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# Structured Diversity: A Practice Theory Approach to Post-Growth Organisations

## Abstract

Innovative forms of organising are a crucial pillar of post-growth transitions. Situated within a growth-based institutional context, actually existing forms of post-growth organising are ambiguous. Divisions across legal structure, market participation and sectoral focus do not suffice to single out post-growth organisations. Instead, this paper develops a more fluid notion which is based on the "thick description" of organisations. Conceptually, the paper borrows from diverse economies and practice theory literatures, allied in their appreciation of performativity. The latter in particular illustrates transition's irreducibility to structural or individual agency and lends itself to a notion of post-growth politics: *the practice of changing the rules of practice to support parallel and mutually enforcing processes of cultural and institutional change within the diverse meanings of post-growth.* Studies of diverse economies remind us that market practices are only the tip of the (economic) iceberg. In conjunction with qualitative empirical data from a study of alternative economies in Stuttgart, Germany, a framework is developed to structure organisations' diverse forms of relatedness to larger contexts. Identifying, besides economies, also communality, narratives, experience, governance and ecology as central *patterns in the relatedness of practices* (*logics*), this paper proposes a structured notion of diversity to discuss the ambiguities, contradictions and compromises of actually existing post-growth organisations.

Keywords: post-growth, practice, diverse economy, organisation, politics
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## Introduction

Post-growth, or degrowth, refers to a heterogeneous theoretical and practical project centred around challenging the hegemony of the growth paradigm (Demaria, Schneider, Sekulova, & Martinez-Alier, 2013; Kallis, Kerschner, & Martinez-Alier, 2012; Latouche, 2009). Rather than simply opposing economic growth, it can be seen as a quest for new "imagination[s], propositions, and principles guiding the economy" (Martínez-Alier, Pascual, Vivien, & Zaccai, 2010). Originally, the terms go back to the French *décroissance*, which accompanied an intellectual debate in the 1970s (Latouche, 2010). Especially in the aftermath of the 2007/8 economic crises,

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a variety of approaches challenging economic growth emerged, ranging from conservative critiques to radical-ecological approaches (Holzinger, 2016, Weiss & Cattaneo 2017). In this context, various academic literatures as well as activist movements draw on *décroissance* and its various translations, not all of which retain the radical nature of the primary debate (Hieronimus, 2016). Degrowth became established after the first international conference of the same name in Paris in 2008. In his reflection on the 2016 Degrowth Conference, Ashford distinguishes between three non-exhaustive meanings, prominently drawing on degrowth as signifier: a proxy for sustainable consumption and production, as sufficiency, and as a radical challenge to capitalist economies (Ashford, 2016). An additional strand of the theoretical debate can be seen in degrowth as a reaction to shrinking growth rates (Malmaeus & Alfredsson, 2017), although it might be argued that framing degrowth as a response to an (undesired) stagnation of growth goes against the grain of *décroissance*'s radical critique of the growth fetish.

In line with the more radical stand of the debate, this paper questions modernist logics of acceleration, with its escalatory tendencies (Rosa, 2013), which materialises in a pervasive neoliberalism (Zanoni, Contu, Healy, & Mir, 2017). To foreground that degrowth transcends economic growth, and does not only call for its decline, the paper adopts the term "post-growth" which is often used synonymously. Post-growth, in this vein, converges with a post-capitalist critique. It challenges capital's encroachment across social institutions and attempts to move beyond the current mode of dynamic stabilisation (Rosa et. al. 2017). Although the relation between post-growth and post-capitalist debates is multifaceted, "the end of growth challenges us to imagine what life after capitalism might look like; for an economic system in which capital no longer accumulates is no longer capitalism, whatever one might want to call it." (Skidelsky & Skidelsky 2012, cited in D'Alisa et. al. 2015, p. 11).

