

Climate vs Neoliberalism: causes of inaction and the call for planning

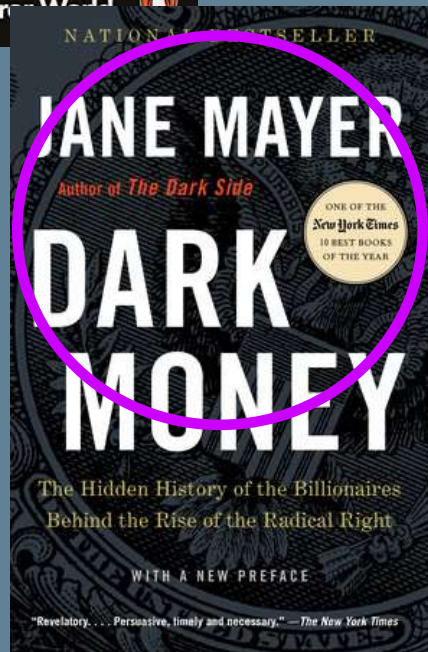
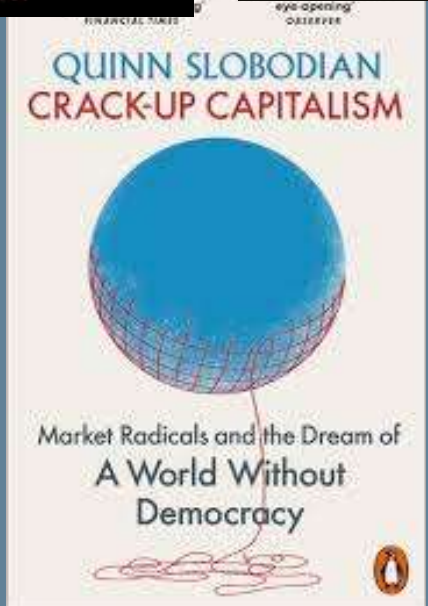
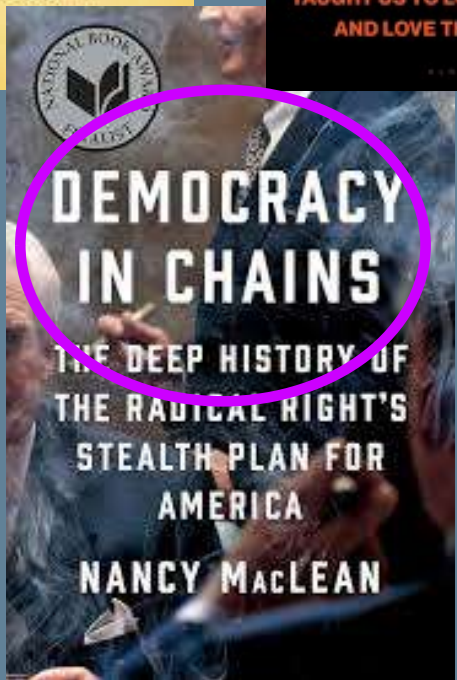
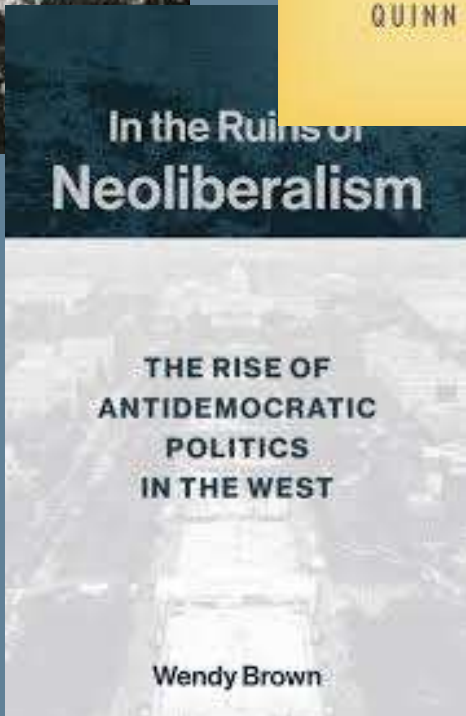
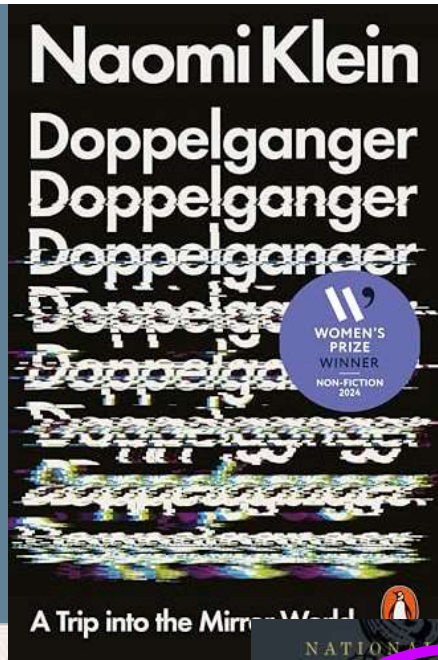
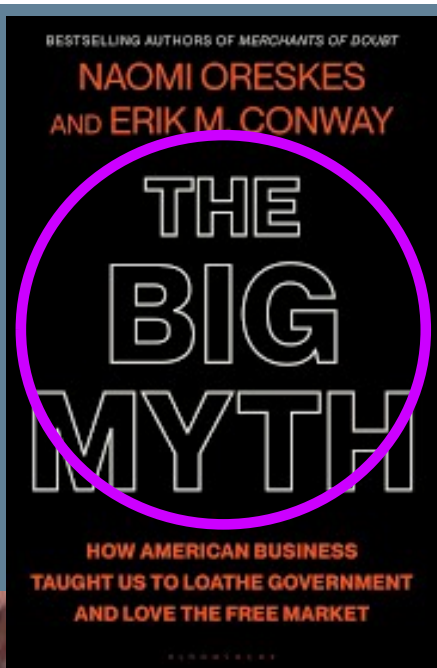
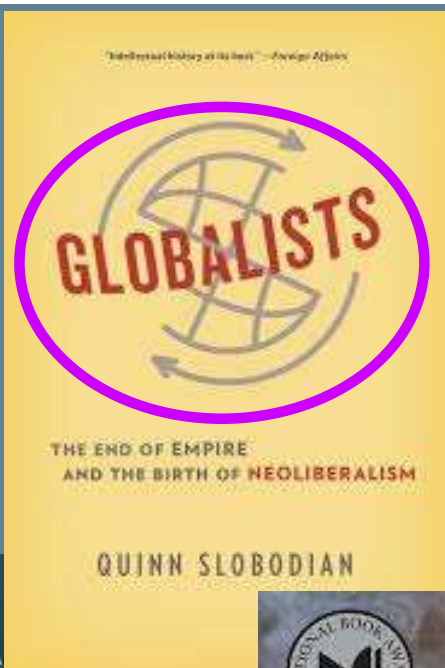
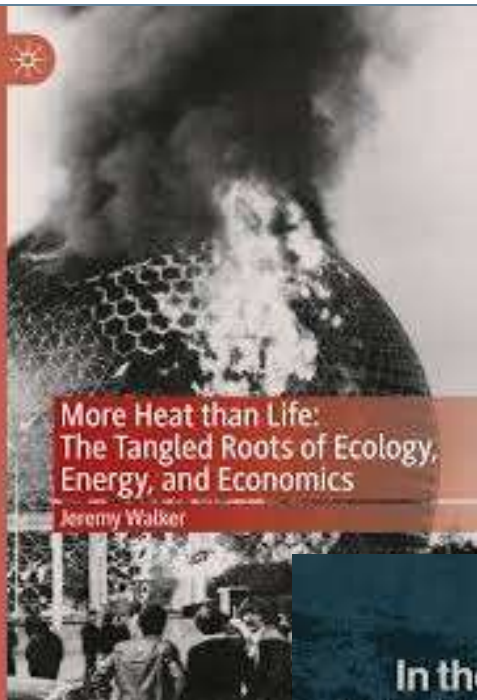
Professor Julia Steinberger, University of Lausanne

Julia.Steinberger@unil.ch

September 29th 2025

Outline

- Neoliberalism vs climate
- Research from Living Well Within Limits and REAL projects

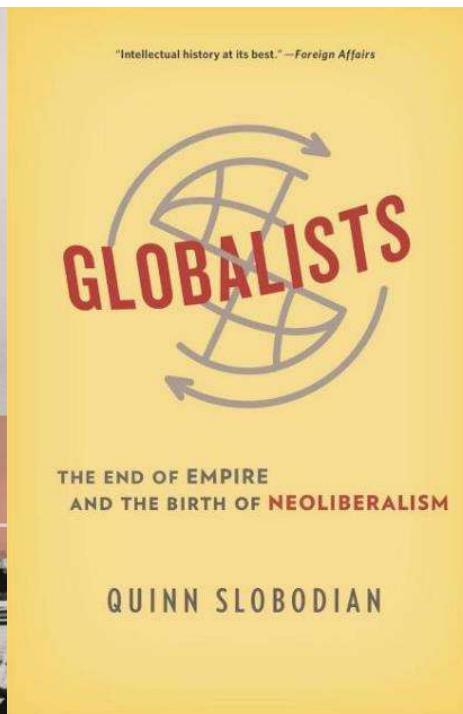
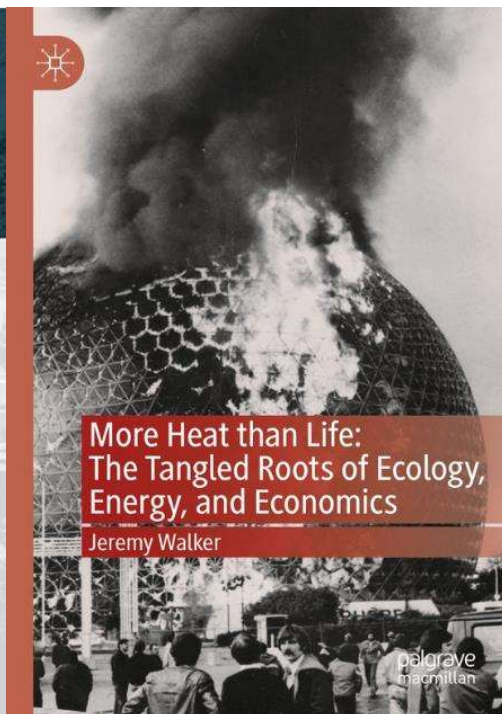
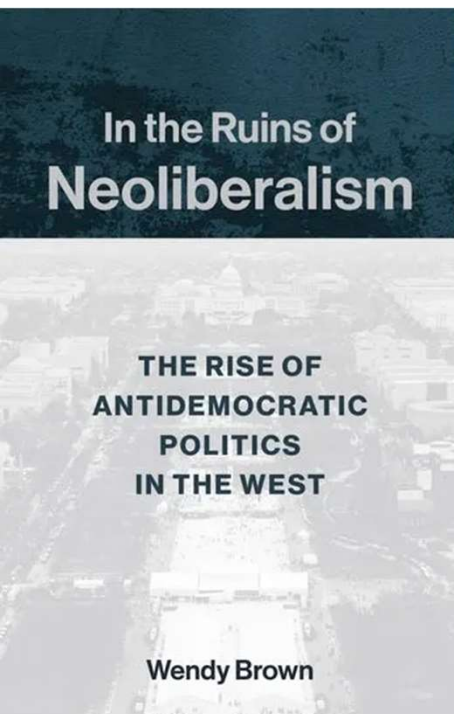


