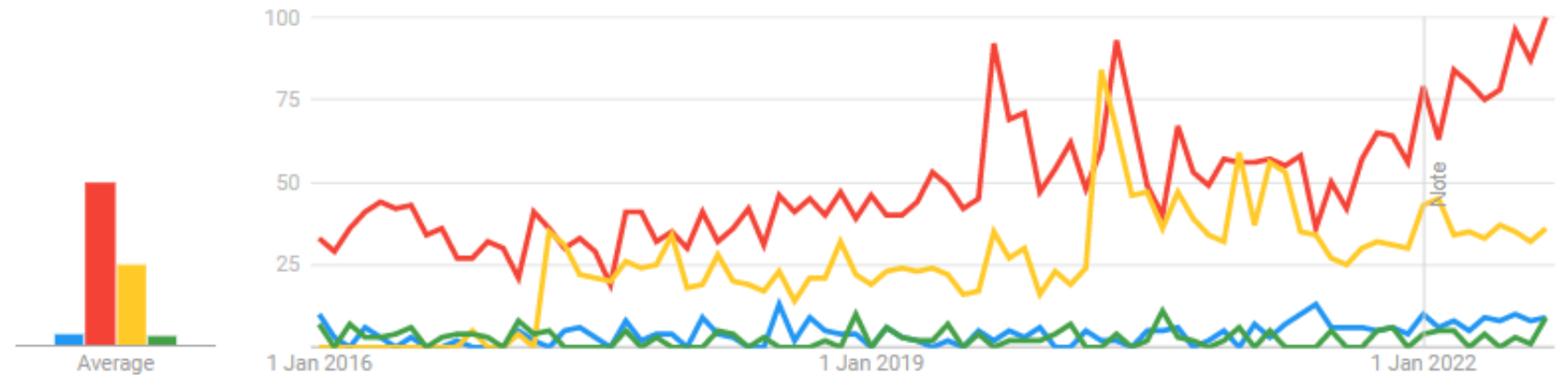
- 'Circular economy' is attracting most interest - more than concepts such as sustainable growth.
- We can also see that interest in the pro-growth terms 'sustainable growth', 'green growth' and 'inclusive growth' has been fairly flat.



THE PUBLIC HAVE ALSO SHOWN INCREASED INTEREST IN POST GROWTH IDEAS IN LAST FEW YEARS.

- We also see strong growth in searches for 'doughnut economics' and 'degrowth'
- Searches for "post-growth" and 'beyond GDP' remain low and flat.

Interest over time ?



