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BECOMING A POST-GROWTH PLANNER

Inner obstacles to changing roles

Christian Lamker and Viola Schulze Dieckhoff

1. Introduction

Post-growth thinking is increasingly being taken up by planning researchers in Germany (Brokow-Loga and Eckardt, 2020), wider Europe (Barry, 2020; Ferreira and von Schönfeld, 2020), and beyond (Nelson and Schneider, 2019). Scholars urge that humanity must stay within planetary boundaries and that people must shed their obsession with unfettered economic growth, with its damaging social, cultural, and ecological impacts. Most scholars insist on the necessity of strong actions against climate change and environmental crises. Some scholars go beyond matters of planetary impact, pointing towards the use of land and scarce resources, as well as to housing and mobility as questions of justice. A discursive momentum is building for developing planning roles and practices that are not based on an institutionalised growth paradigm. It is becoming conceivable that planners will emerge for whom growth is neither a starting point nor a goal. However, post-growth practices remain niche. Planners' capacity for imagining growth-independent spatial development depends on overcoming obstacles in their own mindsets, values, and worldviews. Moreover, knowledge about the challenges that planners face once they get in touch with post-growth ideas is thus far limited to a few singular projects and short-lived experiments.

Surprisingly little is known about what characterises "the planner" as an individual agent within transformation processes (Willson, 2020). Studies have uncovered where planners work, how they act, how they are educated, and which tools and instruments they apply in their daily practice. Much work is done to develop new courses of action for planners and to provide new kinds of information and evidence to feed into planning processes. However, there is an understudied aspect that appears like a black box in planning literature: the inner self of a planner and how the personality of planners impacts their professional roles

and practices (Willson, 2020; Westin, 2014). This chapter, therefore, ponders two main questions. First, what hinders planners in imagining planning beyond growth? Second, what kinds of inner struggles do planners face when they imagine moving away from growth–dependent roles and practices?

The next section (section 2) explains the importance of understanding planners as individual beings with their own personal characteristics. The following methodological note (section 3) outlines transformative confrontations and actions with mostly German planning practitioners and planning researchers between 2017 and 2020. Section 4 shows nine reactions that surface amongst planners when they are confronted with post-growth ideas. Section 5 introduces four perspectives (desires, emotions, values, and sensemaking) that help to systematically understand the inner struggles and barriers that planners experience. These perspectives help to explain visible tensions in planning practice and theory, and with these, the potential for a transformation. Pinning post-growth planning discussions down to different types of reactions aims at enabling a shift away from the growth paradigm to rediscover the transformative potential of planning. Finally, section 6 concludes with potential avenues for overcoming these individual obstacles and enabling the emergence of post–growth planners in democratic societies.

2. Understanding planners to encourage post-growth planning

Planners generally, and those who work in public administrations in particular, collect and analyse information; develop and guide processes; use specific tools and instruments; and translate information into policies, strategies, and plans. Subsequent decisions, which are often both binding and publicly visible, are often taken without explicit reference to political agendas. However, although daily tasks can be routinised and left unquestioned, most are rarely neutral or objective. The assumption of political neutrality has already been challenged under the so-called communicative and argumentative turns. It is even more substantially challenged by recent turns to activism in planning research and practice (Mayer, 2020), as well as by an emerging focus on transformative actions and practices (Albrechts et al., 2020). It is now understood that the roles of planners have been constantly recreated and adapted, most notably with the shift to communicative planning ideals, strategic approaches, and governance processes (Healey, 2002, p. 1788; Othengrafen and Levin-Keitel, 2019, pp. 114 ff.). In line with this work, we recognise planning processes as political processes and planners as inevitably acting politically. We also recognise that the personal dimensions of every planner impact their professional actions (Willson, 2020, p. 46). To date, much research still circumvents questions about the nature of planners and the normative justifications for planning in a democratic society. This void obstructs productive engagement with detrimental structural forces, such as neoliberalism and economic growth.

Planning has been criticised for its inability to tackle either environmental problems like climate change and sustainability, or social problems like housing, mobility, and inequality. Clear long-term goals have been set but these often

conflict with other policy targets. The German government has stipulated that net use of new land for settlements and infrastructure should be cut by more than half to less than 30 hectares per day until 2030 and, in the long run, to zero. However, planners find themselves at the complex interface between politics, science, citizens, and the development and implementation of integrated plans. Since the 1980s, a weak engagement with underlying values has enabled a neo-liberal mentality to dominate planning (Barry, 2020, p. 123; Davoudi, 2016, pp. 617 f.). Some planners resolve this tension by engaging in politics alongside their professional work, whereas others leave planning to run for political office (Albrechts, 2020, pp. 6 f.). This schizophrenia between private and professional roles means underused creativity.