What we are up against



Julia Steinberger · [Follow](#)

30 min read · Jun 17, 2024



An upheaval in 10 chapters:

1. **The cause.** We know the climate crisis is brought to us by highly unequal and undemocratic economic systems.
2. **The rise.** The recent history of these economic systems, in the Americas and Eurasia, is dominated by the ascendance of neoliberal ideology.
3. **The threat.** Neoliberal ideology is antidemocratic at its very core. Its aim is to give free-reign over our societies to corporations, not citizens.
4. **The promoters.** The fossil fuel industry is a long-time promoter, as well as beneficiary, of the neoliberal takeover of our societies.
5. **The coordination.** The organisation of this takeover is not haphazard: it is coordinated through think tanks, lobby groups, public relations & legal firms. These in turn are coordinated internationally, for instance via the Atlas Network, which is involved in more than 500 think tanks worldwide.
6. **The buildup.** These think tanks train their cadres internally, and promote them to places of influence in policy and communication.
7. **The message.** These think tanks replicate their materials and strategies worldwide. Their poisoning of our public sphere runs the gamut from advocating brutally unequal neoliberal economic policies to promoting climate science denial. They also dabble in divisive culture war topics, on gender (equal rights for women, queer & trans rights), race or migration, for instance.
8. **The influence.** One core goal of these organisations is to replace university research expertise by their own materials, influencing the influencers, with journalists and teachers identified as prized targets.
9. **The implication.** To counter such centralised and coordinated actors, the climate movement (and indeed all movements attacked by neoliberalism) should change radically, both in orientation and strategy.
10. **The direction.** Democracy, the fearsome foe of neoliberalism, should be at the heart of our new direction.

Neoliberalism is anti-democratic at its core.

In the Ruins of Neoliberalism

THE RISE OF ANTIDEMOCRATIC POLITICS IN THE WEST

Wendy Brown

“The more dependent the position of the individuals or groups is seen to become on the actions of government, the more they will insist that the governments aim at some recognizable scheme of distributive justice; and the more governments try to realize some preconceived pattern of desirable distribution, the more they must subject the position of the different individuals and groups to their control. So long as the belief in “social justice” governs political action, this process must progressively approach nearer and nearer to a totalitarian system.” – Hayek



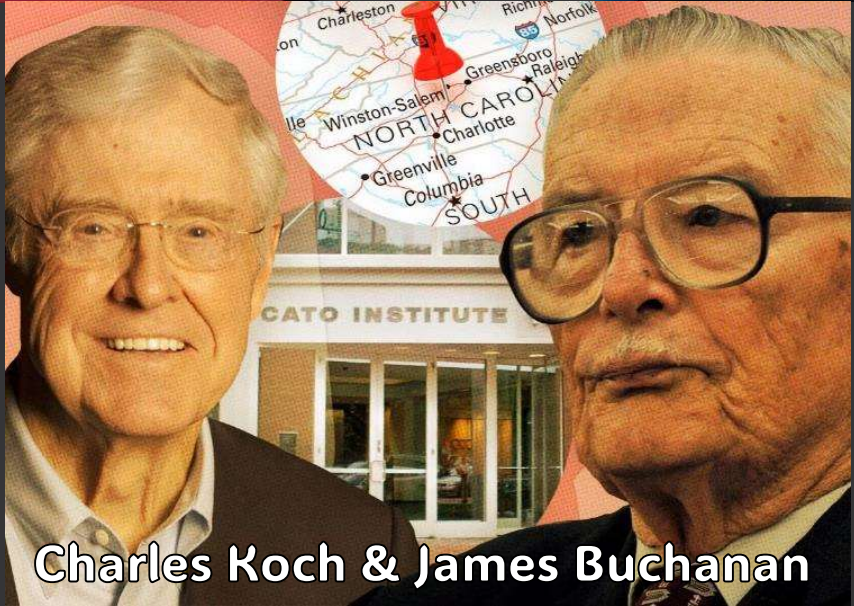
Hayek speaking to the Mont Pèlerin Society



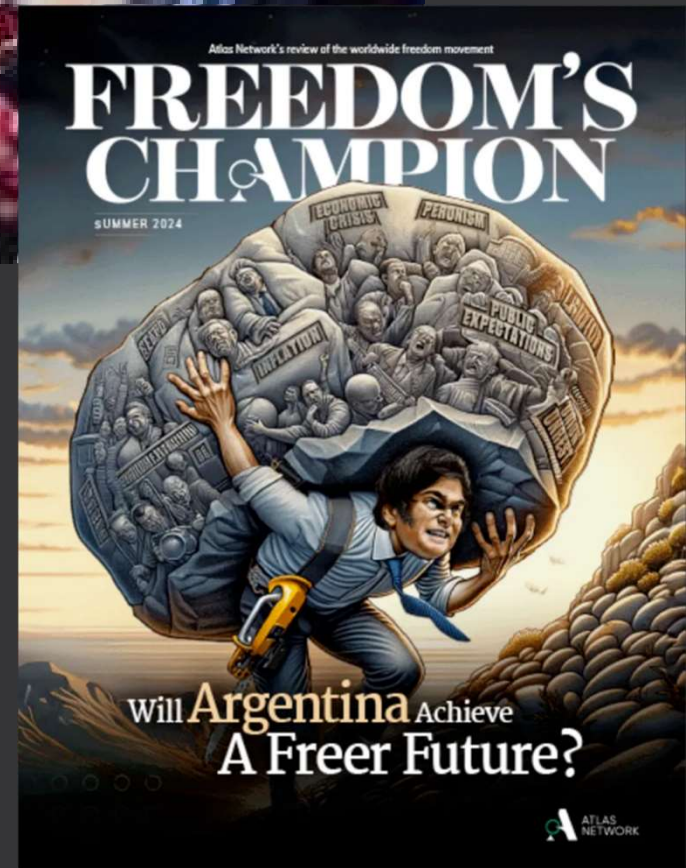
BFFs Thatcher and Pinochet



Musk and Milei



Charles Koch & James Buchanan



Will Argentina Achieve
A Freer Future?

NATIONAL

Hundreds of scholars say U.S. is swiftly heading toward authoritarianism

APRIL 22, 2025 · 5:01 AM ET

HEARD ON ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

Frank Langfitt



7-Minute Listen

+ PLAYLIST

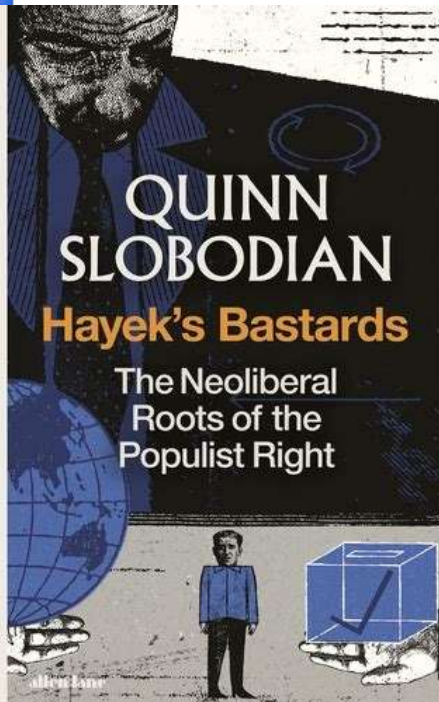
TRANSCRIPT



Manzar Zaidi | January 15, 2025

The Rising Far Right of Europe

EUROPE



Dark times



The New York Times



Subscribe for €0.50/week

Campus Crackdown

Changes at Harvard

International Students

Tribal Colleges

U.C.L.

Law Firm Pressures Brown University to Erase Research on Anti-Wind Groups

The firm, which represents opponents of offshore wind, said it would complain to Brown's federal and private funding sources.



Neoliberalism in full backlash mode

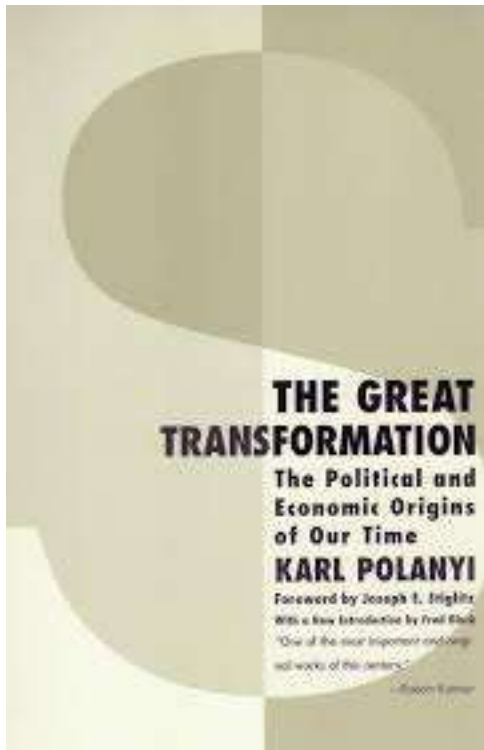
The Draghi report on EU competitiveness

The future of European competitiveness: Report by Mario Draghi

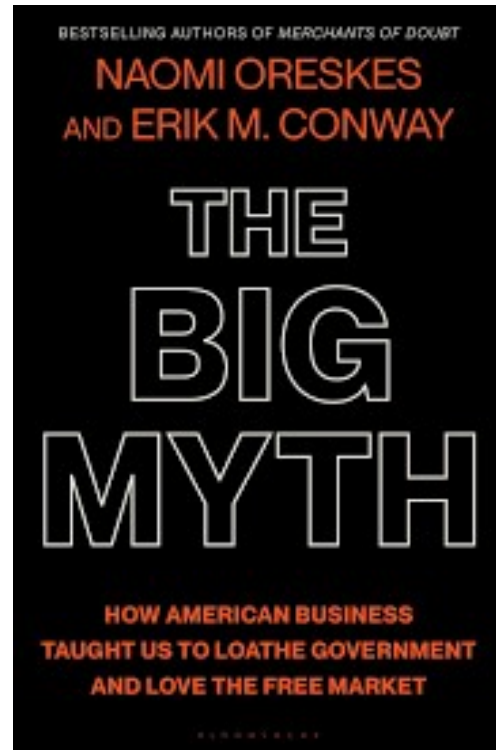


- Competition
- Deregulation
- Roll back of climate, environmental, labour and social efforts
- Focus on AI, space and militarisation: technologies-industries for powerful elites rather than the majority of the population.