● "post growth"
Search term

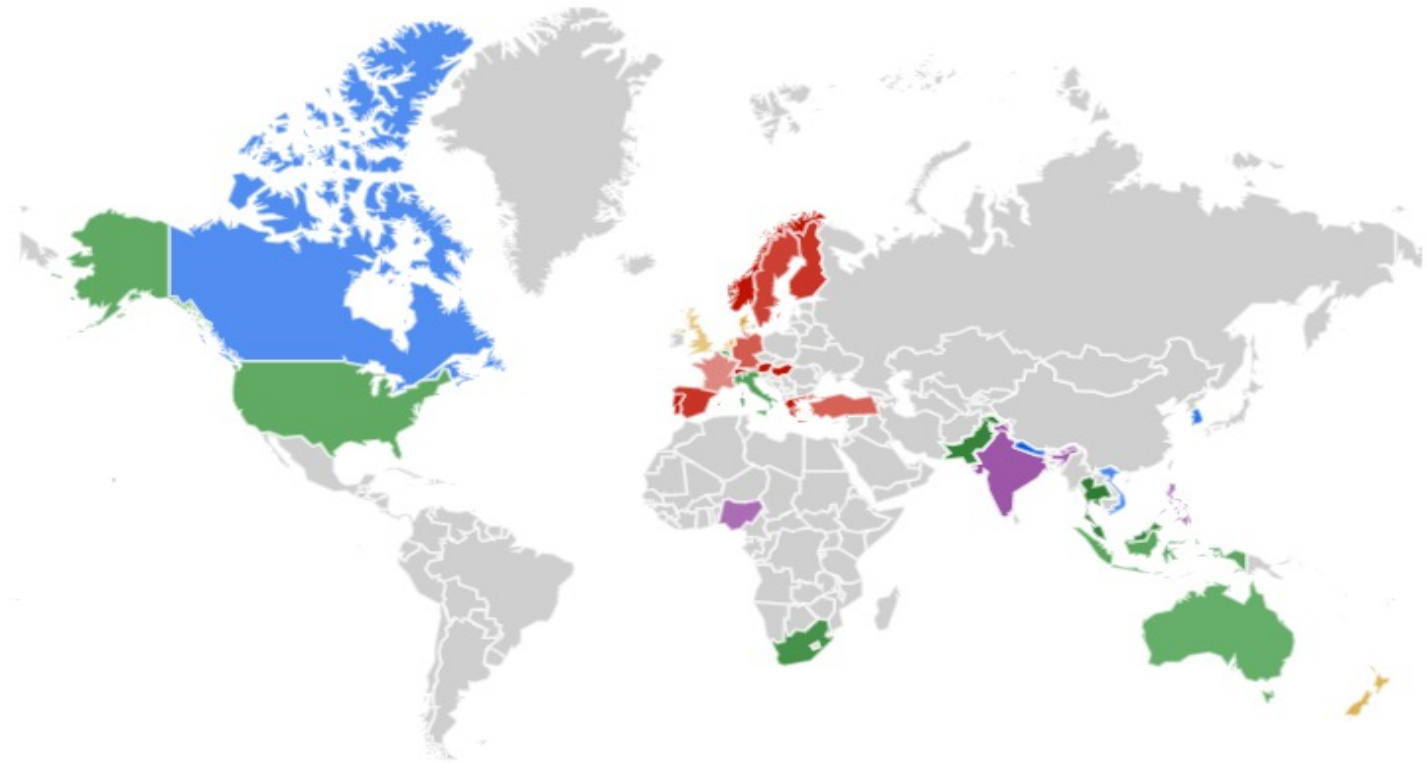
● degrowth
Search term

● "doughnut e...
Search term

● "beyond gdp"
Search term

WE ALSO LOOKED AT HOW GOOGLE SEARCHES FOR THESE TERMS VARIES ACROSS THE WORLD

- 'Sustainable growth' is the most googled term in the US, Pakistan, Australia and South Africa
- 'Green growth' in Canada, South Korea
- 'Inclusive growth' in India and Nigeria.
- 'Degrowth' is the most Googled term in most of continental Europe and 'Doughnut economics' in the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark and New Zealand.



● "green growth" ● degrowth ● "doughnut economics"
● "sustainable growth" ● "inclusive growth"