By pushing through this private/public divide, we aim to unlock planners' creative potential. Doubt remains about whether this is possible. Structural interpretations prevail, leaving a seemingly minor position for individual planners. This bias towards the economic system is often reproduced in post-growth debates (Barry, 2020). Davoudi (2016) resists this reductionist approach to planning, emphasising the importance of social and environmental values. It is important to recognise that each planner faces conscious or unconscious conflicts while engaging with basic dilemmas. As planning scholars, we need to understand the positions of planners before we can support them in transforming their roles. The challenge is to gain support for post-growth as a new normative direction without undermining professional positions, personal characteristics and values, and the democratic legitimacy of planning as such.

3. Methodological notes: towards transformative planning research

Ferreira and von Schönfeld (2020, p. 54) suggest that the economic growth narrative came to dominate public policy in general because, "it offered an ethically sound strategy to increase the wealth of all citizens without having to address the problem of inequality through redistributive policies (or a recurrence to exploitation)." Even thinking differently seems deeply challenging under such structural restraints, let alone acting differently. To begin with, conflicts and their productive potential need to be acknowledged and openly discussed. With this in mind, we engaged in what we call transformative confrontations. The starting point was a puzzle unfolding in a discussion amongst a group of about 15 young planners from academia and practice in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia in September 2016. We felt uncomfortable with unquestioned truths within planning. Unlike most research projects, we did not develop an action plan, gain funding, and write dissemination plans. No support was deemed available for such ideas at the time. However, the group members were engaged in practice, in research, and/or in research–practice exchange groups such as within the German Academy for Territorial Development (ARL). It started with three workshops with young professionals and academics in 2017 to clarify the scope

and questions of the new "post-growth planning", a term that we developed for these efforts in April 2017.

Our diverse engagements undertaken between 2017 and 2021 coalesced around the themes of confronting post-growth as an alternative future for planning and encouraging new, post-growth planners into being. The aim was twofold. First, to increase our own understanding of how post-growth and planning could be linked. We took confrontation as the first step towards transformation (Campbell, 2021, p. 6). Second, to trigger discussions around growth-independent planning roles and practices amongst planning theorists and practitioners. These developments would then enable the institutional embedding and capacity-building that are required for lasting transformative change (Wolfram, 2016, p. 126). Ultimately, the discursive confrontation with radical post-growth alternatives has the potential to become a "transformative confrontation" that also changes participants' ways of thinking. During events, we developed knowledge, reflected on routines, and experimented with thought alternatives, with the aim of triggering change and learning (see also Lamker and Schulze Dieckhoff, 2020).

The first three experimental workshops with young planners in 2017 were independently organised, with a small budget from the ARL for renting work-shop rooms. All following actions were connected to workgroups, conferences, workshops, and other already existing planning events. These confrontations targeted, with few exceptions, public administration planners, applied planning researchers, and planning students from German-speaking countries. Besides smaller workshops, major events included a fishbowl with approximately 90 participants at the Dortmund Conference in 2018, a World Café session with approximately 50 planning researchers and practitioners from the state of North-Rhine Westphalia in Münster in November 2018, presentations at the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) conference in Gothenburg in 2018 and Degrowth Vienna 2020, and the annual conference of the German Academy for Territorial Development (ARL) on post-growth and transformation in June 2019 with approximately 150 participants. We aimed to shift people's focus to planners and their potential to "experiment with and co-create the conditions for change that ultimately leads to a critical mass supporting post-growth" (Liegey and Nelson, 2020, pp. 93 f.).

4. Nine positions on post-growth in planning

Our experiences when confronting spatial planners with post-growth were mixed and partially unexpected. We observed a wide array of reactions from immediate opposition to full support. We identified nine positions that surfaced most clearly (see also Table 13.1). A dismissive "*We did that in the 1970s…!*" reaction (the out of fashion position) was common among planners close to retirement. Clearly, pre-vious debates on the limits to growth amidst the oil crisis in the 1970s, as well as the rise of sustainability in the 1980s and 1990s made some planners confident that the major work is already complete. Talking about post-growth sounds like a personal offence and a denial of previous achievements. To our surprise, a high-ranking

German planning researcher denied the relevance of discussing planetary boundaries, literally because, "*There is the Moon and Mars…!*" (the unnecessary position). Technological solutions, including the potential to mine for resources on other planets, will render boundaries insignificant.