Whereas advocates of post-growth work towards a "profound cultural transformation, and the overcoming of capitalist ways of production with their imperatives of competition, growth and profit" (Burkhart, Eversberg, Schmelzer, & Treu, 2016, p. 1), large parts of mainstream economics and politics resist possibly paradigm-shifting outlooks (Latouche, 2010; Martínez-Alier et al., 2010). Adherence to economic growth dominates official economic and political discourses and practices (Bina, 2013; Seidl & Zahrnt, 2010), despite mounting evidence that economic growth cannot be reconciled with social and environmental justice (Georgescu-Roegen, 1977; Latouche, 2009; Jackson 2017). Following green economy, smart growth or qualitative growth ideologies, resource efficiency and low-carbon futures are regularly discussed with reference to growth stimulation and profits, essentially turning social and environmental justice on its head (Böhm, Misoczky, & Moog, 2012; Kenis & Lievens 2015; Krueger, Schulz, & Gibbs, 2017; Schulz & Bailey, 2014). Post-growth, in contrast, engages in a radical critique of the green economy and subjects economic practice to a more thoroughgoing examination.

Lacking a broader engagement of policy with radical change, some have taken it on themselves to move towards *different* economies (Baier et. al. 2016; Roelvink, St. Martin, & Gibson-Graham, 2015). Through this, post-growth overlaps and connects with a range of concepts that rethink economic being-in-common, such as sufficiency (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014), time wealth (Schor 2010), conviviality (Illich, 1973), commons (Bollier, 2016; Bollier & Helfrich, 2012), solidarity (Miller, 2010), justice (Lehtinen, 2009; Peet & Watts, 1996), and democracy (Hahnel & Wright 2016; Johanisova & Wolf, 2012; Rancière, 1998). Related organisations have become interesting to ecological economics researchers who envision alternative forms of organising as central for sustainable economies (Hinton & Maclurcan, 2017; Johanisova & Fraňková, 2017; Parker et. al. 2014; Stoborod & Swann 2014). In particular, the role of organisations in a transformation towards post-growth economies is a promising avenue for further research (Johanisova et. al. 2013). By developing a notion of post-growth organisations in respect of their relations with broader alignments of social practice, this paper aims to link more closely the discussions around post-growth organisation and post-growth transformation.

Post-growth organisations (PGOs) are taken to be organisational associations that (1) address social and environmental concerns and (2) simultaneously engage in post-growth politics – the initiation and support of parallel and mutually enforcing processes of cultural and institutional change within the diverse meanings of post-growth (Adler, 2017, p. 27). In other words, post-growth organisations go beyond the implementation of more sustainable modes of production and consumption insofar as they challenge economic discourses and practices more broadly. Here, PGOs set themselves apart from sustainable development, ecological modernisation, and more recently green economy (Kenis & Lievens, 2015) approaches that generally lack a "deeper critical approach to the mainstream economic ontology" (Johanisova & Fraňková, 2017, p. 509). These approaches provide the frame in which social enterprises (Arthur, Keenoy, Scott Cato, & Smith, 2016; Defourny & Nyssens, 2012), social entrepreneurship (Nicholls, 2008) and green entrepreneurship (O'Neill & Gibbs, 2016) are generally discussed, from which PGOs are to be distinguished. Note however that in particular the term *social enterprise* is highly contested (Searing, 2017; Vickers & Lyon, 2014) and more critical definitions are advanced (Johanisova et al., 2013). The concept of PGOs has important parallels to that of eco-social enterprises (Johanisova et al., 2013; Johanisova & Fraňková, 2017). Yet it shifts the emphasis to the political dimension of organisations. While appreciating the focus on direct social and environmental impact (1), the proposed concept of PGOs broadens the perspective to explicate the organisations' interaction with socio-economic conditionalities themselves (2).

Post-growth alternatives cannot be grasped as a simple opposition to (capitalist) growth economies (Krueger et. al. 2017). Gibson-Graham trenchantly assert that a "capitalocentric discourse condenses economic difference, fusing the variety of non-capitalist economic activities into a unity in which meaning is anchored to capitalist

identity" (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 56). Imagining economic alternatives solely in relation to a "presumptively dominant capitalism" (Healy, 2009, p. 338) reproduces the (capitalist) economy as a self-evident totality (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Or as Latour puts it: "totalization participates, in devious ways, in what it claims to abolish" (Latour, 1993). Reducing post-growth to a degrowth of GDP would mean walking straight into the trap of capitalocentrism, narrowing economic practice to activities on a capitalist market. Instead, post-growth rejects GDP as a meaningful measure altogether (Hayden & Wilson, 2017; van den Bergh, 2011). Its project is more profound: "decolonizing minds from economism" (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010). What for post-growth scholars means emancipation from economic universalism is, for diverse economies scholars, engaging in an ontological politics of reimagining the economy (Roelvink et. al., 2015). Both are concerned with re-politicising and democratising economies (Demaria et al., 2013; Roelvink et al., 2015).