Colour intensity represents percentage of searches |

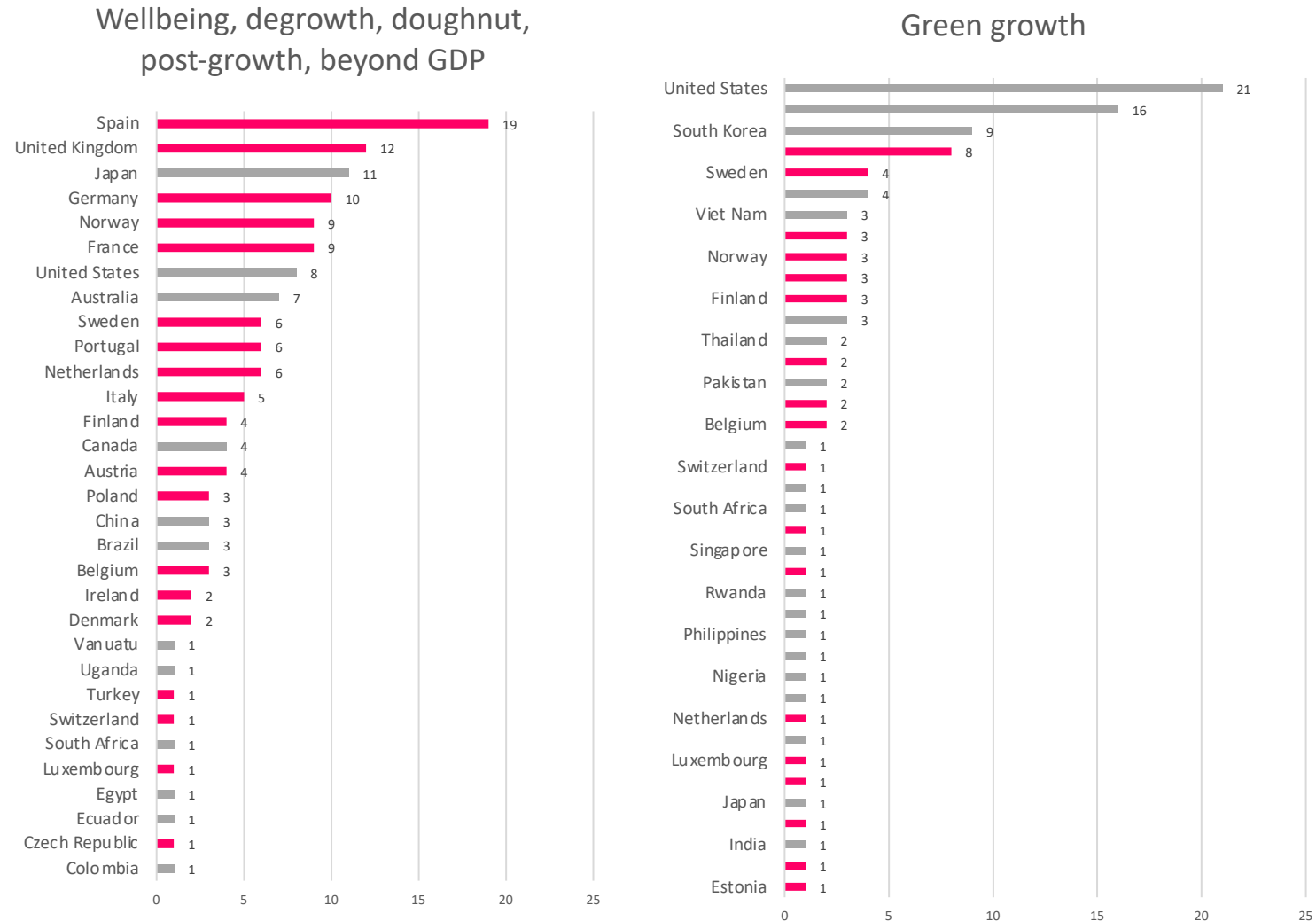
A map of Europe with various colored dots (red, blue, green, yellow, orange) scattered across the continent, representing different urban post-growth agendas. The dots are concentrated in Western and Central Europe, with a few scattered in the North and South.

URBAN POST-GROWTH AGENDAS TRENDS AND THEMES

EUROPE IS THE CENTRE OF INTEREST IN URBAN POST-GROWTH CONCEPTS

Countries of origin of post-growth and green growth social science research focusing on the urban

- US and China dominate production of urban research on 'green growth' but Europe leads post-growth concepts.
- These findings correlate with a recent survey of post-growth urban research literature, which finds that 28 of 40 case study cities were in Europe (Schmid 2022: 16)



THE CASE FOR AN URBAN POST-GROWTH AGENDA

- Cities are more efficient in use of energy and space and allow easy sharing of resources
- Cities are well-positioned to generate and sustain communal relationships
- Cities can sustain the face-to-face connection on which most civic, political and voluntary activity still depends
- Innovation tends to be led in cities: they are the place to re-imagine a post-growth world and develop adequate policies
- Cities tend to be more progressive than their nations, enabling the building of radical green, post-growth politics