Older planning researchers often suggested, "*That's for young people and/or young academics…!*" (the exclusivity position). Post-growth was reduced to a side-debate amongst a group of young people that will ultimately learn how the real world works and subsequently drop such unrealistic thoughts. Similar arguments were commonly present in German political debates around the growing global climate movement in 2018/19. We did not manage to officially invite established municipal planning professionals to the first three workshops, because, "*We only do growth…!*" (the inappropriate position). One invitation to participate as a speaker and discussant was withdrawn because the planning department head did not allow engagement with post-growth agendas. Others participated privately without acknowledging their professional roles. Post-growth entails radical positions that seem valuable, but which are too detached from the usual work of planners. Although agreement about finite resources and the negative impacts of growth-dependent financial markets on land use and spatial development surfaced, the potential solutions were uncertain. Furthermore, some added that, "*We follow political decisions and mandates…!*" (the responsibility position). They explained that they do not see options available and that they are delegated mandates by their local or regional politicians.

A more positive set of reactions was most visible amongst younger planners. Interest grew quickly. This was most visible in the shift from niche workshops to conferences held by established planning and research bodies. First reactions included open questions like, "*What can we do with that…?*" (the uncertainty position). Against a general acceptance of post-growth thoughts, middle-aged participants struggled to see a specific role for planners when planetary boundaries, resource flows, and diverse indicators beyond GDP enter the debate. The uncertainty seems to be even larger for planning researchers than for practitioners. Interestingly, planners who were not interested in post-growth at all in 2017 and 2018 became active in emerging debates later. In a similar vein, others conveyed puzzlement, asking, "*What is the role of planners in that…?*" (the speculative position). A more enthusiastic position was captured in the question, "*How can we be a part of that…?*" (the inspirational position). This position was especially popular amongst young researchers, students, and spatial entrepreneurs. The potential to connect post-growth with spatial planning attracted a significant group of new actors (such as civil society initiatives, cooperatives, but also researchers from various disciplines such as arts, sociology, or economics) to join established planning conferences such as the annual ARL conference in 2019.

The most radical stance was offered by a retired regional planner, who openly stated: "*We need to smash the planning system and rebuild it up from scratch…!*" (the revolutionary position). He was upset with the experienced limitations on doing good planning and the dominant forces that pressured him in just one direction: providing

TABLE 13.1 Nine positions adopted by planners on post-growth planning debates

Position	Typical reaction to post-growth ideas	Potential for change
Out of fashion	"We did that in the 1970s…!"	Low
Unnecessary	"There is the Moon and Mars…!"	Low
Exclusivity	"That's for young people and/or young academics…!"	Low
Inappropriate	"We only do growth…!"	Low to Medium
Responsibility	"We follow political decisions and mandates…!"	Low to Medium
Uncertainty	"What can we do with that…?"	Medium to High
Speculative	"What is the role of planners in that…?"	Medium to High
Inspirational	"How can we be a part of that…?"	High
Revolutionary	"We need to smash the planning system and rebuild it up from scratch…!"	High

Source: authors

land and growth. Some practitioners agreed, but there was also harsh opposition from planning researchers.

Each of the nine typical reactions has a different potential for integrating post-growth thinking into planning (see Table 13.1). The first three positions unveil the broadest opposition to post-growth and therefore offer a low potential for more immediate changes. Further positions could be open to change but mainly defer the debate away from planning (such as to societal debates, political decision-making, legislation, formal tasks, and delegated duties). Others show an immediate engagement with post-growth but uncertainty as to the implications for doing good and legitimate planning. The last four positions appear to have the largest potential for change. However, as all these reactions are visible in contemporary planning in Germany, a deeper understanding of how and why they arise is helpful.

5. Becoming a post-growth planner: internal barriers versus opportunities for transformation

This section conceptualises post-growth planners as potential agents of post-growth transformation. Aiming to understand the inner struggles that planners face when they imagine moving away from growth-dependent roles and practices, we went through notes, recordings, communications, and interviews. This section draws on psychoanalysis, psychology, and philosophy literature exploring how perceptions are constructed to understand the perceptual forces upholding a reliance on growth. We focus on four barriers: desires, emotions, values, and sensemaking. We will discuss these separately, critically exploring the extent to which there is room for manoeuvre for reinterpreting these barriers as opportunities to move towards post-growth planning.