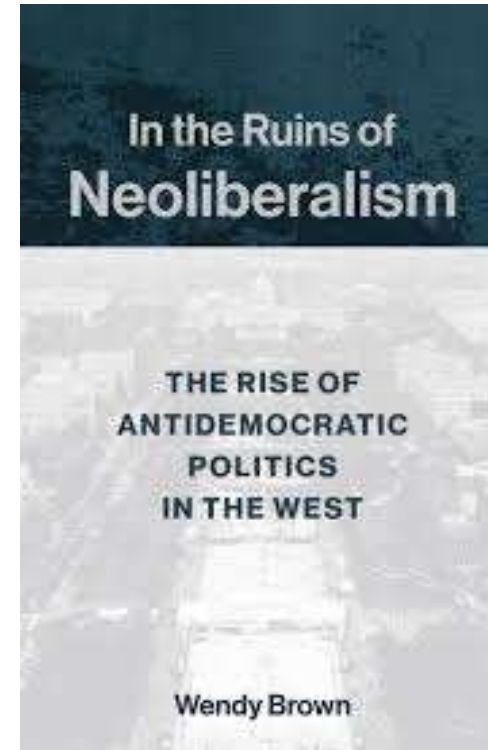
We have been here before ... (sort of)



Polanyi shows how inequality and economic insecurity leads straight to fascism.



150 year history of anti-social and anti-environmental USA industry influence.



Neoliberalism is fundamentally anti-democratic. Market-focus is just a means to an end.

... sort of. There are some new twists.



Crypto ideology of **Network State** is a new twist on the destruction of nation-state democracies, building on neoliberal favoring of multinational corporations.

- Cryptocurrencies to “discipline” democratic governments.
- AI to “discipline” labor.

Crucial to learn more.

1. Gil Duran’s “Nerd Reich”
2. Emil Torres and Kate Willett “Dystopia Now”

The Network State Coup is Happening Right Now

Gil Duran
01 Feb 2025 — 4 min read



WHAT'S BEHIND THE RACE TO CREATE ARTIFICIAL GENERAL INTELLIGENCE?

Understanding the TESCREAL Bundle of Ideologies



Dr. Émile P. Torres
Dig Curator, Truthdig



Dr. Timnit Gebru
Founder & Executive Director at
The Distributed AI Research Institute (DAIR)

The TESCREAL bundle: Eugenics and the promise of utopia through artificial general intelligence by **Timnit Gebru and Émile P. Torres**



Trump and Musk have ushered in the era of cataclysm capitalism. But I have a plan to counter it

Julia Steinberger

The speed with which US democracy is being dismantled is dizzying, but if we organise resistance now we can stop this



Cataclysm capitalism: an ideology of planetary and human nihilism

“The fossil fuel companies, the rightwing tech magnates and the financial companies hurrying in their wake have somehow convinced themselves that **they don't need prosperous economies to prosper themselves. They have learned to profit from disruption and destruction.** They know from experience that immiserated populations will endure exploitative working conditions and go deep into debt to keep themselves and their families alive.”

Let's make some light!

A 3 point plan:

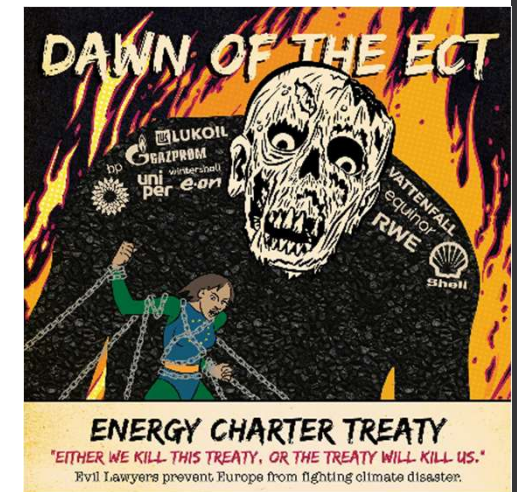
1. **Learning and explaining:** Replace helpless fear with knowledgeable anger.
2. **Organise Homo Cooperator:** Activate cooperative and egalitarian human capacities.
3. **Whole scope positive vision,** not reactive and piecemeal. Living well within planetary boundaries.

1. Learning and explaining

- The loooooong and documented history of anti-democratic, anti-social, anti-labour, anti-environment influence of industry on our societies is far too unknown.

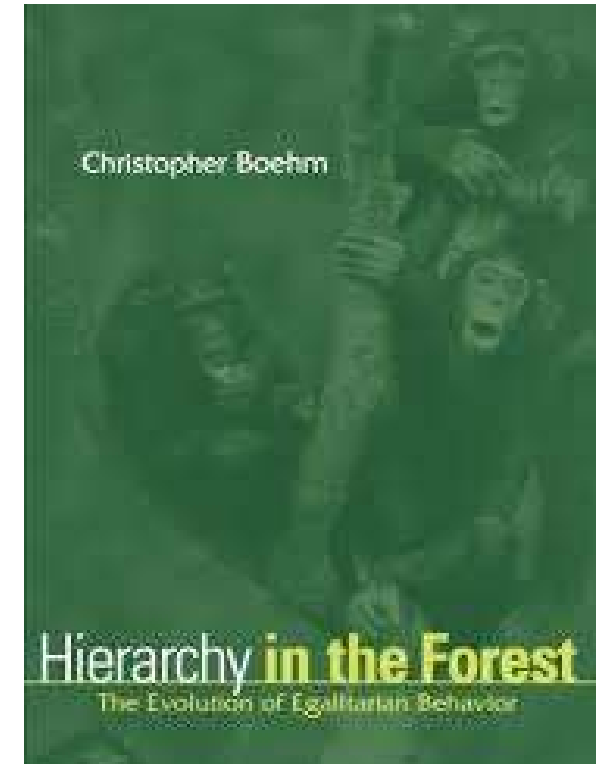
It's vital to learn and communicate it.

- Core thinkers-writers: Wendy Brown, Naomi Oreskes and Eric Conway, Quinn Slobodian, Naomi Klein, Jeremy Walker ...
- **Crucial intermediary role for academics and NGOs:** make these long historical books into easily accessible shorter materials, memes and slogans.
 - A new generation of communicators is taking on the challenge, but needs support: Gary's Economics, Climate Town, many others.
 - Graphic artists are key! See Céline Keller, Léonard Chemineau ...







2. Organise Homo Cooperator and Activista Femina.

- Activate a new (and realistic) vision of human beings, to give people not just a future worth fighting for, but actors worth being.
 - False neoliberal human vision as competitive, selfish, incapable of long-term vision or reflection, incapable of collective deliberation. With this vision, Draghi wins, and fascism triumphs.
 - Reality: long term (evolutionary scale) history of egalitarian societies.
- **Our intelligence is meant for organizing for the common good!**
 - Social and political intelligence: our ancestors thought out and practices politics and cultures of “Reverse Dominance” and “Counter Power”, to put down bullies.
 - **Ecosystemic intelligence**, a species capable of understanding ecosystems in depth, and managing them for the long-term good.
- **Re-learning practices of organizing for the common good: creating forms of economic democracy in our everyday life. Mutual aid is action.**



Democratizing provisioning systems: a prerequisite for living well within limits

Julia Steinberger^a , Gauthier Guerin^b , Elena Hofferberth^a  and Elke Pirgmaier^a 

^aInstitute of Geography and Sustainability, Faculty of Geosciences and Environment, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland
^bCatalyst Collective Ltd, Cornholme, Todmorden, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

The core challenge of the 21st century, of achieving good living conditions for all, while bringing resource use and emissions down within planetary limits, is likely to be technically feasible. However, current political and economic trends perpetuate extractive practices and growth imperatives, where decisions that benefit vested interests at the expense of humanity and life on Earth are hidden behind capitalist market logics. To break this deadlock, we argue economic democratization is necessary, bringing crucial economic decision-making into the sphere of democratic deliberation. We review existing proposals and argue that economic democracy requires more fundamental rethinking of social, political, and economic relations. We then explore these in three thematic areas: the deepening of democracy, the importance of provisioning systems, and the provisioning logics within organizations. We conclude with a call to action for a revived coalition of environmental and social movements, focused on the crucial task of democratizing the economy through its provisioning systems and organizations.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 November 2023
Accepted 2 September 2024

KEYWORDS

Economic democracy;
human needs;
provisioning systems;
organizational logics

«This mission was supposed to be impossible, if not for an outstanding determination of the people of the world.

It's amazing to see that when we decide to do something together, we go beyond that idea that we cannot do anything, that our only mission, our only capacity is to work,work,work, and compete, and compete, and accumulate material goods.



We have the capacity to achieve great accomplishments, once we put collective action, collective intelligence to work.»

Climate and humanitarian activist
Thiago Avila, Global Sumud Flotilla,
Barcelona, August 31 2025

3. Whole scope positive vision: humanity well-being within planetary boundaries.

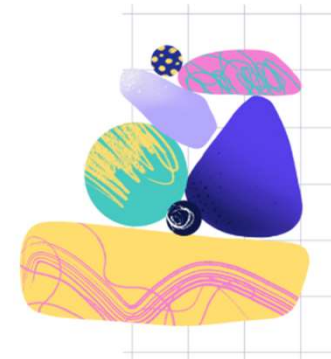
- **Egalitarian, democratic, economic and material security within planetary boundaries.**
 - Human at centre, no longer possible to pit social against ecological goals.
 - “Scientifically-informed democratic decision-making for the common good”
- **We can identify, study and model economies focused on human well-being within planetary boundaries.**
 - Living Well Within Limits, REAL – A postgrowth deal projects, general field of ecological economics, degrowth and postgrowth.
 - Decent Living Standards for all possible at less than half of current energy use (Millward-Hopkins et al 2020, Kikstra et al 2021).
 - Equality, democracy, public services & infrastructure, healthcare: all enable societies to do better at lower environmental impacts.
 - We can quantify, explain and model inequality and exploitation, within countries and across the world, exposing neocolonial patterns of unequal exchange in money, resources and labor.