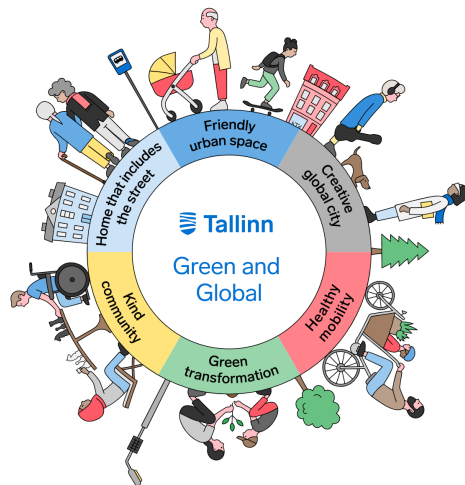
A REVIEW OF POLICY DOCUMENTS SHOWS CITIES ACROSS EUROPE ARE EMBRACING ‘GOOD GROWTH’ THINKING

AMSTERDAM



“A thriving, regenerative and inclusive city for all citizens, while respecting the planetary boundaries”

[Amsterdam City Doughnut 2020](#)

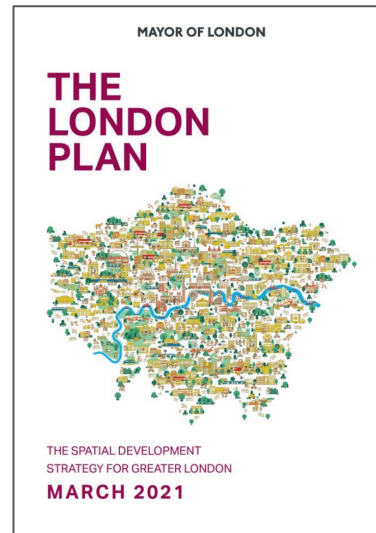


TALLINN

“Our plans and actions are driven by responsibility for the future. We leave a better city, a better Estonia and a better living environment for the next generations. Tallinn is an example of how sustainability, respect for nature and balanced development go hand in hand and make people's lives better”

[Tallinn 2035 Development Strategy](#)

LONDON



“Now is also the right time to look afresh at how we measure our success as a city. For years, we’ve measured prosperity — like most cities and countries — in terms of material wealth that is generated by our economic activity. But the strength, sustainability and wellbeing of our economy and society are not currently properly reflected. So I’ll work with others to establish a new measure of wellbeing in London as the core indicator of our city’s success as a place to work and live for all its residents”

[Sadiq Khan For London Manifesto 2021](#)



BRUSSELS

“The economy has to be re-embedded into its social function. Public authorities must accompany the development of a prosperous ... economy, that respects the limits of humans and nature – an economy that does not exceed social limits nor the environmental ceiling, and that eventually regenerates them thanks to innovation capacities and circular actions.”

[Shifting Economy, the new economic strategy of the Brussels-Capital Region – 2022-2035](#)

VIENNA



“Smart City Wien is committed to the vision of a city in which it is possible to live a good life. However, because Vienna conserves natural resources and uses them responsibly, this good life does not come at the expense of the environment and future generations.”

[Smart City Wien Framework Strategy 2019-2050](#)

A REVIEW OF POLICY DOCUMENTS SHOWS CITIES ACROSS EUROPE ARE EMBRACING 'GOOD GROWTH' THINKING

BRISTOL



"Our shared city vision is clear: In 2050 Bristol will be a fair, healthy and sustainable city. A city of hope and aspiration, where everyone can share its success"

[Bristol One City Plan – A Plan for Bristol to 2050](#)

GLASGOW



"Our vision is to have a world class city with a thriving, inclusive, economy where everyone can flourish and benefit from the city's success.

[Glasgow City Council Strategic Plan 2017-2022](#)

BARCELONA



"Sustainability is the exciting way of being happy efficiently using only what we need and without compromising the happiness of others. Sustainability thus has a social dimension based on fair distribution and also a material dimension based on efficiency, savings and sufficiency."