However, such a "discourse of economic difference" (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 615) should not be divorced from its materialities (Lee, 2016; Roelvink et al., 2015). Culture and materiality cannot be separated in a meaningful way, since every culture has to materialise to be effectual, while materiality can only be understood socially (Hillebrandt, 2016; Gherardi 2017). In the vein of such a poststructuralist materialism, practice theory approaches are aware of the contingency and historicity of bodies and artefacts, as well as the materiality of systems of meaning.

This paper develops a practice theory informed, diverse economies perspective on post-growth organisations. To do so, it draws on an empirical study of alternative economies in the city of Stuttgart (Germany). By developing and applying a framework to analyse PGOs in their diversity, the paper aims to contribute conceptually as well as empirically to an emergent academic engagement with questions of "organising for the post-growth economy" (Johnsen, Nelund, Olaison, & Meier Sørensen, 2017). Part I discusses the relation between organisations and growth. Subsequently, by linking poststructural openings of economic difference with the more materialist ontology of practice theory, the relatedness between organisations' diverse economic practices and broader nexuses of practice is explored and operationalised in part II. Part III outlines methodological considerations, followed by a presentation of empirical findings and the exploration of three organisations in greater depth in part IV. Part V returns to the conceptual discussion and applies the concept of *diverse logics* to trace practices' relatedness across broader webs of practice. The paper closes with a recourse to the notion of post-growth organisations and their role within imaginaries of transformation.

## Organisations and Growth

Economic, political and cultural institutions are aligned towards *GDP growth*. Without growth, they become destabilised (Binswanger, 2009; Rosa et al., 2017).

Path dependencies are seen in, amongst other things, the interest-based debt money system, industrial specialisation, the dependence of the state budget on fiscal revenue, and cultural-ideological norms (Kallis et al. 2018; Paech, 2012, 2016; van Griethuysen, 2010). At the level of organisations, this translates, for instance, into interest on borrowed capital, inter-organisational competition, growth-based legal frameworks, stakeholders' profit expectations and cultural expectations of cheap products and rapid product changes (Gebauer, Lange, & Posse, 2017). From a structuralist point of view, it is via the institutionalisation of growth-based forms of production, consumption, exchange, governance and finance that self-financing organisations are coerced into following the logic of capital (Harvey, 2011). A practice theory approach does not deny the influence of these institutional arrangements, but instead of falling for structural determinism, it looks at its constitutive practices and thereby decentres agency (see part II). Traditional enterprises express their growth orientation through practices such as sourcing of low-priced materials, efficiency-centred management, driving down wages, externalisation of costs, creation of needs, contrived durability, prevention of repairs and functional, psychological or other forms of obsolescence (Illich, 1973; Latouche, 2009; Packard, 2011; Paech, 2012), paralleled by a general compliance with growth-oriented institutions and discourses. Growth-based economies are reproduced through the recurrent collective enactment of corresponding practices, in turn coercing individuals and organisations to participate accordingly.

Some organisations remove themselves from these patterns and practise economies differently (Baier et al., 2016; Bollier & Helfrich, 2012; Fuller, Jonas, & Lee, 2016; Laloux, 2014). Many of the practices to which this translates are not visible, or only partly visible, from capitalocentric perspectives. Economic organisations are dominantly perceived as monofunctional, with money as the prime medium of communication (Roth, 2015). In opposition to monistic representations reducing the economy to "formal market transactions, wage labour and capitalist enterprise" (Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2009, p. 329), a post-growth perspective goes hand in hand with different economic and organisational imaginaries (Kallis, 2017; Reichel, 2017; Roth, 2015). In lieu of maximum return on investment, socio-environmental concerns are foregrounded, accompanied by alternative-capitalist or non-capitalist forms of production, consumption, exchange, surplus allocation, finance, ownership and governance (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008; Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2013; Lee, 2006, 2013).