Well-being and climate change mitigation:
the Living Well Within Limits approach



**REAL -
A Post-
Growth
Deal**

The REAL project advances scientific research for realising post-growth transformations.



10 stylised facts about living well within limits

At present	In the future
Energy & Human Needs	
SF1. Satisfying human needs does not require high or (in most cases) increasing energy consumption.	SF2. Satisfying human needs globally could be done using less than half of current energy use.
Distribution & Inequality	
SF3. Energy use is driven by the most affluent inter- and intra-nationally.	SF4. Reducing inequality would enable, and is necessary for, climate mitigation and the elimination of energy poverty.
Importance of public services and provisioning systems	
SF5. Provisioning systems limit the extent to which need satisfaction can be achieved at low energy use.	SF6. Improved provisioning systems could enable high need satisfaction at lower energy use.
Political Economy of Provisioning systems	
SF7. Current highly unequal ownership and power structures strongly shape provisioning systems.	SF8. Transforming our economies requires understanding and overcoming systemic barriers.
Transformation	
SF9. Democratic and participatory processes are crucial for unlocking changes in human need satisfaction.	SF10. Provisioning sufficient, equitable & universal well-being requires moving beyond contemporary capitalism.

Chapter 10: The Direction.

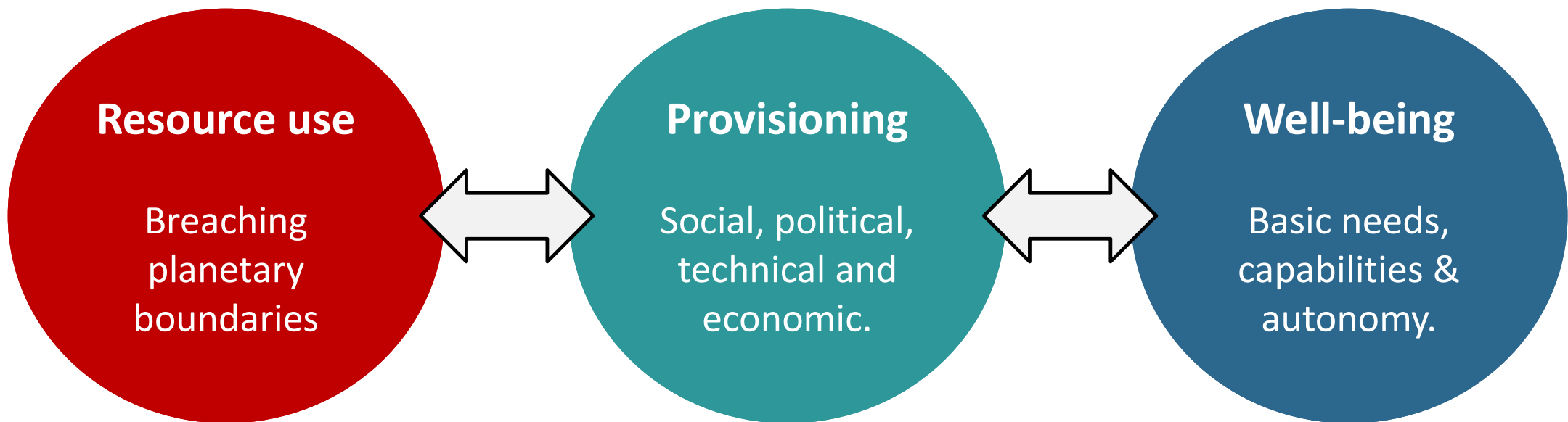
Democracy, the fearsome foe of neoliberalism, should be at the heart of our new direction.

- Democratic decision-making should always work hand in hand with public service research and information.
- Research should be oriented to support democratic deliberation and decision-making, and citizens should be trained to understand the domains of validity of research results.
- The consideration of scientific results, alongside the fostering of a culture of care and reciprocal work, is what will enable our decisions to bring us back within planetary boundaries, while protecting the most vulnerable from the harms already upon us.

Research in these areas ...

SOME RESULTS FROM “LIVING WELL WITHIN LIMITS” (2017-2022) AND “REAL – A POSTGROWTH DEAL” PROJECTS (2023-2029)

PROVISIONING SYSTEMS ARE THE LYNCHPIN BETWEEN PLANETARY BOUNDARIES AND WELLBEING.



Method for studying: Systems of Provision

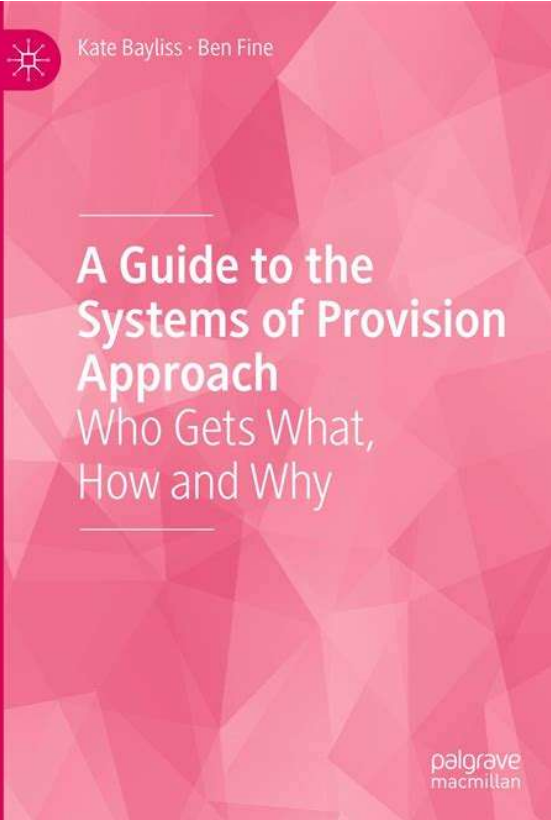
Fine & Leopold 1993, Fine 2002, Bayliss & Fine 2020


- **Structures:** governance rules and hierarchies of decision-making (key laws and regulations, regional scales of responsibility).
- **Processes:** stages of policy-making, formal procedures for decision-making, project development and communication between actors.
- **Agents:** the most important actors responsible for shaping provision.