[Citizen Commitment to Sustainability 2012-2022](#)



COPENHAGEN

Copenhagen will "use the Donut model as an overall management tool for the municipality's economy and development"

[DEAL - How Copenhagen voted for the Doughnut](#)

KEY FINDINGS

Case studies cities are:

- Growing, Western European cities led by progressive mayors
- Informed by post growth thinking but avoiding language of 'degrowth' and 'post-growth'
- Prioritising policy areas they can control directly but also venturing into new policy territory, conventionally controlled by national governments
- Working across policy silos, engaging residents and businesses
- Working closely with university partners
- Relying on support from international organisations and institutions



NEXT STEPS



UPCOMING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Phase 1: Understanding good growth

June-November 2022

Phase 2: Implementing good growth

December-April 2023

Phase 3: Recommendations

April-July 2023

Phase 4: Publication and launch event

October 2023

- How are European cities developing new approaches to growth? What role for visions and values, concept and frameworks, missions, objectives and policies?
- How can cities build coalitions and win support for good growth agendas?
- How are good growth agendas being embedded and operationalised? How can they be adapted to individual city contexts?
- What challenges are cities finding in developing and implementing new approaches to growth
- What support do cities need in developing and implementing new approaches to growth?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What are the arguments for going beyond GDP and exploring the potential of post-growth for cities, and for European cities in particular?
- How has post-growth thinking developed in Europe's cities over the last 20 years?
- Why are some cities embracing post growth thinking and policies?
- What are prospects for post-growth urbanism in Europe? What role can Europe's cities play in advancing post growth thinking and policy?