Yet the production of goods and services by capitalist firms sold on a free market in order to make profit has become a largely unchallenged representation of the economy (White & Williams, 2016). Prominently, the TINA – *there is no alternative* – discourse naturalises the capitalist mode of economic organising, removing it from political contestation (Swyngedouw, 2015). By contrast, assuming economies to be inherently diverse allows for a dis-identification with capitalism as the natural form of economic organisation (Byrne & Healy, 2006). Taking into account "different

kinds of transaction and ways of negotiating commensurability, different types of labour and ways of compensating for it [as well as] different forms of enterprise and ways of producing, appropriating, and distributing surplus" (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 60) is an important step in re-politicising economic "being-in-common" (Nancy, 1991, p. 27). A diverse economies perspective exposes the reductionism of narrowing economic practice down to for-profit enterprises (Peck, 2013; Polanyi, 1957). Simultaneously, it reveals that the private sector is also not entirely governed by rational profit maximisation and growth (North, 2016). Analysing PGOs along profit/non-profit divisions would oversimplify the matter. Instead, a diverse economies perspective opens up towards the diverse practices of (post-growth) organisations. The next section explores practice theory as a conceptual foundation and fuses both approaches into a *diverse logics perspective* that enables a critical investigation of PGOs and their being situated within larger nexuses of practice.

## Towards a Diverse Logics Perspective

Practice theory rejects individualist and structuralist accounts of the social. Instead of structural properties and individual intentions, the researcher turns to the enactment of sociality through a nexus of socialised bodies, material arrangements and systems of meaning (Hillebrandt, 2016; Reckwitz, 2002; Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012). In line with Latour, the social is not seen as "a special domain, a specific realm, or a particular sort of thing, but […] a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling" (Latour, 2005, p. 7). For practice theory, the constant movement and (re)association of body-minds, meanings and things materialises as social practice (Nicolini, 2013). Having said that, a distinction between practice and practices is called for. The former remains indeterminate, whereas the latter individuates specific types of activity (Hirschauer, 2016). Practices are neither self-contained nor ontologically separate units, but an observer's perspective, most often described using everyday (nominalised) verb forms (ibid.). Repairing, producing, sharing become the analytical lens through which the researcher looks.

Practice theory is not a unified theory but refers to diverse approaches that exhibit a family resemblance (Hillebrandt, 2014; Nicolini, 2013). Rather than subscribing to a particular strand of practice theory, this paper emphasises the possibilities opened up by focusing on social practices as a central theoretical category, in transcending a number of entrenched dichotomies (Nicolini, 2013). First, conceptualising practices as individuated segments of the plenum is premised on their radical ontological sameness. *Micro* and *macro* do not constitute different planes of reality, but are relational categories to describe small(er) and large(r) "slices" of practice and hence proceed from a "flat ontology" (DeLanda, 2006; Marston, Jones, & Woodward, 2005; Schatzki, 2016b). Second, the mind and the subject, privileged in much of Western thought, are reconciled with their materialities. Rehabilitating objects and most importantly the body, practice theory materialises culture (Reckwitz,

2016), moving beyond structure-culture divides. Third, and closely connected, rather than being separate realms of the social, "doings and sayings" (Schatzki, 2008) are conceptualised as different levels of explication (Hirschauer, 2016) – with discursive practices as practices of representation (Reckwitz, 2016). Fourth, the aforementioned materialisation of culture prepares the ground for an integrated understanding of stability and change. Anchored in artefacts and (socialised) body-minds, while simultaneously being constitutive of them, the repetition of practice implies both sameness and otherness (Schäfer, 2016). Thus, potentials of stability and change are both grounded in the recurrent enactment of practice. And fifth, research itself becomes visible as practice, necessitating reflection on its processes and inevitable contextuality. Universal claims are problematised by taking account of the concrete spatio-temporalities in which research practices are situated and to which they pertain.