Kate Bayliss



Ben Fine

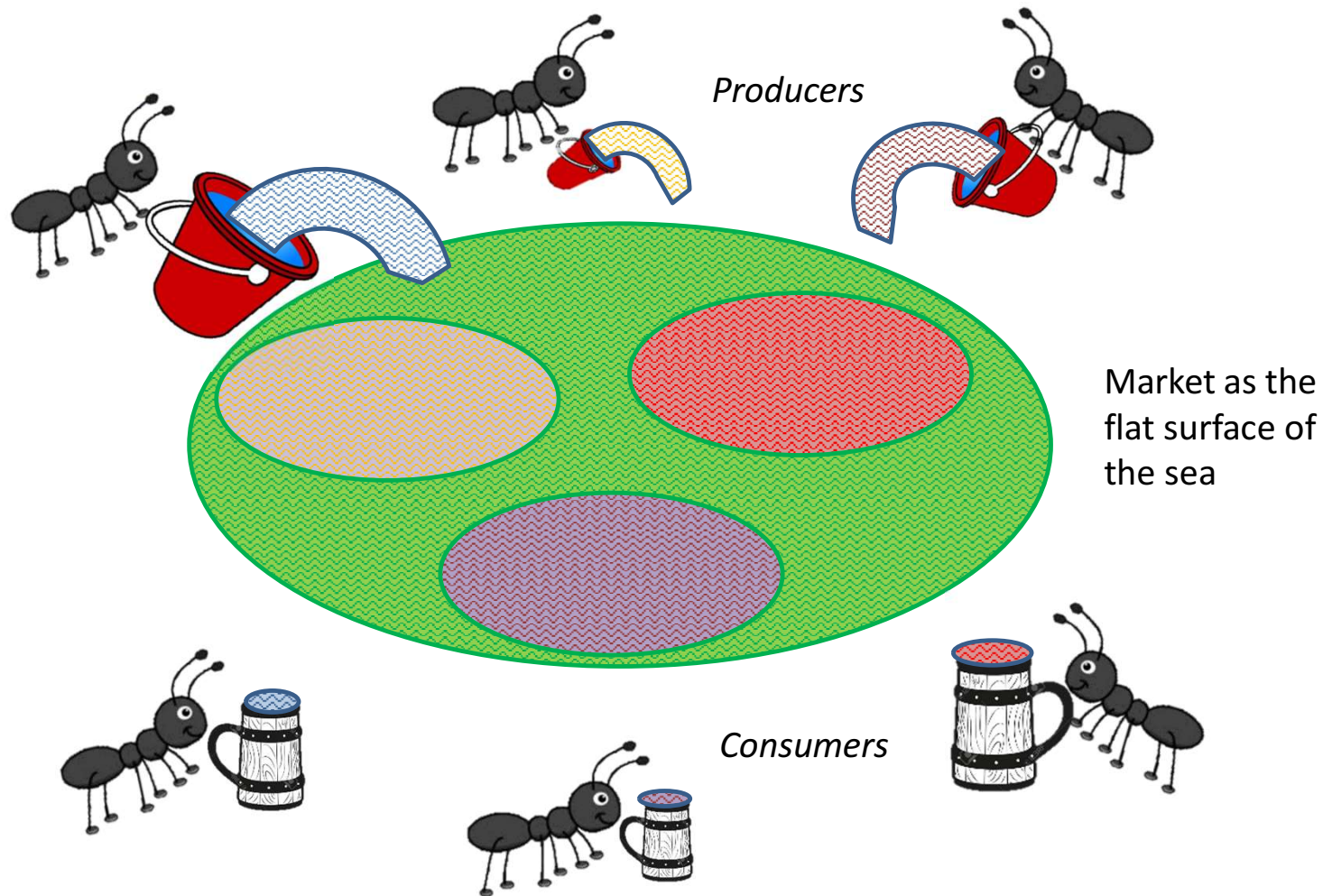




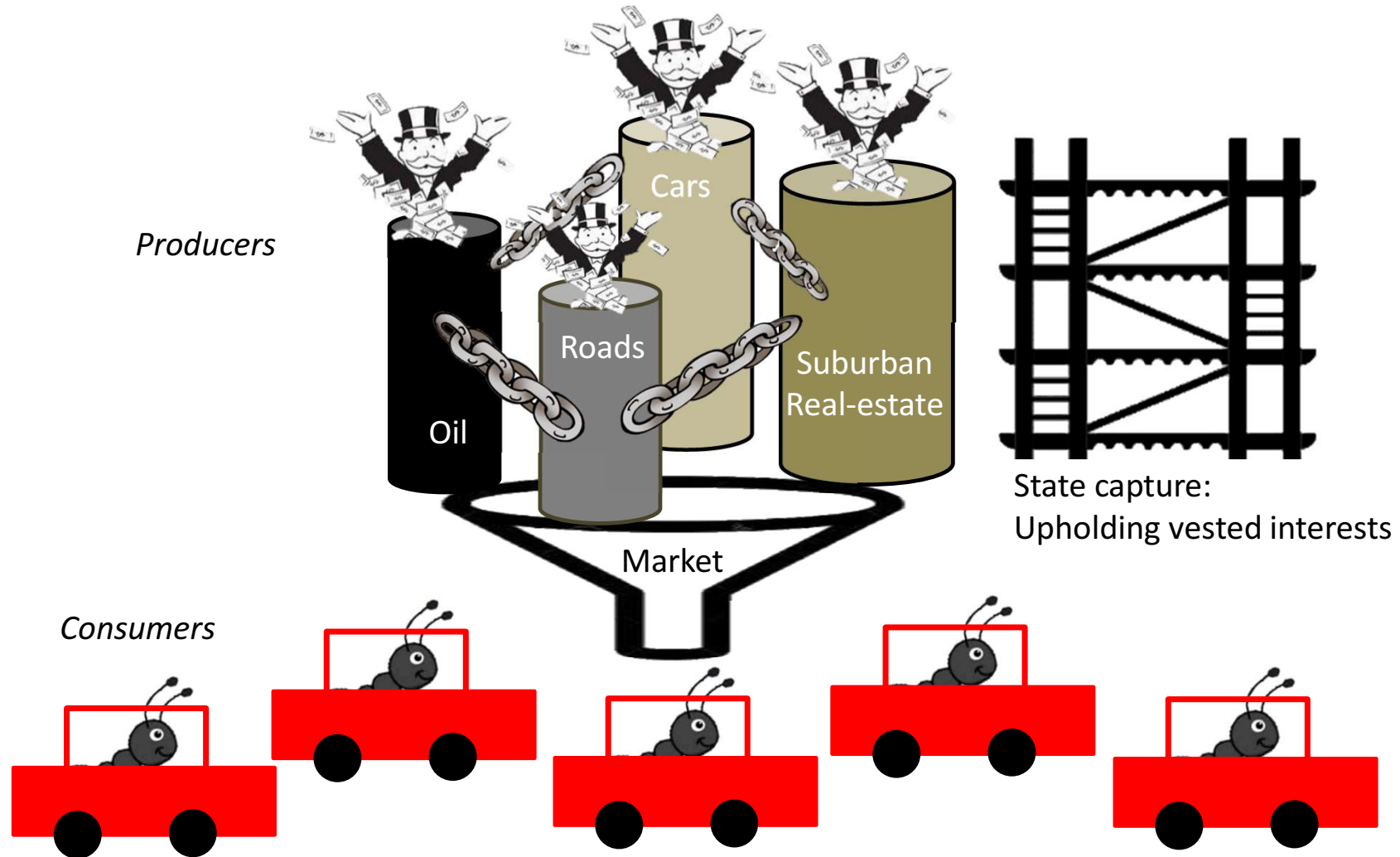
Provisioning systems could enable good lives at low resource use, but are often engineered to create resource dependency.

Dependency on resource-intensive consumption is itself an industrial product, driven by decades of lobbying, subsidies, and state-regulatory capture.

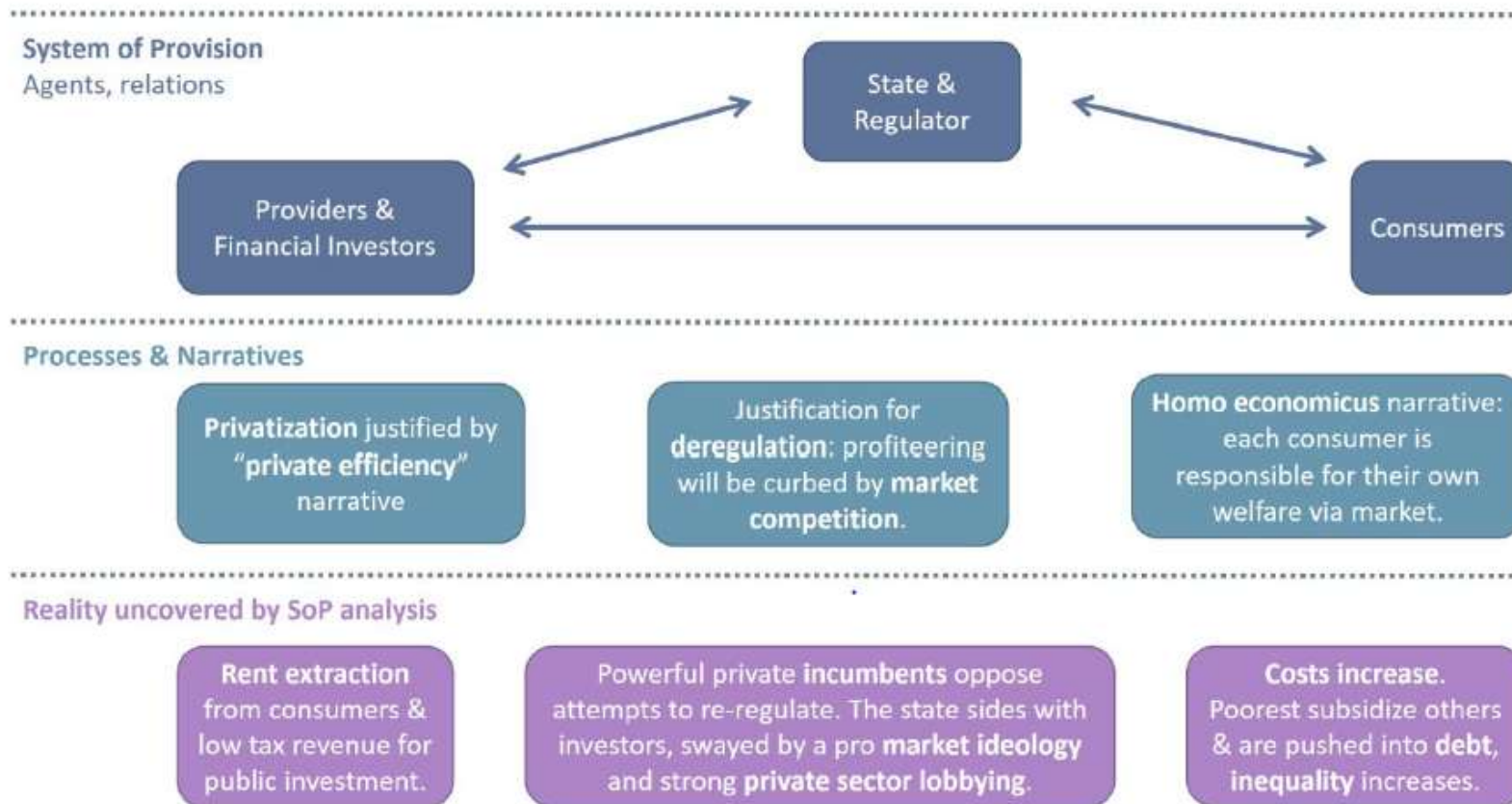
Cartoon version of the neoclassical (green) economy as a **horizontal** market



Cartoon version of real economy as **vertical** supply chains, connected through technology clusters



UNCOVERING THE REALITY BEHIND PRIVATISATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES



“Abandoning people to the private market in relation to services that affect every dimension of their basic well-being, without guaranteeing their access to minimum standards, is incompatible with human rights requirements.”

Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, UK visit report, 2019

<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/41/39/Add.1>

WAY FORWARD ? DEMOCRACY

Breaking dependency and state capture requires expanding the scope of democracy to our economies.

Active economic citizenship through far expanded decision-making roles of:

- Workers,
- Community members,
- Households,
- Local/National/International governance.



Les 150: French Citizen Assembly on Climate

real

A POST GROWTH DEAL



Prof. Giorgos Kallis
Autonomous University of
Barcelona, Spain



Prof. Julia Steinberger
University of Lausanne,
Switzerland



Prof. Jason Hickel
LSE and Autonomous University
of Barcelona, Spain

WP1

Planetary Possibilities

- North-South convergence scenarios of resource use.
- Material prerequisites for decent living.
- Postgrowth IAM scenarios.

WP2

Postgrowth Policies

- Mapping unequal exchange.
- Post-Growth Deals for EU and Global South.
- Modelling and feedback on policies.

WP3

Postgrowth Provisioning

- Determinants of social progress.
- Democratic provision alternatives.
- Modelling transformed provision.

WP4

Postgrowth Politics

- Learning from labour, peasant and municipal movements.
- Role of protest and conflict.
- Models of postgrowth political organizing.

WP4

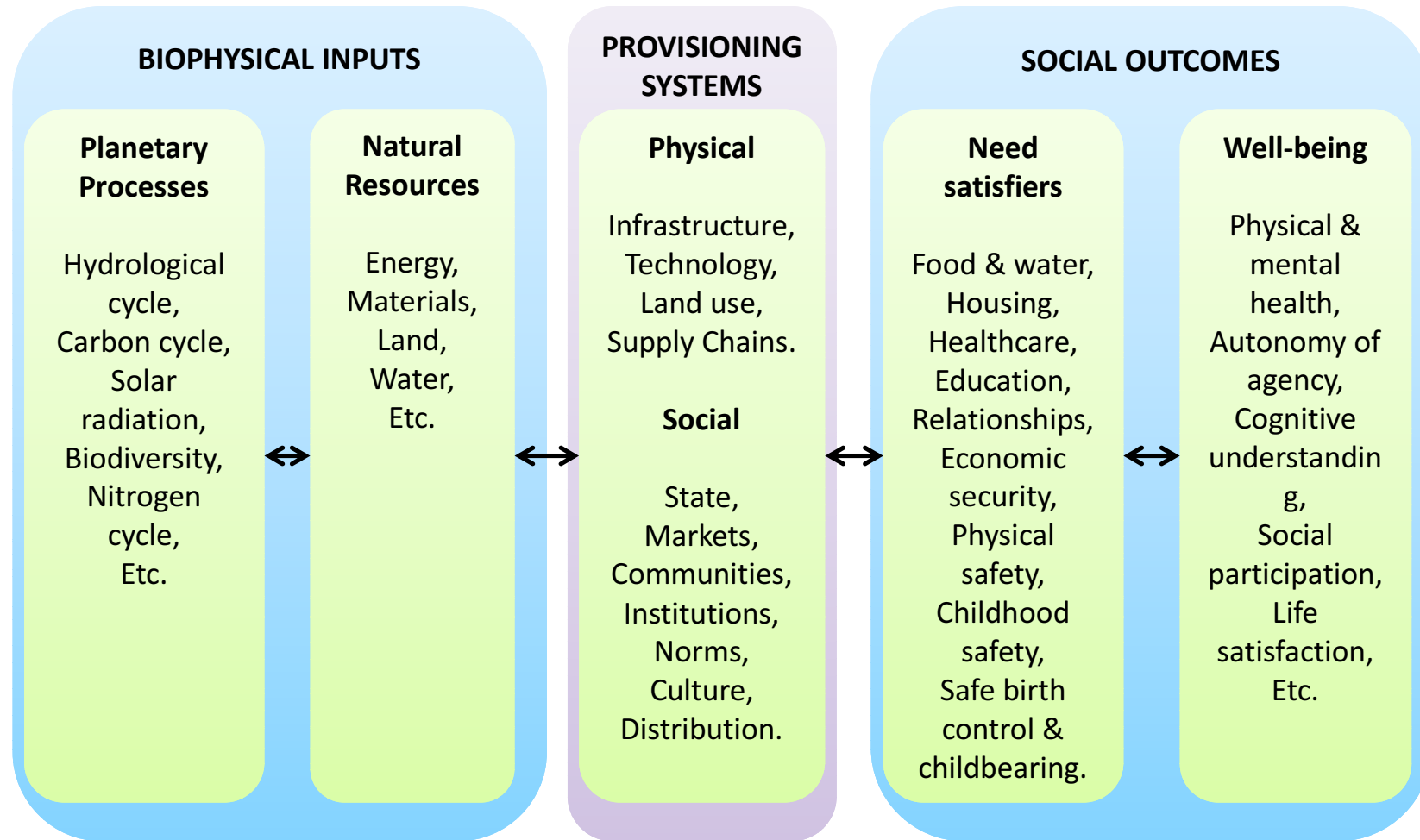
Postgrowth in Practice

- Planning processes for postgrowth in practice.
- Execution and public consultation for Post-Growth.
- Prototyping Post-Growth Deals.



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission

Our analytic framework for studying Living Well Within Limits



O'Neill, Fanning, Lamb & Steinberger 2018, Nature Sustainability

Socio-economic factors enabling well-being at lower energy use

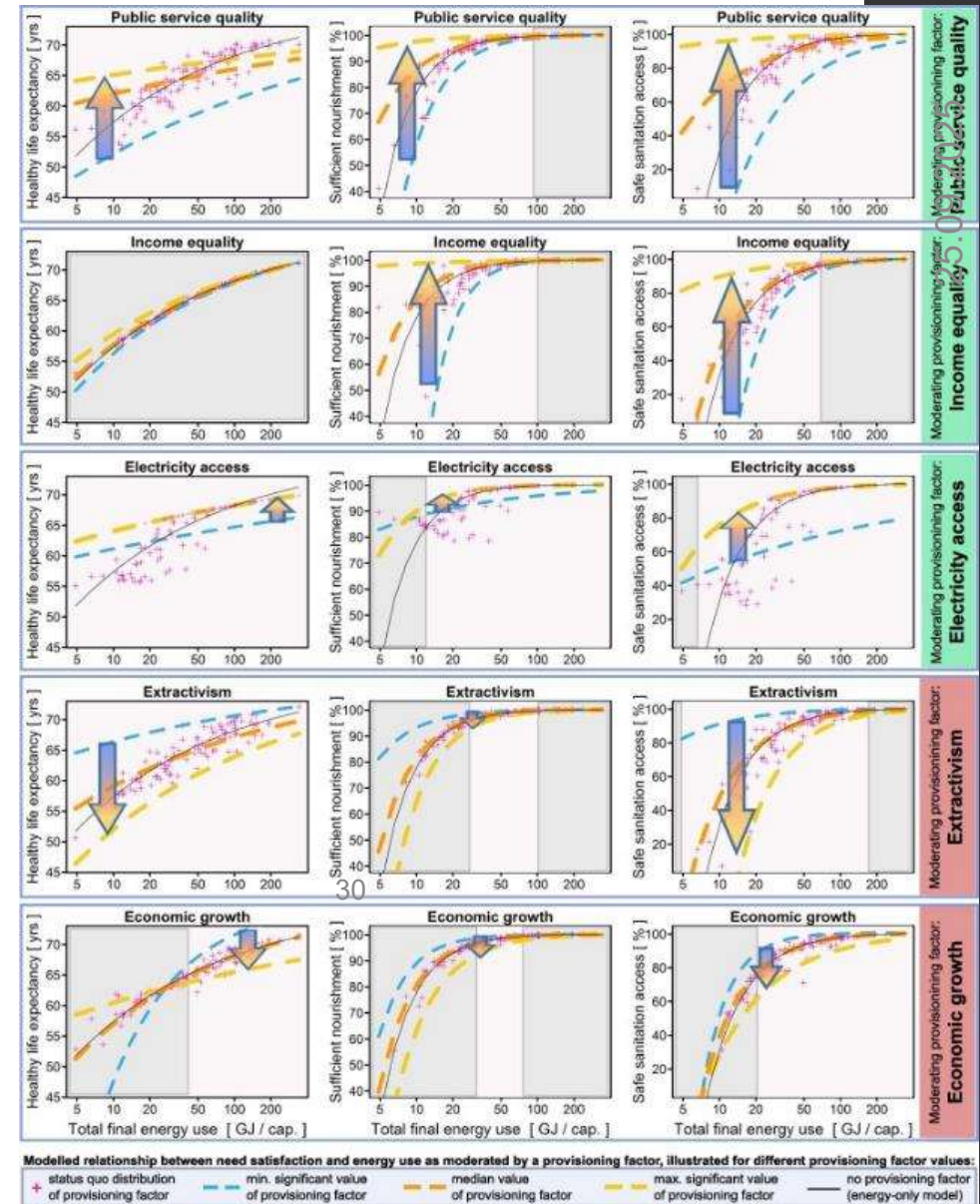
Positive factors

- Public services
- Income equality
- Democracy
- Electricity & sanitation access.

Negative factors:

- Extractivism
- Economic growth above a moderate income.

Vogel et al 2021



REAL: Some first thoughts on democratizing provisioning systems

SUSTAINABILITY: SCIENCE, PRACTICE AND POLICY
2024, VOL. 20, NO. 1, 2401186
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2024.2401186>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

Democratizing provisioning systems: a prerequisite for living well within limits

Julia Steinberger^a , Gauthier Guerin^b , Elena Hofferberth^a and Elke Pirgmaier^a

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ABSTRACT

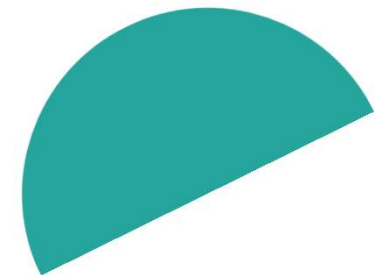
The core challenge of the 21st century, of achieving good living conditions for all, while bringing resource use and emissions down within planetary limits, is likely to be technically feasible. However, current political and economic trends perpetuate extractive practices and growth imperatives, where decisions that benefit vested interests at the expense of humanity and life on Earth are hidden behind capitalist market logics. To break this deadlock, we argue economic democratization is necessary, bringing crucial economic decision-making into the sphere of democratic deliberation. We review existing proposals and argue that economic democracy requires more fundamental rethinking of social, political, and economic relations. We then explore these in three thematic areas: the deepening of democracy, the importance of provisioning systems, and the provisioning logics within organizations. We conclude with a call to action for a revived coalition of environmental and social movements, focused on the crucial task of democratizing the economy through its provisioning systems and organizations.