5.1 Desires

Using insights from psychoanalytical theory, we define desires as (often unconscious) drivers that guide individuals' thoughts, choices, narratives, and actions (Westin, 2014, pp. 32, 177). Planning research informed by psychoanalytical theory suggests that considering planners' desires can be a very effective approach to understand their professional choices (e.g. Gunder, 2011; Gunder and Wang, 2020; Hillier and Gunder, 2003). However, desires are not necessarily rational and do not necessarily present themselves as easily changeable. On the contrary, desires can become dangerous forces that lead to rationally unwanted behaviours, and they are open to being unconsciously instrumentalised and abused (Gunder, 2011, p. 201). Furthermore, engaging planners in debates explicitly referring to their desires is not a simple or necessarily constructive task, as it can be easily understood as unprofessional, personally intrusive, and even offensive. For this reason, we did not explicitly mention the personal desires of planners during our events – even though the debates often naturally flowed towards the topic in a veiled and unintentional way. In sum, identifying and overcoming barriers to post-growth, rooted in desires, can be a substantial challenge. However, deeply transformative potential can emerge from aligning planners' desires with the post-growth logic, and vice versa.

The German planning system puts a strong emphasis on formal institutions and legal processes that are predominantly controlled and operationalised by planners. However, planners themselves expressed concerns about the fading importance and decreasing recognition of their work in politics and society, which brings with it a decline in the resources they need to accomplish their legal duties. Their dwindling reputation also challenges both their willingness and their ability to support those aspects of post-growth thinking that emphasise collective action, civil society initiatives, and urban commons. They do not wish to give over what little control they have left to citizens. Planners desire to be influential; guardians of the public interest; and, therefore, in control of developments. These desires might represent some of the strongest and most resilient barriers against the post-growth logic.

Planning practice often entails performing numerous technical, procedural, and administrative tasks, and maintaining minimally harmonious relations between planning departments, citizens, private powers, and elected politicians. Due to these surface issues, many of the concerns of practitioners and researchers alike circle around planning instruments, methods, legal prescriptions, and processes (in line with findings of Othengrafen and Levin-Keitel, 2019, p. 121). Nevertheless, it was clear from the way planners expressed themselves during the events that, below this sometimes rather technocratic surface, most of them maintain a strong desire to do "good" and to altruistically serve the public interest in ways that express their unique personalities, knowledge, and skills. The personal desire to be more than a bureaucrat fulfilling a legal duty, subject to fluctuating political whims, was obvious on multiple occasions. This urge is an opportunity for triggering transformation

towards post–growth planning. Indeed, if it became clear for planners that the post-growth logic is better aligned with the public interest than that of growth, the active endorsement of post–growth initiatives would be more likely. Planners adopting the revolutionary position might be particularly open to this, as might those holding the inappropriate and uncertainty positions. However, it is important to highlight the difficulty of identifying and defining the "public interest" (Gunder, 2016) and, consequently, the difficulty of anticipating the ways in which pursuing post-growth planning might either serve or harm it.

5.2 Emotions

Moving to psychology, we acknowledge rational thought and emotions are both dimensions of a person's logical thoughts (Fromm, 2010 [1968]). Consciously or unconsciously, emotions and emotional experiences guide actions. We contend, with Willson (2020, p. 28) and Baum (2015, p. 500), that incorporating emotional and personal dimensions is crucial to understanding why certain planning positions are favoured over others. Human decision making requires an emotional cap-acity (Tekeli, 2019, p. 233). Moreover, emotions are variations of desires (Thrift, 2004, p. 61) and understanding them supports sensitive, practical decision making. Although emotions can drive the radical changes post–growth agendas call for, they can also act as obstacles. Planners who position themselves against dom-inant economic (neoliberal) forces take responsibility but also a risk (Gunder and Hillier, 2007). Risk-averse emotions limit creativity and the potential to challenge and change the existing domain (Csikszentmihaly, 1996, p. 28; Kunzmann, 2004, p. 385). Anger, fear, and anxiety can further lead to paranoic characteristics that limit openness (Davy, 2019).