A practice theory approach to organisations, then, does not begin with predetermined organisational entities but with the iterative movement between constitutive practices and their conditioning. As practice-formations, organisations move from being to *becoming*. Hillebrandt aptly posits that "practice-formations have to be materially produced time and again through 'eventful' practices. Practice-formations, consequently, can only be understood as materialisations of practices *in actu*, and are *per definitionem* events" (Hillebrandt, 2016, p. 72; author's translation).

Practices and their enactment, in turn, are conditioned by other practices and their broader alignments within the "gigantic maze" (Schatzki, 2016a) of practices of which they are part. The assumption of a non-layered reality reconceptualises scalar differences as "thinner or thicker, more compact or spread out, continuing and fleeting, and patterned or scattered" practices that constitute the social (Schatzki, 2016a, p. 6). Schatzki speaks of "large social phenomena" to refer to extensive alignments of practices. Without resorting to conceptions of ontologically different levels, governments, corporations, economic systems, and others are conceived as far-flung nexuses of practices (ibid.). From the perspective of a flat ontology, however, *large* can only be a relational notion. Note also that the term *phenomenon* is problematic, suggesting a bounded empirical appearance rather than an observer's perspective[1]. With this caveat in mind, the paper draws on the notion of *large social phenomena* to describe extensive alignments of practices that are commonly associated with institutions or structures. A further, more critical development of the term follows below.

Post-growth organisations were defined as *organisational associations that address social and environmental concerns and simultaneously engage in post-growth politics*. Conceptualizing the social world as "gigantic maze" of practices, practice theory

1 I thank the members of the DFG network on practice theories for inspiring discussions on the notion of large-scale phenomena, in particular Simon Runkel, Klaus Geiselhart and Susann Schäfer.

suggests approaching post-growth politics through practices' relatedness. Dünckmann and Fladvad (2016) describe politics as "the practice of changing the rules of practice". Politics transpires through practices that "explicitly or implicitly attend to, question, or put to the test […] the plenum of practices itself or slices and aspects thereof" (p. 29). Practices are political when they reflectively relate back to the plenum of practices – (1) *reflexivity* – and, however minutely, direct the plenum of practices or slices thereof – (2) *relationality*[2]. Post-growth politics, then, is the *practice of changing the rules of practice to support parallel and mutually enforcing processes of cultural and institutional change within the diverse meanings of post-growth.*

Reflexivity (1), as it is used here, is located primarily at the level of conscious thought and language. Within the usual constraints, researchers might get access to practitioners' reflexivity through interviews and related methods. Practices' relatedness (2) proves much more difficult to examine empirically. It is very challenging to trace the relatedness of practices beyond a specific context (for a discussion see Everts 2016). In this vein, the remainder of this section prepares an approach to link PGOs' constituent practices with their wider nexuses. It proposes a conceptual framework that facilitates the empirical tracing of practices across scale to grasp post-growth politics and thus post-growth organisations from a practice theory perspective.

As a first step, I will reflect on the typologising of practices in more detail.

> Practices […] can be identified when action is considered a cultural technique. Only an observer can typologise practices into individual forms. Practices are (like complex actions or discourses) an observer's scheme, namely one identifying formal patterns, which means ways of doing. For a start, observers draw on a rudimentary individuation through everyday verb forms (running, counting…). (Hirschauer, 2016, p. 60; author's translation).

Everyday verb forms alone, however, tend to override practices' diversity. For instance, repairing – a practice that is frequently discussed with reference to postcapitalist economies (Baier et al. 2016) – can be a source of revenue, contribute to material sustenance, challenge the politics of short product cycles, engender exclusive communities, and/or reduce resource consumption. Repair simultaneously intersects differently with various social phenomena. Sweepingly attributing (post-growth) potentials to repair would be misleading, since its various manifestations relate fundamentally differently to larger nexuses of practice (Schmid, forthcoming). Hence, a perspective on practices' transformative geographies has to take into account the various formations practices are simultanously part of. The next step, therefore, is to systematise diversity by refining the notion of *large social phenomena*.

Social theorists have structured society into "systems" (Luhmann, 1998, 2015), "institutional orders" (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012), and "worlds" (Boltans-

2 My use of the terms *reflexivity* and *relationality* differs from Dünckmann and Fladvad's use. I thank Florian Dünckmann for pointing this out. To avoid conflation, the paper speaks of relatedness in further conceptualizing post-growth politics.

ki & Thévenot, 2006). Without being able to discuss the extensive conceptual arguments behind the respective theories, I use them as inspiration to systematise diversity. Roth and Schütz identify ten function systems of society: the political system, economy, science, art, religion, the legal system, sport, the health system, education and mass media (Roth & Schütz 2015). Thornton et. al. conceptualise the inter-institutional system made up of the institutional orders of family, community, religion, state, market, profession and corporation. Boltanski & Thévenot's society is constituted through six different worlds of common use: the inspired world, the domestic world, the world of fame, the civic world, the market world, and the industrial world. Each of these approaches opens avenues to "organisational polyphony", accounting for the multifunctionality of organisations (Roth, 2014, 2016). For instance, Luhmann's systems theory has been used to sharpen the perspective on organisations' non-economic dimensions (Roth, 2016, 2017). Post-growth perspectives then emerge from the (re)situating of (economic) organisations within "a constellation of in total 10 function systems" (Roth, 2015, p. 119). Yet the language of "systems" (and likewise "institutional orders" and "worlds") cannot be integrated smoothly with practice theories' ontological assumptions (see above). More tentatively, this paper sees large social phenomena as an observer's perspective identifying dense and highly complex arrays of social practices as relatively coherent and stable formations. In the vein of a flat ontology, large social phenomena are *not above* practices but a different perspective *on* practices.

Therefore, third, practice theories' flat ontology is integrated with a structured notion of diversity as inspired by perspectives on systems, institutional orders and worlds. Nicolini proposes the metaphor of *zooming* to capture the analytical movement across non-hierarchical scale (Nicolini, 2013). Iterative zooming in and out enables a focus on practices' relatedness without recourse to a layered reality. Zooming in on the practices constituting post-growth organisations exhibits the components, interrelations but also differences and tensions within and across practices in specific times and places. Zooming out, on the other hand, enables the researcher to expand the scope, tracking broader connections and interactions with practices across time and space. Identified patterns in practices' relatedness, thereby, provide guidance in this process. Or, in other words, a *structured notion of diversity* helps the researcher to listen to PGOs' polyphony (Hazen, 1993).

Step three connects both strands discussed above. A structured notion of diversity provides a guiding frame to trace practices' relatedness beyond their immediate context, while zooming enables us to refrain from layered conceptions of scale and operationalize a practice theory ontology. Combining both perspectives facilitates an empirical study of post-growth organisations by linking PGOs' practices with broader alignments – enabling a look at their politics.

*Patterns in the relatedness of practices* that are identified by means of such a structured notion of diversity are henceforth referred to as *logics*. Yet, in order to identify

patterns, or *logics,* we need to turn to empirical observations first. This paper follows an abductive approach that links the development of its conceptual approach to empirical data. Through the "continuous interplay between theory and empirical observation" (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 559), the paper evolves an approach that might be called *diverse logics perspective*. After presenting the study's methodology and findings, I will return to the conceptual discussion in section 5, bringing together conceptual deliberations and empirical data.

## Methods

The context of this study is the city of Stuttgart (Germany). Potential PGOs were sought through snowball sampling (Morgan, 2008) and initial contacts to organisations were established through a local activist group. In addition, interviews and desktop research deepened the insight into the organisational landscape and allowed the identification of further organisations of interest. The selection of organisations was informed by a notion of PGOs as addressing social and environmental concerns while explicitly or implicitly challenging growth-based economies and politics (see above). Legal form and other objective criteria proved inadequate to inform the selection and – taking a diverse economies perspective – a separation between market and non-market was deliberately avoided. Rather, the study drew on more subjective parameters such as references to post-growth-related topics, organisations' area of focus, protagonists' discursive and practical nonconformity with growth based institutions, and others to identify potential PGOs.

In using snowball sampling to recruit organisations, inevitably already established connections emerge. While the bias for a particular subset to emerge is undesirable in some cases (Morgan, 2008), it was useful in the present study. Over and above standalone organisations, it was also possible to observe their embeddedness in networks and interactions of a "local coalition". Organisations with visible ties to the emergent network(s) were selected with preference. Yet, the connections were not limited to the local context but stretched far beyond the city of Stuttgart. In terms of its scope, however, this study focuses on local interaction. Interactions across longer distances remain a potential focus for further research. Lastly, organisations with a strong material focus were preferred over those with a cultural focus. While discourses and practices of alternative economies are not viewed as separate (see above), the study is particularly interested in more-than-discursive practices.

Semi-structured exploratory interviews were conducted with founders or local representatives of 14 organisations (see table 1), and are between 30 and 120 minutes in length. They were recorded, transcribed with F5, and coded in MAXQDA. Initial coding schemes were informed by a preliminary typology that emerged from a rough conflation of the macro-perspectives presented above, and were refined through successive rounds of coding. Data gathering and data analysis overlapped with one another chronologically, and in the vein of an abductive approach, they

mutually informed one another. On that basis, some organisations were followed up with in-depth interviews and/or participant observation.

**Table 1: List of organisations studied**

| Organisation | Description |
|---|---|
| **Hobbyhimmel (Verein zur Verbreitung Offener Werkstätten e.V.)** | Open workshop, providing low-threshold access to high-tech and low-tech tools and machinery |
| **Slowtec GmbH** | Engineering office developing sustainability-related technologies |
| **em-faktor - Die Social Profit Agentur GmbH** | Agency offering fundraising, CSR, campaigning and branding services to social profit enterprises |
| **Lastenrad Stuttgart e.V.** | Project promoting car-free urban mobility; provision of a free cargo bike lending system |
| **Foodsharing e.V. (local group)** | Association organising against food waste |
| **Smark GbR** | Fully automated sale of regional and organic food |
| **Geco Gardens GbR** | Development, construction and sale of vertical garden systems |
| **Repaircafé (collaborative project)** | Project organising free exchange of repair services and skills on a regular basis |
| **Relumity - Technologie Transfer Initiative GmbH** | Development, production and sale of sustainable and reparable LED lights |
| **ownworld GbR** | Development of self-sufficient, off-the-grid housing (ownhome) |
| **Grünfisch e.V.** | Development and construction of aquaponics |
| **Werkstadt Stuttgart e.V.** | Association organising free exchange of repair services and skills on a regular basis |
| **Cradle to Cradle e.V. (local group)** | Association promoting a circular economy |
| **Open Source Ecology Germany e.V. (local group)** | Association promoting open source hardware and software |

In-depth interviews provide detailed information about organisations and participants. This is particularly important when only few other sources are available (della Porta, 2014). In rendering stories, descriptions and intentions visible, they capture foremost that part of social phenomena with a high "level of explicitness" (Hirschauer, 2016), privileging narratives and knowledges over bodies and objects. Interviews are useful for practice theory approaches, but are supplemented by ethnographic participant observation that is, in a way, the "natural" method for practice analysis (Reckwitz 2016). Participant observation captures the "silent" (part of) practices – for example the supposedly irrelevant, the taken-for-granted, the clandestine, the ineffable, the routinised or the unconscious. This does not come

without its challenges. First, participant observation still does not allow direct access to objects, bodies and meanings, but is mediated by an observer. The researcher needs to be aware of her/his own subjectivity and critically reflect (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Second, whereas the data collection for interviews follows a fairly straightforward procedure, there are some inherent challenges of participant observation with respect to systematic data handling (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013).

## Findings

Social and/or environmental concerns are key in the motivation and operation of all the organisations that are the subject of this research. While their objectives overlap substantially – not least due to the selection process (see methods) – the organisations show a broad spread with respect to legal form, financing and spheres of activity. Notably, legal form, financing and market-orientation do not align neatly, and non-commodified forms of production, transaction, governance and ownership are present throughout (legally speaking) for-profit and non-profit organisations. Inadequacy of legal form is an issue for a number of organisations, in particular for those that engage in market-oriented practices in order to be financially self-sufficient while focusing on non-monetary objectives. Divergences between organisations' legal structures and their actual practices are the norm rather than an exception, rendering for-profit and non-profit distinctions problematic. In this respect, the search for PGOs cannot be limited to either associations (German legal form: e.V.) and projects (without legal structure) or companies (German legal form: GmbH, GbR) but has to transcend the for-profit/non-profit dichotomy.

Financing varies significantly, and is based on donations, public funding, sale of goods and services or a combination thereof. Again, the relation between legal form and mode of financing is not straightforward. While some companies are involved with, and financially dependent on, publicly funded projects, particular associations and projects have been found to be financially independent through selective participation in markets. The inclusion of (volunteer) work adds further complexity to the picture of how legal, financial and also ethical moments (e.g. gender) interact. Labour costs are a major expense factor and the majority of organisations are either based on volunteer work or use it to supplement paid labour. At the same time, volunteer work and other forms of non-commodified exchange allow organisations to limit their participation in market practices and partially replace less desirable finance strategies.

Most protagonists problematise a growth-based capitalist economy, some firmly emphasising the urgency of establishing economic arrangements that renounce a focus on growth. A smaller proportion discusses social and environmental sustainability without reference to economic (de)/(a-)growth, and only few interviewees propose a sustainability transition through green or smart growth. Coupled with the width and depth of critique are varying imaginaries of social transformation that inform

the organisations' practices. While all organisations are heterogeneous formations, different strategies and tendencies are visible. Some protagonists are sceptical of the capability of institutionalised politics to induce post-growth transitions, and point out the need to expand spaces of non-capitalist economies. This is reflected in the co-occurrence of commodified and non-commodified practices, mentioned above. Moving between non-profit objectives and market orientation, many experience contradictions and a need for compromise. Contradictions emerge particularly between reach and scope on the one hand and the intended social or environmental impact on the other. Most organisations' participation in market practices can best be described as pragmatic, balancing financial needs with ethical and political objectives. In the remainder of this paper, I will focus on three organisations – *Hobbyhimmel*, *Slowtec* and *em-faktor* – in more detail (table 2). All three are independent of public funding or donations in their financing, but differ with respect to their relationships with larger nexuses of practice. Part V then returns to the conceptual discussion left off in part II and elaborates the notion of PGOs on the basis of these differences.

**Table 2: Organisations presented in more detail**

| Organisation | Description |
|---|---|
| **em-faktor - Die Social Profit Agentur GmbH** | Agency offering fundraising, CSR, campaigning and branding services to social profit enterprises |
| **Hobbyhimmel (Verein zur Verbreitung Offener Werkstätten e.V.)** | Open workshop, providing low-threshold access to high-tech and low-tech tools and machinery |
| **Slowtec GmbH** | Engineering office developing sustainability-related technologies |

*em-faktor - Die Social Profit Agentur GmbH* is a communication agency offering campaigning, fundraising, CSR (corporate social responsibility) and branding services. Customers and partners are primarily organisations with a social or environmental purpose. *em-faktor* communicates clear social and environmental values, selecting its clientele accordingly.

> We work for social profit enterprises. For us, it does not matter whether they are [legally] non-profit or not, as long as they follow a social purpose. In that sense, we even work for banks – such as the Munich Sparda Bank or the GLS Bank – that are traditional enterprises. But they follow a different purpose. For them, profit is not the goal of the enterprise, but other concerns are. (em-faktor)[3]

The organisation explicitly identifies as a "social profit" agency, rejecting the dichotomy of non-profit and for-profit and thereby the norm of monetary gain for economic organisations on the one hand and the (financial) dependence of non-

3 All interviews were conducted in German. Relevant passages were translated by the author for the purposes of this paper.

profits on the other hand. Rather, common good is seen as profit, or better, as a desirable outcome of economic practices. For the organisation, a focus on social rather than monetary profit does not necessarily exclude monetary surplus and stable finances. In other words, while financial self-sufficiency is important, *em-faktor*'s main purpose is seen in the (positive) social impact it creates. Legally, *em-faktor* is registered as a limited company (GmbH). The organisation is audited by the *Economy for the Common Good*[4] (ECG) and shows a close association, in terms of content as well as personnel, with the local ECG group. