

IMPLEMENTING POST-GROWTH

An Emerging Agenda for European Cities

European Cities Programme
Presentation of early research findings
Roundtable, 04/04/23



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

LSE **Cities**

CONTENTS OF THIS PRESENTATION

1. Our research questions
2. Overview of our six case study cities
3. Emerging findings from interview analysis – post-growth visions, policies and coalitions
4. Discussion



IMPLEMENTING POST-GROWTH: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Phase 1: Understanding post-growth

June-November 2022

Phase 2: Implementing post-growth

December-April 2023

Roundtable 2 (April 4): The challenges of developing and implementing post-growth agendas in European Cities

Phase 3: Recommendations, publications and dissemination

April-July 2023

1. How are European cities developing post-growth approaches? What role for visions and values, concepts and frameworks, missions, objectives and policies?
2. How can cities build coalitions and win support for post-growth agendas?
3. How are post-growth agendas being embedded and operationalised? How can they be adapted to individual city contexts?
4. What challenges are cities finding in developing and implementing post-growth approaches?
5. What support do cities need in developing and implementing post-growth approaches?

OUR CASE STUDY CITIES

City	Population	GDP per capita	Political make-up of city govt	Approach/Framework
Amsterdam	873.338 (2020)	63.500 €	Green-Left, Labour Party, D-66 (Liberal) – since July 2018	Doughnut Economics; “Broader Wellbeing”; Community Wealth Building; Municipalism
Barcelona	1,636,732 (2021)	51.300 €	Barcelona en Comu, Socialist Party of Catalonia – since May 2015	Municipalism; “Caring city”; Doughnut Economics
Brussels	1.222.637 (2022)	74.068 €	Socialist Party, Green Party, + regional liberal parties – since May 2013	“Economic Transition”; Doughnut Economics
Copenhagen	644.425 (2022)	86.564 €	Social-Democratic, Social-Liberal, Liberal and Conservatives (Mayor and three deputy-mayors); Red-Green, Socialist parties (three deputy-mayors: Technical and Environmental; Social Affairs; Health and Care) – since Jan 2022	Green growth; Doughnut Economics
Glasgow	635640 (2020)	43.500 €	SNP minority administration – since May 2017	“Glasgow Green Deal”; Doughnut Economics;
Preston	147,900 (2021)	35.866 € (2020)	Labour – since May 2011	Community Wealth Building

PART 1

WHAT ROLE FOR VISIONS AND VALUES, CONCEPTS AND FRAMEWORKS?

THE TERM "POST-GROWTH" IS RARELY EXPLICITLY USED IN EUROPEAN CITY GOVERNMENTS

- Too negative to use in political communications (**Amsterdam, Preston**)
- Too closely associated with degrowth (**Barcelona**)
- Not practical enough as a political tool (**Preston** and **Barcelona**)
- Confusing as an academic concept - "no one has done the analytical work to define [post-growth]" (**Barcelona**)
- Misleading when some forms of growth (social, cultural, and even – less extractive, more inclusive, democratically owned – economic growth, especially of foundational sectors) might be desirable in some contexts (**Preston, Glasgow**)

THE TERM "POST-GROWTH" IS RARELY EXPLICITLY USED IN EUROPEAN CITY GOVERNMENTS

e.g. *"if we start the conversation, 'this is a post-growth agenda', then we're not gonna get in the door. So it's sometimes [about] getting in the door and then saying, 'well, tell us about what you mean by growth. Alright, oh you mean jobs? You mean good health? You mean you decent housing, right? Like that we can all get behind [...] but that that isn't necessarily gonna be achieved through the kind of model that we've been pursuing for God knows how long."* Researcher and policy advisor, Preston

BUT “POST-GROWTH” RESONATES WITH A RANGE OF RELATED AGENDAS FOR ECONOMIC TRANSITION

“Across the globe, there’s a growing swell of consciousness that the economy is knackered, or the economy’s not serving people, place, planet [...] And in that there [are] a range of ongoing agendas, [...] sister movements as part of a post-growth umbrella” Policy advisor, Preston

- **Brussels:** Post-growth and Doughnut Economics are “synonyms”
- **Amsterdam:** “*Broader Wellbeing and the Doughnut Economy are aligned*”
- **Preston:** Council has “done work with Doughnut Economics: *obviously we’re having similar kinds of conversations*”
- CLES (which has worked **Preston, Glasgow** and **Barcelona**) is having a “live conversation” about how about how Community Wealth Building relates to Degrowth
- **Copenhagen:** “*I’ve been involved in transition towns initiatives for a long time [...] The Doughnut is another piece of that puzzle of a much bigger movement of new economic thinking*”
- **Barcelona:** “*the [post-growth] concept helps to gather a lot of policies and a lot of interventions and projects that are in the same line now*”

POST-GROWTH “SISTER” AGENDAS PROPOSE DIFFERENT STRATEGIC APPROACHES

"Different people talk to different audiences [...] we are all good friends, and we understand that we all slightly play a different role." Researcher and Degrowth activist, Barcelona

- Differing levels of emphasis on **social vs. ecological transition** - *"We'll let others fight the green battles"* (**Preston**)
- Differing levels of engagement with **local vs. global economy** – e.g. *"What is ["wellbeing"] worth if you only look within your city borders without considering the major effect we have on other parts of the world?"* (**Amsterdam**)
- Differing emphases on **practice vs. political vision and analysis**: e.g., *"[CWB] is also what we do on Monday. It's very, very deeply practical and more than the Doughnut, I would argue [...] you can start to do things very practically in the very short term"* (**Preston**)

MOST CITIES ARE EMBRACING SEVERAL POST-GROWTH AGENDAS SIMILTANEOUSLY AND FOCUSING ON POLICY OUTCOMES RATHER THAN POLITICAL VISIONS

- **Amsterdam:** *"I sort of jump on board [with] these different concepts because I don't really care about the shell as long as what's going on inside is palpable and actually makes sense."*
- **Glasgow:** *"I'm very wary that there's always something new coming along, we were talking about inclusive growth and then everybody started talking about Community Wealth Building and everybody started talking about the Well-being Economy and then everybody started talking about the Doughnut approach. [...] All these [are] tools that we can use, but it's the end goal that matters. [...] It's high quality, well-paid, sustainable jobs that all our population have access to, it is a sustainable city where everyone is able to live a carbon-free lifestyle as much as possible, and continuing to reduce inequalities. Those are the things that we want to achieve. Those are the things that citizens understand."*

SOME GREEN-LEFT CITY GOVERNMENTS WITH STABLE COALITIONS ARE EXPLICITLY DECLARING THEIR COMMITMENT TO POST-GROWTH AGENDAS

Amsterdam: *"[Following] the municipal elections in March last year, we now have a city board of Mayor and Deputy Mayors that have stated in their political agreements that "broader wellbeing" is the way forward [...] what I think helps now is that it is a political statement that we have to accelerate the transition towards a sustainable city and towards a Doughnut Economy based on Broader Wellbeing. And what we are doing now is translating that into a political assignment towards all the departments."*

...BUT MANY EUROPEAN CITY GOVERNMENTS CONVEY THEIR PURSUIT OF POST-GROWTH MORE IMPLICITLY

Barcelona: *"what gets reflected in the discourse, and in the practice of the local council, is the fact that there is never single mention in favour of growth [from Barcelona en Comu]... publicly they would never claim it, but they would try to reflect it in what they do"*

Brussels: *if you read the Shifting Economy Strategy, you will see that we talk about environmental ceiling and social foundations, but we don't mention the Doughnut. This is because some parties in the majority do not agree with that. They agree with the transition concept, but they don't agree with the Doughnut."*

PART 2

**HOW ARE POST-GROWTH VISIONS AND AGENDAS BEING
TRANSLATED INTO POLICIES?**

OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIES AND PLANS

Strategy or plan	Amsterdam	Barcelona	Brussels	Copenhagen	Glasgow	Preston
Circular economy	X	X	X	X	X	
Climate neutrality	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sustainable mobility	X	X	X	X	X	
Sustainable energy	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sustainable food	X	X	X	X	X	
Housing	X	X	X		X	
Gender	X	X			X	
Fair work			X		X	X
Skills & training	X	X	X		X	X
Remunicipalisation	X	X				X

AMSTERDAM



Green-Left, Labour and
Liberal parties form
governing coalition

2018

Doughnut City Portrait

Circular Strategy 2020-2025

Climate Neutrality Roadmap

City Centre Approach

2020

Amsterdam Impact is set
up to support and
accelerate the city's
'impact ecosystem'

2015

2000

2005

2010

2015

2020

2025

AMSTERDAM: CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

- By 2025, 65 percent of all household waste must be separated to enable recycling or reuse.
- By 2030, there must be a 50 percent reduction in the use of primary raw materials.
- By 2050, the city must have a fully circular economy.

Strong complementarity with Climate Plan.



AMSTERDAM'S CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME IN PRACTICE

- **Circular procurement.** The city administration will reduce its overall consumption by 20% and implement 100% circular procurement by 2030.
- **Amsterdam Made**, a community of over 150 manufacturing companies based in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area working to become more sustainable and reduce the use of raw materials
- **Buiksloterham**, Amsterdam's circular city district. The district functions as a testing ground and offers various opportunities for research, experimentation and innovation in the field of sustainability and circularity.



BARCELONA



First Citizen Commitment to Sustainability is signed
2002

Financial crisis
2007-8

Ada Colau is elected Mayor
2015

First superblock in Poblenou
2016

2016-2025 Plan for the Right of Housing
2017

Strategy for Promoting the 2030 Agenda in the City of Barcelona
2020

Public energy provider *Barcelona Energia* starts operating
2018

Social and Solidarity Economy Strategy 2030; Special Urban Plan for Tourist Accommodation
2021

2030 Healthy and Sustainable Food Strategy
2022

Metropolitan Commitment 2030. The city of 5 millions
2023

Dark kitchens and stores banned in the city centre
2023

2000

2005

2010

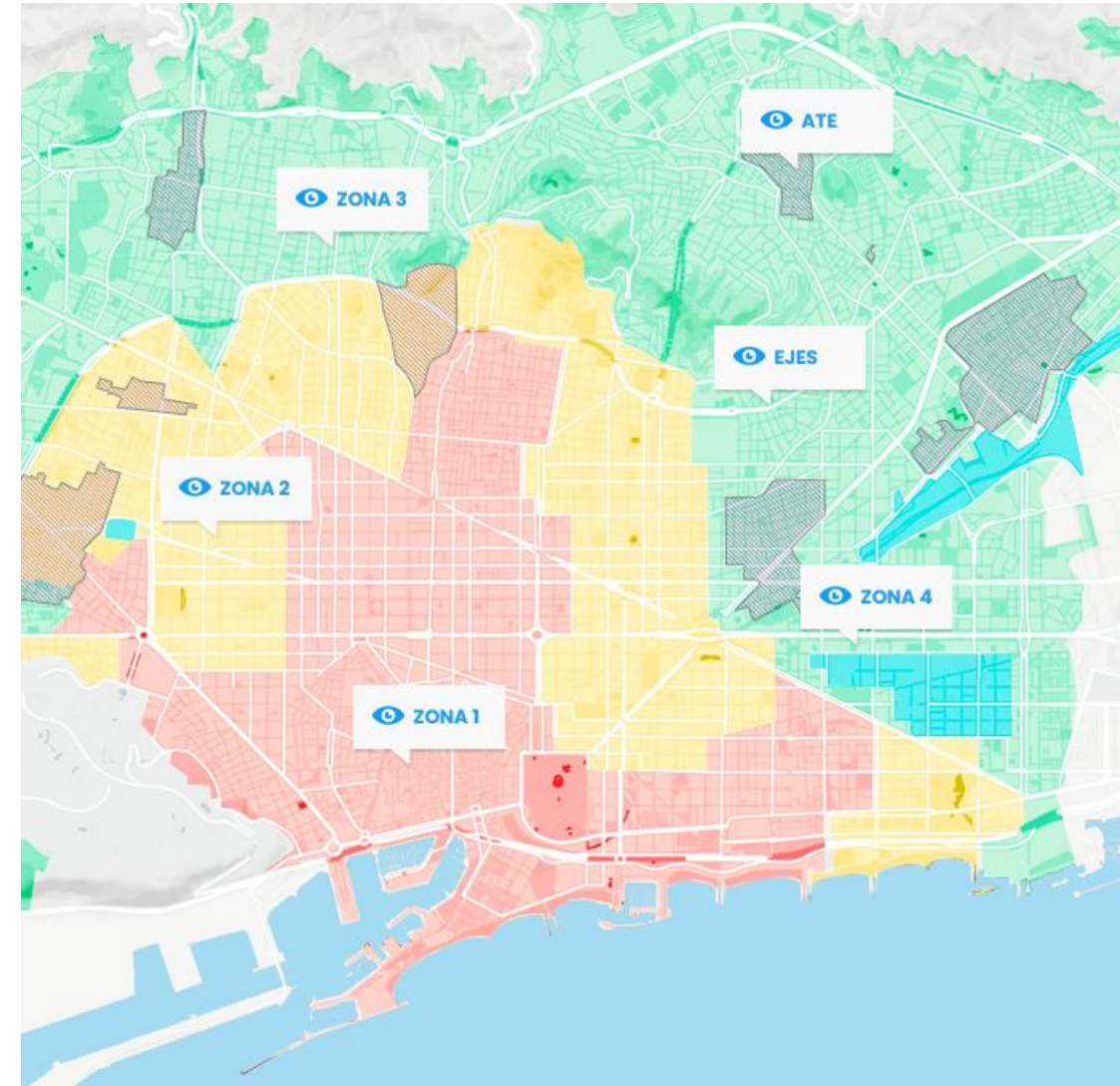
2015

2020

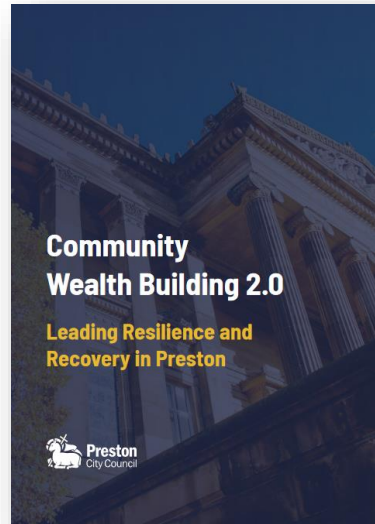
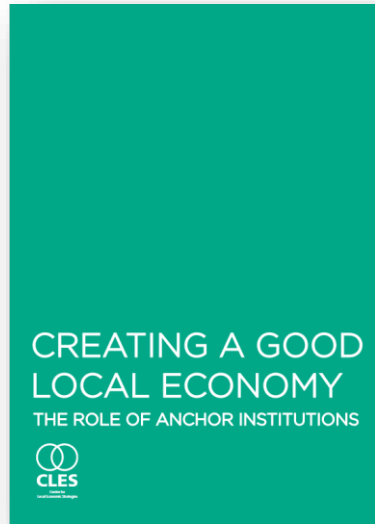
2025

BARCELONA: TACKLING OVER-TOURISM AND 'EXTRACTIVE' INDUSTRIES

- Regulating **tourist accommodation** and short-term rentals, especially in central districts
- Banning **dark stores and kitchens** through land use planning
- Ongoing discussions to regulate **cruise ship sector** (e.g. maximum number of cruises per day, maximum number of visitors per year)



PRESTON



Preston City Council
accredited as a Living
Wage Employer
2012

Preston leads EU-funded
URBACT Procure network of
11 cities working on
progressive procurement
2015

Partnership with
CLES starts to
explore Community
Wealth Building
2013

Publication of "Community
Wealth Building 2.0. Leading
resilience and recovery in
Preston"
2021

Labour Party wins
city council elections
2011

Financial crisis
2007-8

2000

2005

2010

2015

2020

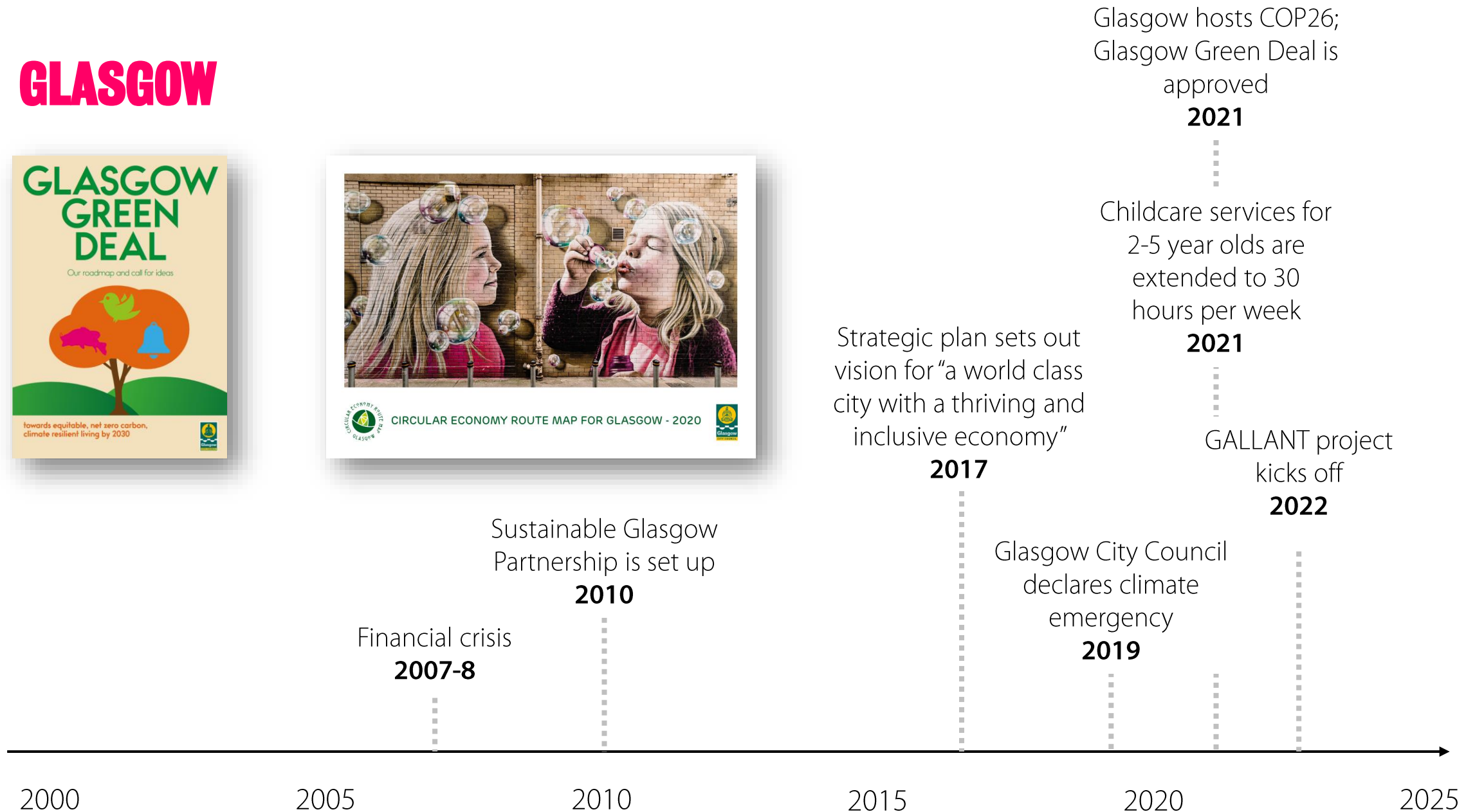
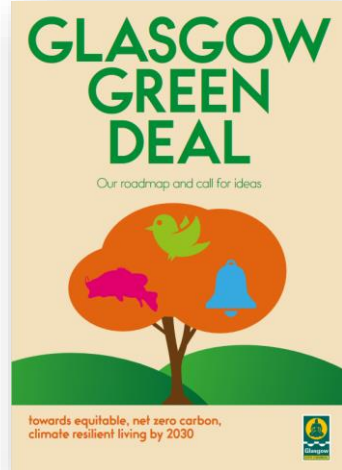
2025

PRESTON: PIONEERING 'COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING'

- **Progressive procurement** makes it simpler for local communities to bid for opportunities linked with the procurement of goods and services
- Accreditation as the first local authority in the north of England to pay the **Real Living Wage**.
- Supporting local, independent banks, credit unions and cooperatives (e.g. Northwest Mutual Bank, credit union Clevr Money, Preston Coop Development Network)



GLASGOW



GLASGOW: INFLUENCE OF POST-GROWTH FRAMEWORKS ON KEY STRATEGIES

“A world class city with a thriving and inclusive economy where everyone can flourish and benefit from the city's success”

Glasgow's vision as set out in the Strategic Plan (2017)

Glasgow's economy [...] is operating beyond planetary boundaries which provide a safe space for citizens to thrive, with climate change the most significant and growing risk to our economy and our way of life. [...] At the same time, the rules and norms guiding our economy are increasingly unfit for purpose, having widened inequality, and increased the insecurity of many over the last decade.”

Glasgow's Green Deal (2021)

GLASGOW: FLAGSHIP POLICIES TO TRANSITION FROM A 'POST-INDUSTRIAL' TO A 'POST-CARBON' CITY

- Developing a 'doughnut city portrait' with the support of the University of Glasgow through the GALLANT project.
- Investing on skills and employment programmes for the post-Covid & post-carbon economy
- Applying a Community Wealth Building approach to reduce the amount of Vacant and Derelict land across the City Region, bringing land back into use for commercial, greenspace, or community benefit.



BRUSSELS



Sustainable Urban
Growth Agreement (or
"New Deal") is adopted
2011

Regional Plan for Air,
Climate and Energy
2016

Governing parties
sign 2019-2024
coalition agreement
2019

"Good Move" plan is
approved
2020

Brussels Donut
project kicks off
2020

GO4Brussels 2030
strategy; Climate Law
2021

Shifting Economy:
Regional Economic
Transition Strategy
2022

2000

2005

2010

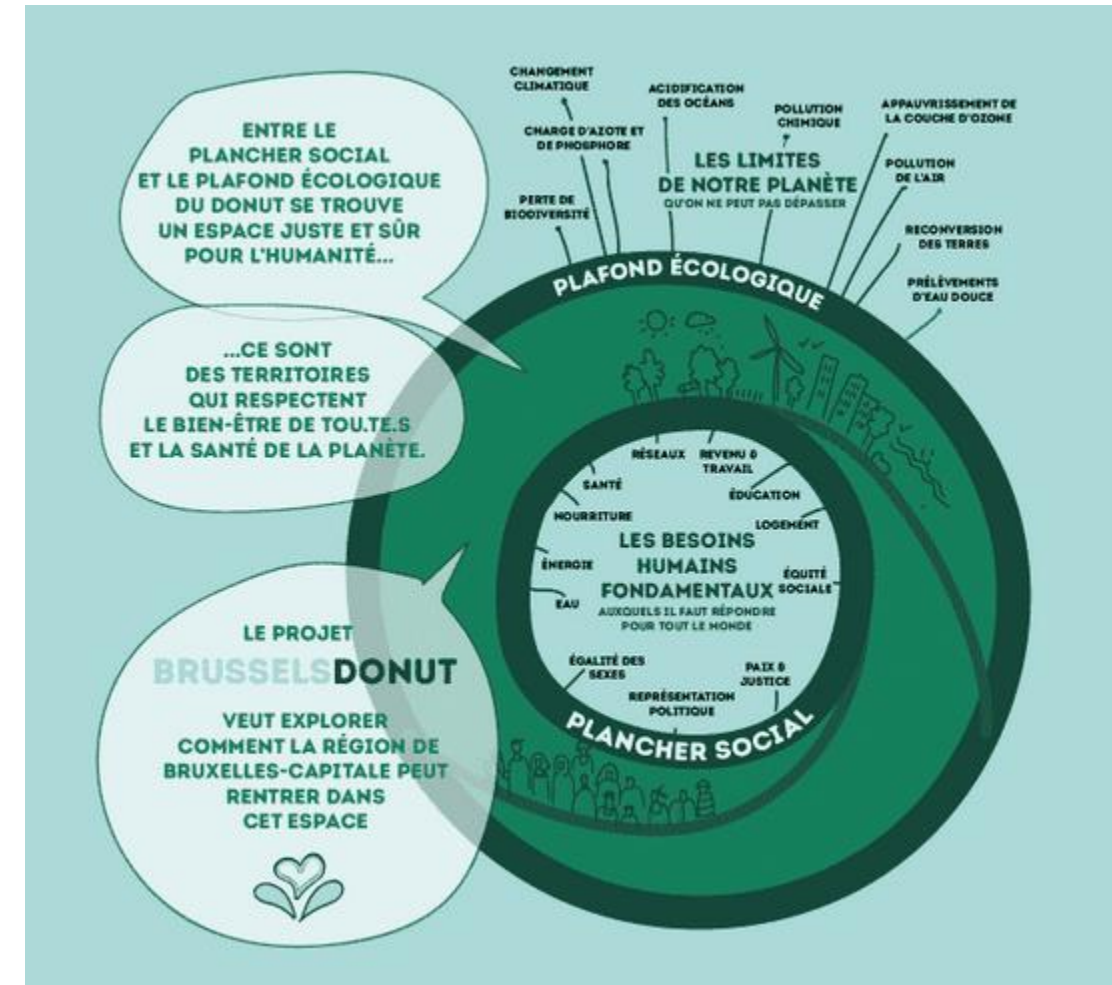
2015

2020

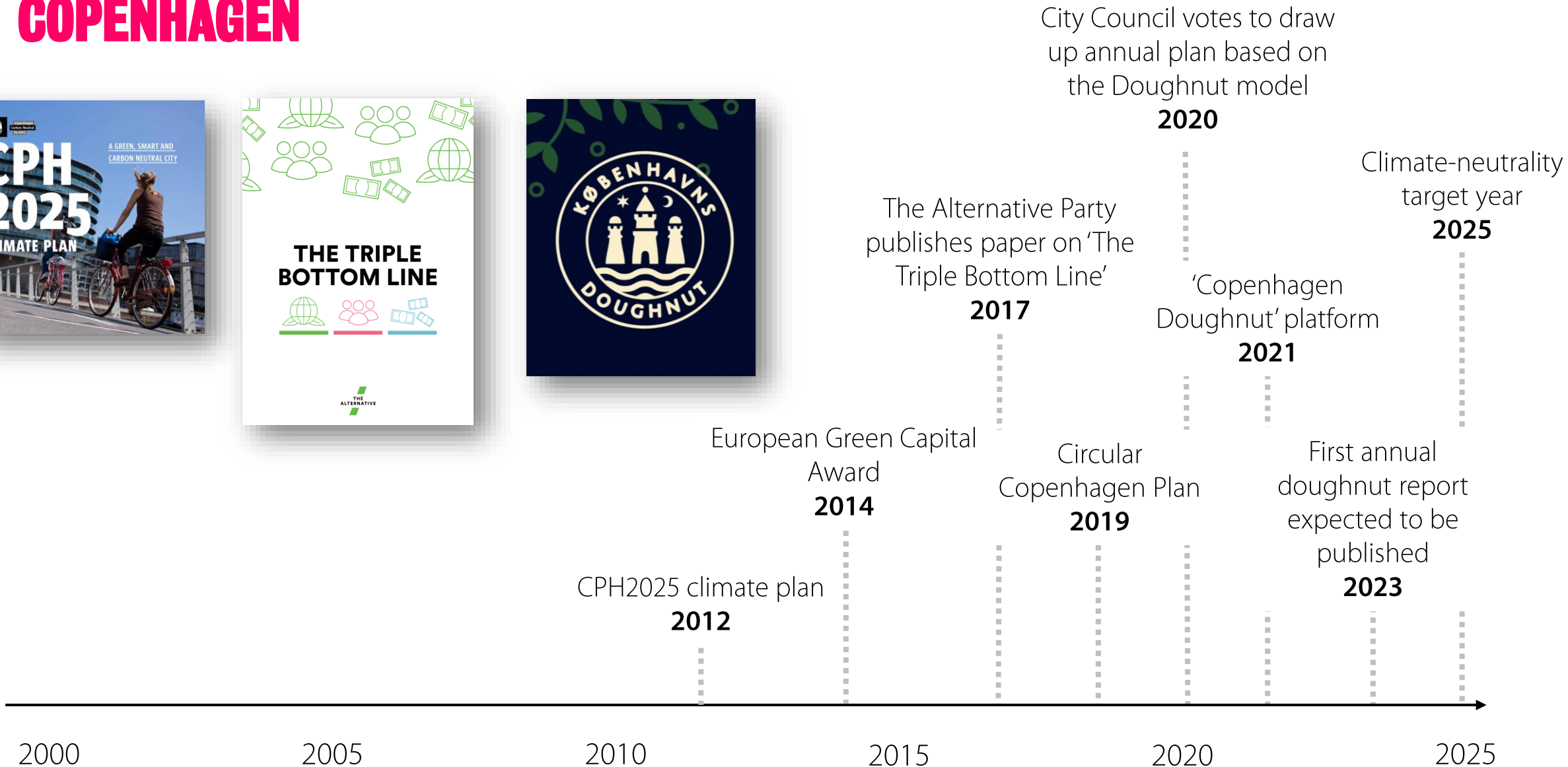
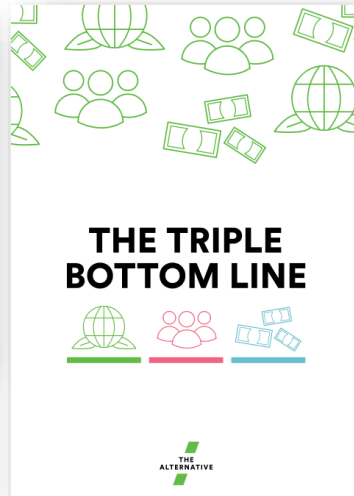
2025

BRUSSELS: NEW CRITERIA FOR ECONOMIC SUBSIDIES AND NEW INDICATORS

- **New criteria for economic subsidies** for economic activities and research & innovation enshrined in law.
 - “The Doughnut really helped us make sure that within our way of thinking the economy, the economic policies would consider these environmental and social levels. The concrete translation is the conditionality of subsidies, 400 million worth of subsidies to enterprises per year. This is quite a lot.”
- **New, crowdsourced indicators** through the Brussels Doughnut Project
 - “If the researchers go until the end of this process and we manage to convince our colleagues at the political level, our dream would be to basically change the doughnut framework into a dashboard to monitor the progress of the economy.”



COPENHAGEN



COPENHAGEN: AN ANNUAL REPORT TO ASSESS THE ECONOMY THROUGH NEW INDICATORS

- “Some political parties **were afraid that the donut would be some kind of *aquatic monster*** and will just become another report that would never be used. That's why it was slowed down. The first initial proposal from the administration was that they wanted 44 million kroner (6 million EUR) to create a small team to work with this and the other parties thought that was too expensive.”
- “Then I got elected. With a new team for my party and we said, OK, how can we make this as cheap as possible and make it look less bureaucratic? We made a new proposal that was seen as cheaper, and **we worked into some of the processes** in the city that already existed into instead of creating new ones.”



PART 3

**HOW CAN CITIES BUILD COALITIONS AND WIN SUPPORT FOR
POST-GROWTH AGENDAS?**

ADVOCATES FOR POST-GROWTH ARE WORKING WITH CONSTANT TENSIONS WITHIN CITY GOVERNMENT

"We're now feeling the pain of being in transition. [...] and experimenting with the new system at the crossroads". Policy Officer, Amsterdam

- Ideological tensions between coalition partners (**Barcelona**)
- Short- and medium-term impacts of post-growth policies on city budgets (**Amsterdam**)
- Siloed working within city government (**Amsterdam, Barcelona**)
- Institutional cultures of neoliberalism (**Preston, Amsterdam**)

"[The Doughnut] has been catching on with one small department within the city administration, but it hasn't resulted in any cross-cutting and overall strategy" Policy Officer, Barcelona

...BUT MEETING WITH SOME SUCCESS AS THEY BUILD SUPPORT FOR POST-GROWTH ACROSS CITY HALL

"We view the Doughnut as a kind of [tool] for socialising the Brussels region to a new way of thinking"

- Harnessing the political will of senior leaders (**Preston, Glasgow, Brussels**)
- Writing strategies implicating all departments (**Brussels**)
- Building on existing frustration with GDP amongst bureaucrats (**Brussels**)
- Creating forums for political education and debate e.g., using visions and frameworks with conceptual clarity like the Doughnut (**Barcelona, Copenhagen**) or bringing policymakers into direct contact with post-growth activists and researchers (**Amsterdam**)

POLICYMAKERS AND POLITICIANS ARE LOOKING TO BUILD NEW COALITIONS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY AND RESIDENTS

"the partnership ecosystem around the city economy [...] has been very helpful in backing [the city government] up when [...] we're making some potentially difficult decisions" Elected Official, Glasgow

- Some cities are seeing broad post-growth coalitions e.g., **Amsterdam's** *"Doughnut coalition [...] is] a very bottom-up coalition of the willing"*
- Others are seeing targeted partnerships e.g., **Barcelona:** *"different allies for different purposes"*; **Preston:** *"tailored approaches"* to convince anchors and institutions
- Policymakers and politicians have a growing awareness that post-growth means breaking - as well as making - alliances:

"The thing here is, how far do you dare to go as a politician? [...] Are you daring to kind of break [...] with] long established practices [and] long established stakeholders that that that are influencing city politics?" Policy Officer, Barcelona

DEMOCRATISING THE ECONOMY WAS SEEN AS A GOAL OF POST-GROWTH IN ALL OUR CASE STUDY CITIES

"We talk a lot about ownership over the economy. But ownership over the debate, I think, is even more important [...] I think there's a massive role for political education." Researcher and Policy Advisor, Preston

"I don't really think that Doughnut Economics really got beyond the city council and the administration [...] none of the mainstream media or mainstream people thought about it. It was hard for us to tell the story." Member of the City Council, Copenhagen

"It's not about "Do you know the Doughnut?", but "Do you understand that these themes are interconnected?" Policy Officer, Amsterdam

"How to let people know that they have power? Maybe it's training about how to use your influence within the system to make change." Researcher, Glasgow

BUT PROGRESS BUILDING DEMOCRATIC ECONOMICS IS SLOW

- Institutional cultures of neoliberalism across civil society
- Distrust of city government from social movements, communities and residents
- Lack of coherence between post-growth and pro-growth policies, and lack of structural support for post-growth initiatives
- The legacy of austerity and the 2008 financial crash, and the current cost of living crisis

"Citizen-led initiatives [...] in many cases feel a bit taken advantage of: they provide input, but [...] remov[ing] the [structural] barriers [...] necessary for them to thrive, to scale up, to persist, is not that often happening and takes very long" Researcher, Amsterdam

"You've got an economic system which isolates people. You've got a democratic system which is doing the same [...] People are really suffering [...] and t]he space and capacity to think about questions around economy and politics and all the rest of it is really squeezed." Researcher, Preston

CITIES NEED SUPPORT FROM NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND MOVEMENTS

"I do think we need to look at a radical reimagining of our economic system nationally [...] we're restrained nationally" Preston

- Devolution and financial resources
- Training around post-growth cultural change and democratic economics
- Diverse case studies and policy toolkits like *"like flat packs"* that are adaptable to different contexts
- International post-growth exchange and alliances
 - to build support for and demonstrate the credibility of post-growth approaches within city hall (**Glasgow, Barcelona, Preston**),
 - to create *"a more enabling political environment"* for post-growth agendas by lobbying for change (e.g., to EU regulatory frameworks) (**Amsterdam**)
 - (to a lesser extent) to exchange concrete post-growth ideas (**Barcelona, Preston**)

OPENNESS TO POST-GROWTH IS INCREASINGLY CROSSING BETWEEN DIVERSE CITIES AND ACROSS IDEOLOGICAL LINES

- Similar cities are in dialogue e.g., **Amsterdam, Brussels** and **Copenhagen**, but post-growth ideas are also travelling to diverse contexts (e.g., Community Wealth Building picked up in Scandinavian cities, re-municipalisation in e.g., Nice, France)
- Ideologically, post-growth experimentation is concentrated amongst Green-Left city governments, but some of its tactics and principals are being adopted and adapted by right-wing parties, including the exclusionary and xenophobic far right.

"I think there is an interesting overlap between [Community Wealth Building] and One Nation Toryism in terms of [...] wanting to support British and [...] to support enterprise and business, [...] that really strong kind of loyalty to place and sovereignty, and [...] building more locally."

Georgia Meloni's speeches "can sound quite degrowth."

DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How helpful is **post-growth as a category** for understanding the diverse narratives, coalitions, and policy programmes we describe?
2. Where are **the limits of post-growth coalitions**? How should the green-left respond to neo-liberal frameworks for deprioritizing growth (e.g. ESG or Triple Bottom Line), and exclusionary versions of post-growth emerging on the far-right?
3. How can post-growth agendas and coalitions help to envisage and put into practice a more **democratic economy**?
4. What are the **key metrics** by which we should assess post-growth urban agendas?
5. **What's missing**? Are there big questions about post-growth in cities that this research is overlooking?