   The German planning system emphasises the design and conduct of participa-tory processes, often in the early stages of planning and beyond legal requirements. Emphasising these processes demonstrates a belief in the power of discourse and argumentation but sets aside a deeper engagement with emotions, neglecting how motivation and agency are developed (Bögel and Upham, 2018, p. 133). In some settings, creating arenas for debate can solve tensions (Balducci, 2011). In other cases, debates stir emotions. Particularly in a polarised political climate, debates allow the "angry citizen" to enter the stage (Davy, 2019, p. 291). Emotions were overtly visible in our confrontations. A group of planners holding the out of fashion and unnecessary positions were personally offended by post–growth views. For them, radical thoughts devalue their hard work. Planners often feel, and this may well be true, that their efforts have led to major changes. They feel disrespected by basic criticisms of underlying planning values and their own previous or current practices.

   On the one hand, these emotions seem to inhibit shifts towards post–growth planning. But on the other hand, they also show that planners want control and that they are not neutral towards normative directions. Planners taking the out of fashion position could be activated by acknowledging their achievements and

demonstratively building upon their previous work. Those holding the unnecessary position may agree with some of the long-term goals of post-growth planning, such as climate neutrality, and could be open to debating the potential speed and balance of technological innovation and social and environmental concerns. An openness to talking about emotions seems most important for the inappropriate and responsibility positions. Planners occupying these positions feel uneasy with their professional roles, but fear negative emotions from politics and society if they step forward and propose alternatives.

5.3 Values

Values are fundamental to planning. The very definition of problems is shaped by whatever norms and values dominate in the time and place in which planners find themselves. Engaging with how people value space is central to how it is used and organised. This remains the case even when values are perceived to be absent. Drawing on the work of Jürgen Habermas, Savini (2019, p. 72) argues that "that sphere of moral values, has been colonized by the individual pursuit of growth, which substitutes pre-capitalist moral principles with the new foundational (amoral) principle of accumulative and individual economic success." In this case, what counts as good planning is defined by the assumption that value accumulation, growth, innovation, and progress are necessary.

   The centrality of values may be hard to accept in Germany, and arguably also elsewhere, where planning is understood as a process of recognising and solving spatial problems (Diller and Oberding, 2017). For German authors in particular, planners are either the neutral moderators (in participatory processes aiming at consensus) or the objective technical-rational advisors of and within political processes. Values are underrepresented in favour of purportedly objective empirical methods and rational decision making. Talking about values is challenging and uncomfortable (Campbell, 2012, p. 392) and planners avoid discussing values openly (Xue, 2021, p. 14). In this context, integrating post-growth values in contexts where values of growth, consumerism, and capitalism are deeply rooted sounds impossible. If issues and roles of planning are going to change, finding and calibrating an ethical compass will be crucial (Hendler, 2002, p. 11). Nor are explicitly growth-oriented values the only blockage. Tensions also arise between post-growth values themselves, which may be at least preliminarily accepted by planners, and democratic legitimacy. In essence, public administration planners cannot be seen to present themselves as superior decision makers.

   Looking into our confrontations, many planners saw their major task as the (temporary) allocation of scarce spatial resources, especially land, in the right way and by using professional planning instruments. Planners are eager to make and implement legally binding plans that suit the demands and contexts at hand. Legitimacy is derived from planning law and procedures; public participation; or the political decisions of councils and parliaments. For those holding the inappropriate and responsibility positions, the scope for engagement with values is narrow.

On the other hand, most planners are socialised in university environments that put a strong emphasis on spatial challenges from housing provision and affordability, to inequalities, to sustainability, environmental issues, and climate change. A transformative potential may arise for planners holding the uncertainty and speculative positions. They share broad post-growth values but lack a closer connection to the professional roles and practices associated with post-growth. Providing safe discussion environments, such as the transformative confrontations we held, could already serve as initial triggers.

5.4 Sensemaking

Spatial planning and the role of planners are shaped by processes in which planners make sense of their environment and their given tasks. Sensemaking is thus part of both the everyday work of planning (Metzger and Hillier, 2015, pp. 12 ff.) and the periodic need to reinvent planning. Decades of theorising planning have opened a folding fan of how it is framed – with diverse roles for planners related to each theoretical strand (Lamker, 2016, pp. 102 ff.). From this perspective, sensemaking processes are varied. However, the economy itself remains unquestioned as "an ordered machine that governs our lives" (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013, p. 1).