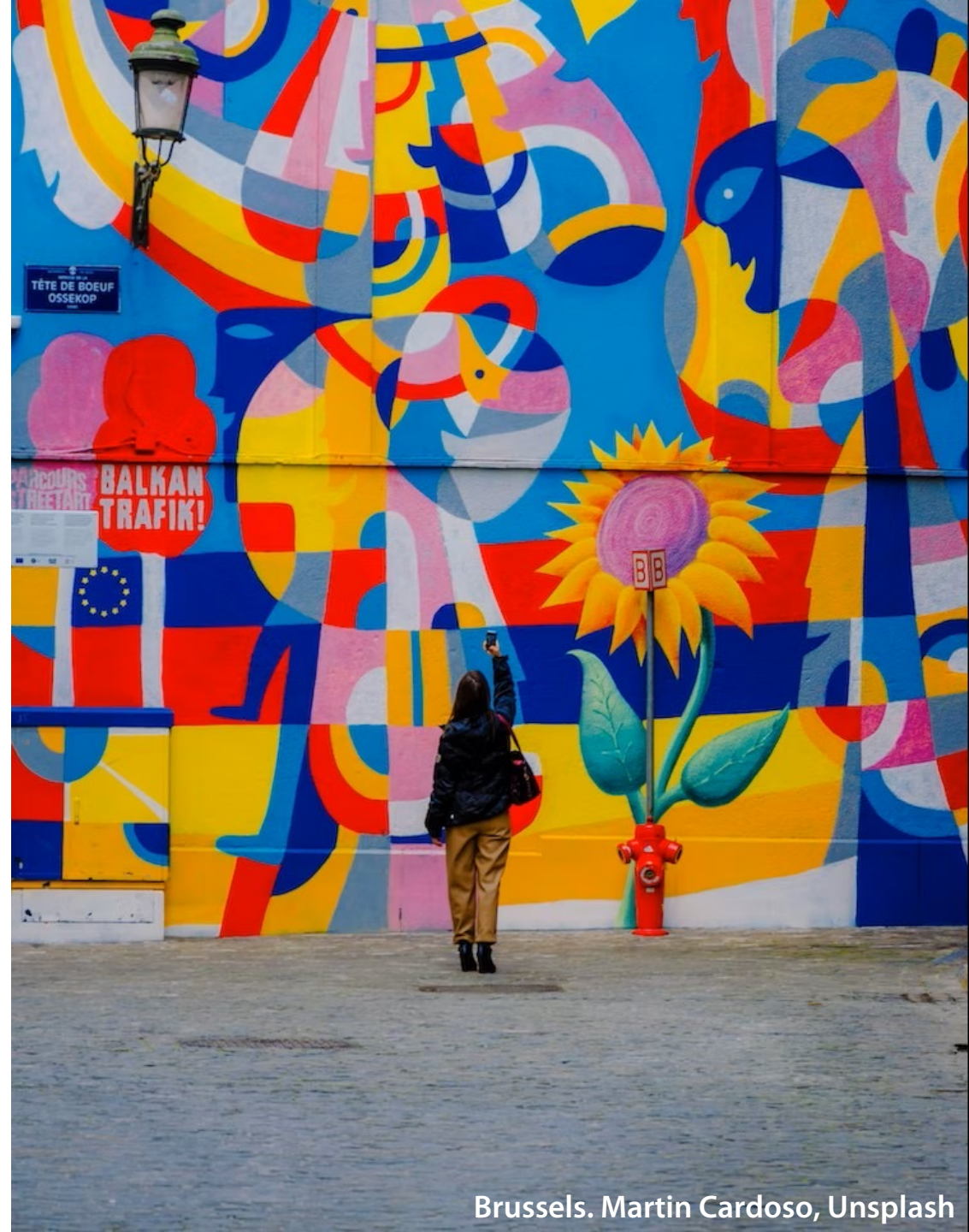




DISCUSSION: KEY TAKEAWAYS

CITIES ARE NOT USING THE LANGUAGE OF POST-GROWTH

- Each of the case study cities is taking a distinct approach to 'going beyond' growth
- However, they are not explicitly using the language of 'post-growth' to describe their approach, preferring less radical-sounding language of the doughnut, wellbeing, prosperity and the 'economic transition'.
- This has helped them ensuring wider political and public support for their agendas.



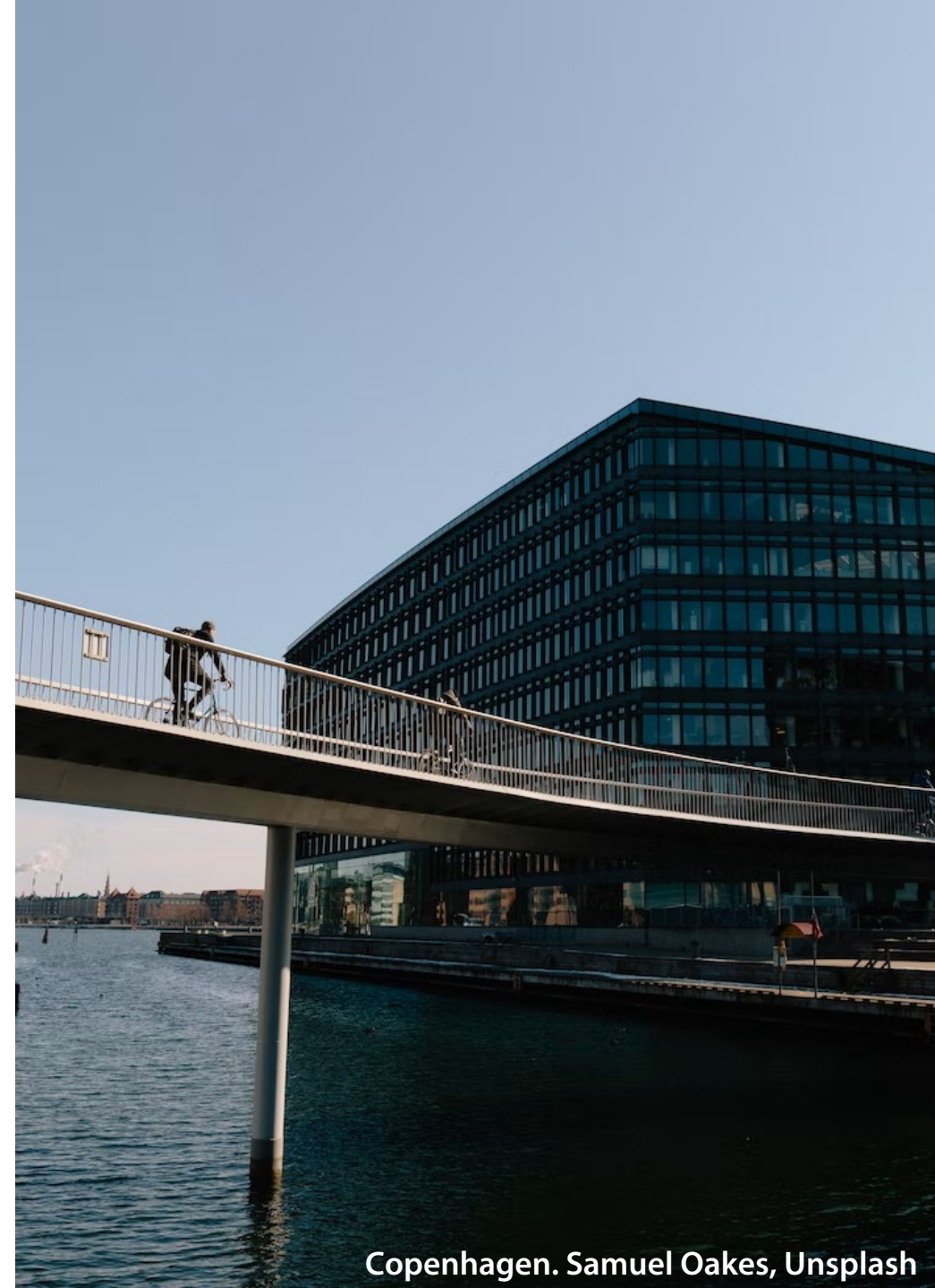
CITIES ARE SHAPING THEIR AGENDAS BASED ON CONCRETE POLICY CHALLENGES

- Cities are grappling with the recovery from the covid pandemic and the impact of the energy and cost-of-living crisis.
- In this context, responding to the challenges caused by the intersection of these crises resonate more than discourses on growth.
- A representative of the Barcelona City Council mentioned over-tourism, the cost-of-living crisis, energy poverty and the lack of affordable housing as the key challenges on which the city is framing their agendas.
- A representative from the London Borough of Camden highlighted their focus on combating inequalities and providing access to good quality jobs to residents.



RECONCILING SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL AGENDAS

- Following the example of Amsterdam, several European cities such as Brussels, Glasgow and Barcelona have engaged with the principles and methods of Doughnut economics, developed by Kate Raworth.
- According to DEAL's Leonora Grcheva, the approach is proving to be useful to balance cities' social and ecological needs and agendas through a single, holistic framework.



MOVING FROM SILOS TO SYSTEMS

- Several other contributors mentioned a shift towards a more theoretical approach as the only way to address cities' complex and concurrent challenges, while tackling systemic issues such as inequalities and poverty.
- Professor Henrietta Moore endorsed the shift from growth to prosperity but argued that we need to give a lot more thought to the political economy of a post growth society – our economies, government finances and personal finances all take growth as given
- Professor Henrietta Moore also pointed to virtues of natural systems, such as resilience, flexibility and diversity, which can provide a model that our economic system and our cities can strive to imitate



LOOKING FOR NEW BUSINESS AND PARTNERSHIP MODELS

- The discussion touched upon the financial challenges of implementing ambitious and transformative agendas.
- Jamie Toney of the University of Glasgow, which is supporting the city through the GALLANT project, highlighted that the cost of decarbonising and adapting Glasgow is estimated to be in the tens of billions of pounds: 'Cities will need to find new business and partnership models to finance their agendas'.



IDENTIFYING THE ROLE OF CITIES IN A POST-GROWTH SOCIETY

- Professor Henrietta Moore stressed that “cities have proven their ability to translate new ideas into strategies, policies, and metrics”. They have also increasingly willing to learn from each other and to share knowledge.
- More social innovation and changes in the institutions will be needed, and research and policy debates should focus on how these new institutions are being designed.