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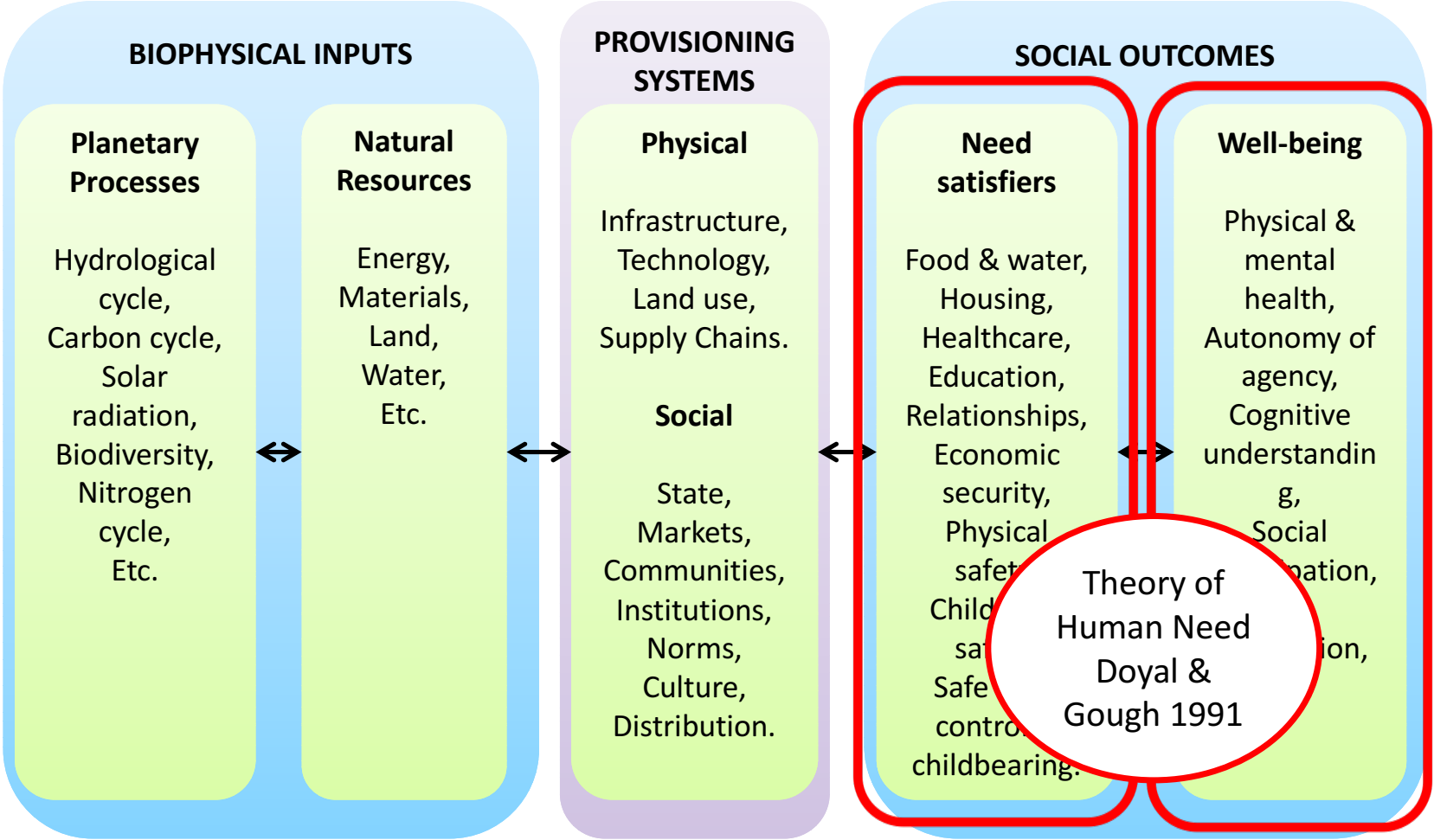
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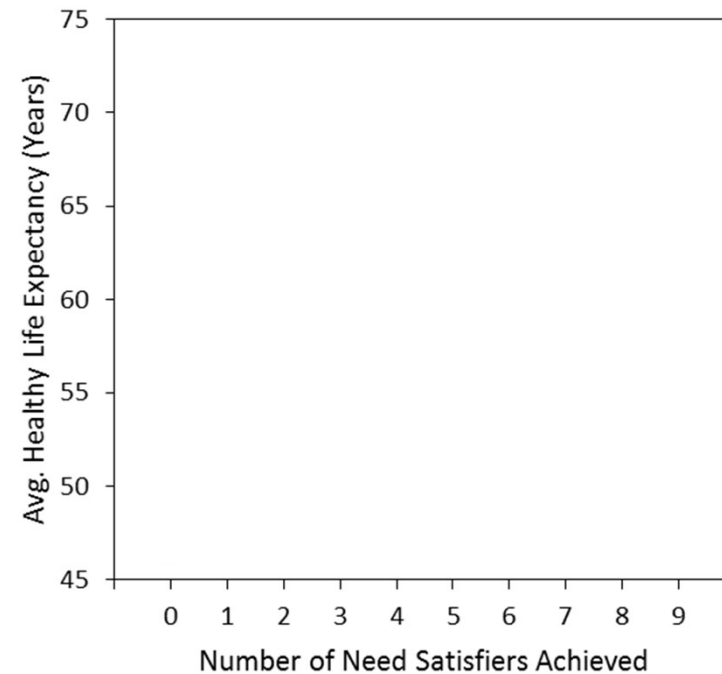
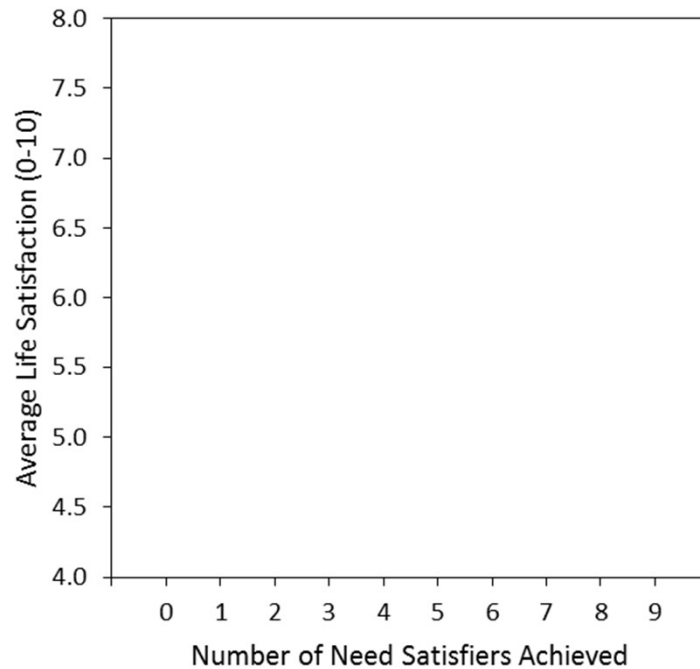
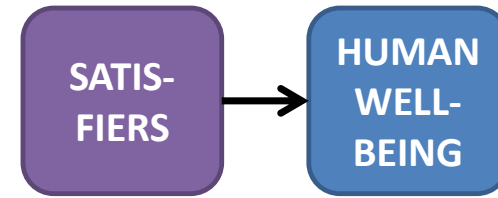
Can we test needs => well-being?

Living Well
Within
Limits [LiLi]

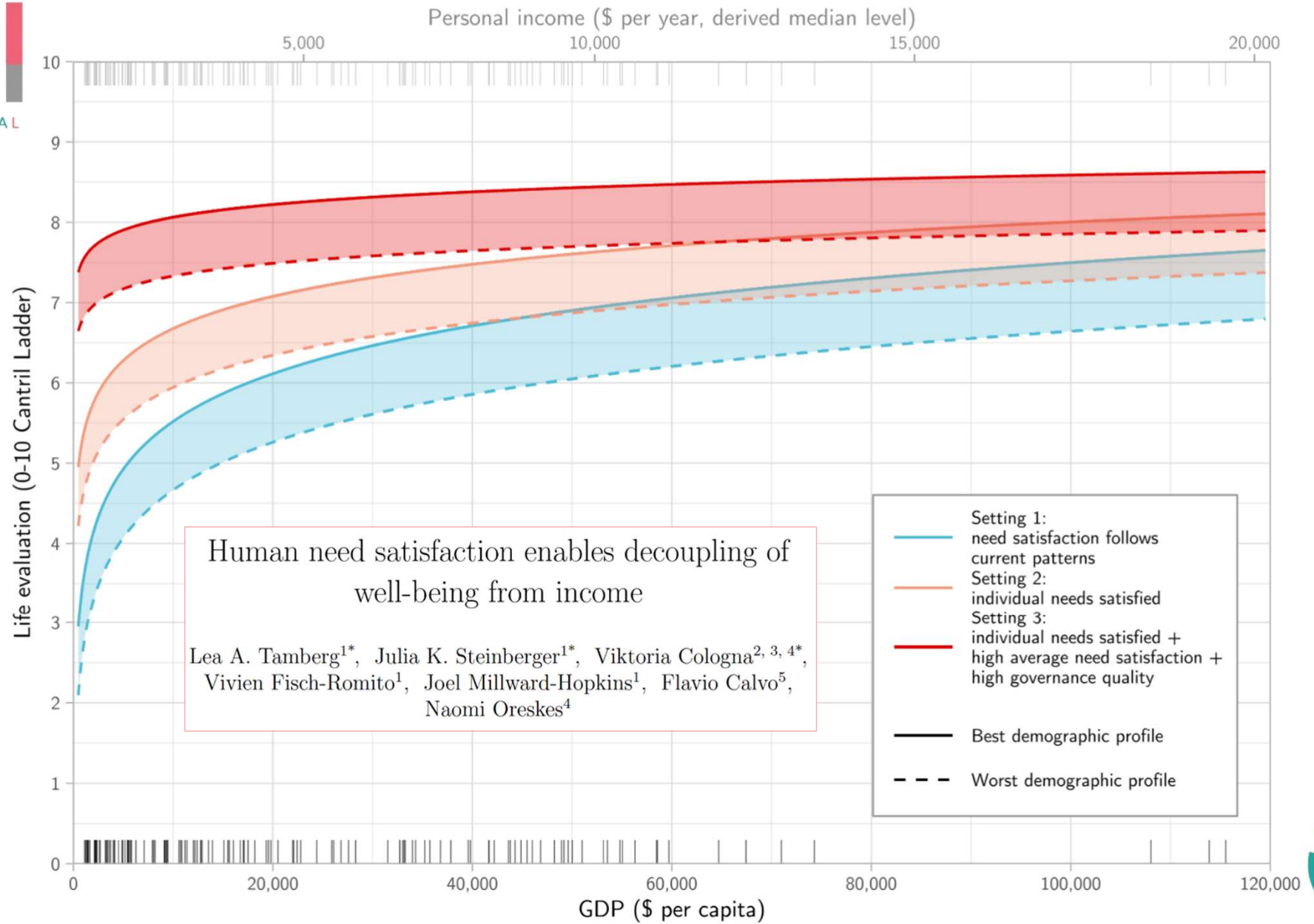


O'Neill, Fanning, Lamb & Steinberger 2018, Nature Sustainability

Empirical evidence that multidimensional need satisfaction is a pre-condition for well-being



O'Neill, Fanning, Lamb & Steinberger 2018, Nature Sustainability



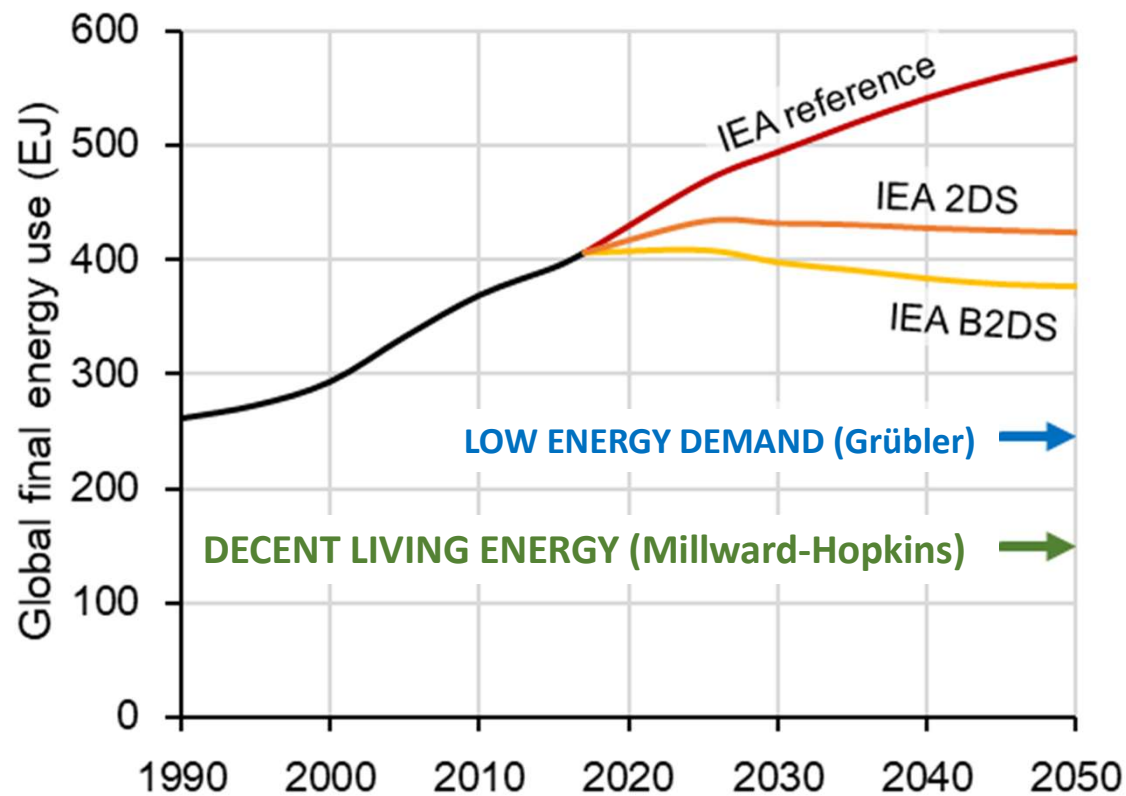


Modelling a low energy & high well-being future

Can we model a different future, based on sufficiency and existing technology?

- First effort based on the “Decent Living Energy” framework of Professor Narasimha Rao, Yale.
- Connects needs to sufficient levels of energy services.
- Global model takes into account technology improvements, equal distribution, results in lower demand levels.

Decent Living Energy (following Prof Narasimha Rao) for all possible in 2050 at 40% of current energy use, despite population growth.



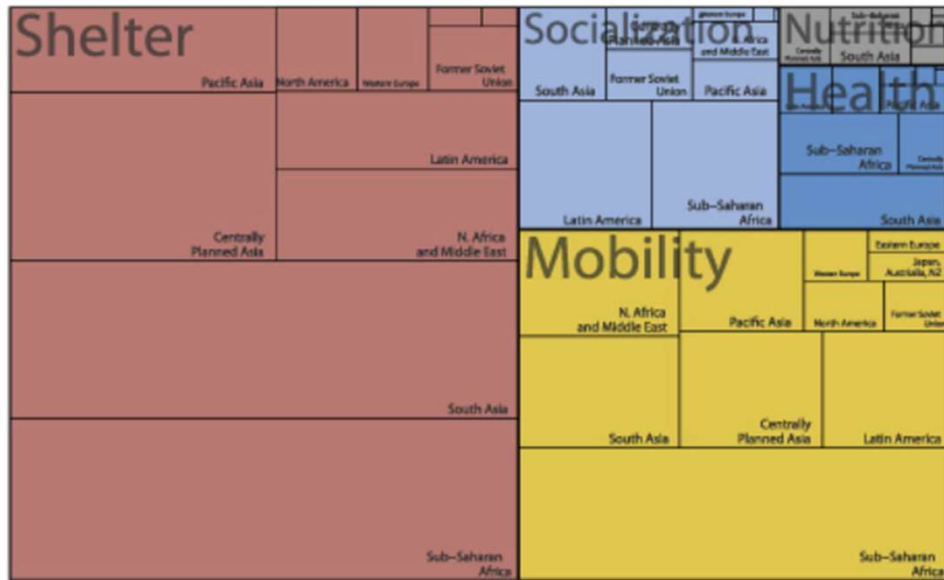
Based on efficient (but realisable) technologies, equitable shared infrastructures, need satisfaction depending on demography, climate, geography.

INVESTMENT AS CORE ISSUE

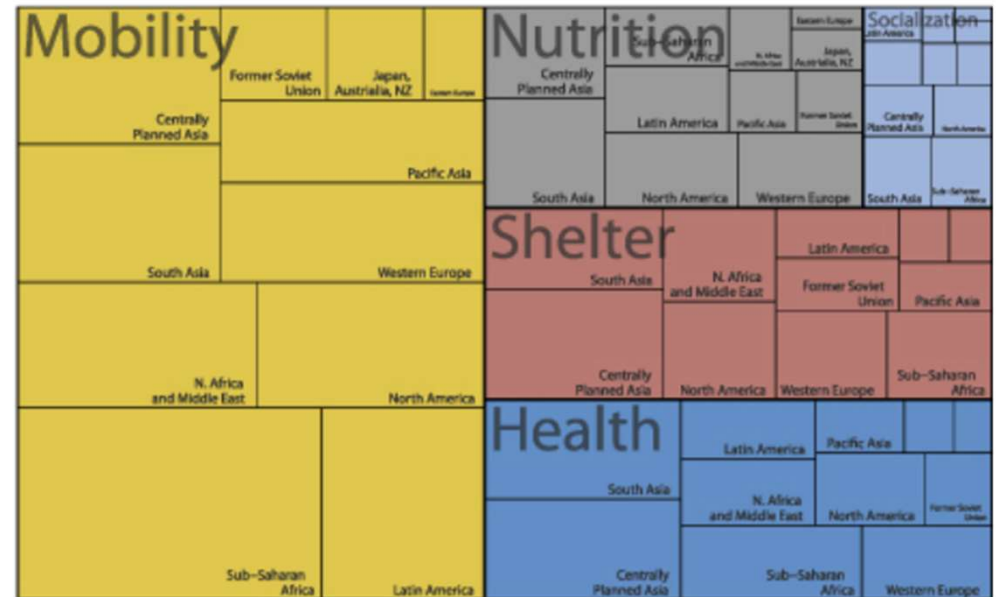
Global investment for DLE: 290 EJ

Annual energy use after investment: 156 EJ

A Cumulative need from 2015 until 2040 for constructing new infrastructure for Decent Living
 Sizes based on new construction energy per region for SSP2. Total cumulative: 290 EJ.



B Total yearly Decent Living Energy need
 Sizes based on operation and construction energy per region for SSP2. Total DLE in 2050: 156 EJ/yr.



Ongoing work streams in REAL

- **Labour:** footprinting, including care work
- **Modelling:** postgrowth climate mitigation scenarios
- **Policies:** delinking and ending unequal exchange between North and South
- **Politics:** understanding different schools of thought for political change, and their potential for postgrowth transformation.



Watch this space ...

A 'NEW ECONOMIES FOR ERADICATING POVERTY' INITIATIVE:

A ROADMAP FOR ERADICATING POVERTY BEYOND GROWTH

CONCEPT NOTE - MAY 2025



MANDATE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON
EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS



1

A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth

A joint contribution by the REAL project and friends

Editing and coordination: Suryadepto Nag¹ and Emilie Tricarico

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Policy Areas

- Policy Area 1: Access to social protection and services (P1)
- Policy Area 2: Labour policies and the care economy (P2)
- Policy Area 3: Economic systems transformation (P3)
- Policy Area 4: Climate, environment and resources (P4)
- Policy Area 5: Trade, finance, debt and global solidarity (P5)

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1

Development and Delinking policies for Low- and Middle-income countries

- 1.1 Employment guarantee
- 1.2 Universal care income
- 1.3 Universal basic services
- 1.4 Schooling incentives
- 1.5 Energy access policy
- 1.6 Internet access policy
- 1.7 Land ceiling and redistribution
- 1.8 General delinking policies
- 1.9 Intellectual property rights deregulation for pharmaceuticals
- 1.10 Withholding taxes and profit repatriation
- 1.11 Organized price control mechanisms
- 1.12 Debt cancellation
- 1.13 Trade protections
- 1.14 Reparations
- 1.15 How do these policies work together?



2

Post-growth policies for High-income countries

- 2.1 Job guarantee with working time reductions
- 2.2 Universal care income
- 2.3 Universal basic services
- 2.4 Wealth taxation
- 2.5 Luxury carbon tax
- 2.6 Rationing of luxury commodities
- 2.7 Policies for economic democracy
- 2.8 Democratic ecological post-growth planning
- 2.9 Repression of private for-profit finance
- 2.10 Monetary-fiscal co-ordination
- 2.11 Credit guidance
- 2.12 Post-growth foreign policy
- 2.13 Resource use reduction targets for the EU
- 2.14 How do these policies work together?

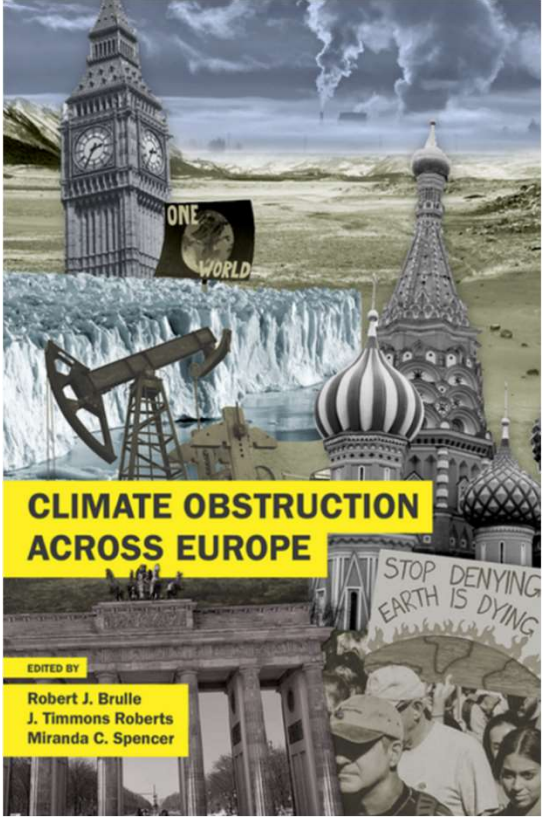
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CLIMATE OBSTRUCTION ACROSS EUROPE

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CLIMATE OBSTRUCTION
A GLOBAL ASSESSMENT

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Conclusion?

Together We Can Do It!



But it requires facing down quite a few dragons.