The challenge to implementing post-growth approaches to sensemaking is twofold. First, planners themselves perceive their profession as rather complex. They are already engaged in constant processes of sensemaking, but primarily in relation to digital transformation, sustainability, and climate change. Sensemaking is thus diverted away from more radical approaches. Second, just as with values, the foundation of planning is not perceived as a relevant discussion within planning. The norm is to promote the value of planning as such without putting forward specific normative directions (ARL, 2017, p. 24). Today, German planning research itself is in a process of redefining its relationship with politics, the public, and planning practice. Such efforts are worthy in terms of ensuring democratic legitimacy, but they have limits if planners retreat from developing alternative ideas, such as those provided by post-growth.

With the exception of the revolutionary position, planners in our confrontations understand themselves as nested within existing institutions and public administrations. They thus defer processes of sensemaking to structural forces. Interestingly, a study for the government of North Rhine-Westphalia positioned the future role of public administration as a counterpart to economic growth as early as the 1970s (Wagener, 1971, p. 8). This shift in sensemaking has not happened to date, though the speculative and inspirational positions clearly show openness to this direction. Quite to the contrary, after German reunification, the planning debate shifted even more towards European and global competitiveness, metropolitan cores, and economic growth agendas. With the adoption of the New Leipzig Charter in 2021 for European urban development policy, unlimited economic growth has lost its predominant role and growth-dependent planning may have

sustained its first serious crack. This could enable planners holding the inappropriate and responsibility positions to rethink their roles and practices.

6. Conclusion

> The projection of alternative futures including serious roles for planners can exert its magic, can become performative, when others become persuaded and organize governance anew, allowing for a new planner to arise.
>
> *(van Assche et al., 2017, p. 225)*

Planning practice is already limited in its ability to find prompt spatial answers to accelerating crises. Spatial problems and their contexts are understood as complex, polarised, and ambiguous, with multiple overlapping uncertainties. However, a persistent desire to grow hinders the development of sustainable solutions to environmental and social crises. With an ambition to stay neutral, planners struggle to engage in value-laden, conflictual debates that touch upon basic understandings of their profession and themselves. They desire to be a meaningful profession, to deliver good results, and to communicate their profession's relevance well to politics and society. Planners' personal characteristics are pivotal to transformation but receive little attention in planning research. Changing in *any* normative direction from *within* planning, therefore, sounds unlikely and hard to achieve. The responsibility position is deeply anchored in the planner's self-understanding. Changing in a radically different, post-growth direction seems impossible at first sight. However, confrontations with post-growth show a large bandwidth of reactions that include support.

Becoming a "post-growth planner" and associated processes of making and taking new roles have become thinkable. On the ground, planners experience practical limitations in fulfilling growing demands for land, as well as seeing the impact of planning on the environment and our climate. As pleasing divergent demands gets harder, planners become more receptive to different approaches. Since 2018/19, leading planning networks and research institutions in Germany have put post-growth on their debate agendas. Policy documents and funding streams such as the New Leipzig Charter for urban development (finalised in 2020) have further shifted focus beyond GDP. Likewise, other disciplines such as health have begun to name and challenge "society's normal obsessions – efficiency, consumption, and growth" (*The Lancet*, 2020, p. 143). A discourse on values can be taken as a starting point for a paradigm shift and a reframing of responsibility in and of planning. Doing planning creatively sometimes means being "an urban or regional guerrilla", undermining "established bureaucratic and political agendas" (Kunzmann, 2004, p. 385). However, such an emphasis on individual planners does not detract from democratic legitimacy. It should not be misunderstood as instrumentalising planners for a post-growth agenda. Our aim is to show the enabling and transformative direction of post-growth ideas, which can help to revalorise core planning aims that have been lost to the focus on economic growth such as public interest and well-being.

To continue, we need to deepen our understanding of planners as human actors with personal characteristics and inner struggles. Planners can gain strong supportive agency and leadership in a post-growth transformation if we engage with desires, emotions, values, and perceptions.

Planners in public administration are and remain central actors in spatial development in both German and European contexts. However, the dependence on growth has a best-before date which is fast approaching. Open debate about appropriateness and responsibility remains crucial to reducing the uncertainty about what post-growth planning could mean and to using its transformative potential. To foster this debate, we summarised future directions for spatial planning in "six propositions of post-growth planning" (Lamker and Schulze Dieckhoff, 2019). The transformation of planning becomes conceivable if compassionate planners can act in the public interest, independently of dominant economic paradigms. Doing this will require courage, engagement, and reflection on personal values.

A critical debate on planning values can help planners to focus on doing good beyond growth. Future research should be open to the various ways planners react to post-growth, their different entry points and emotional states. Such conversations could be the start of a new planning system, based on compassion for the world with its social, cultural, and planetary boundaries.

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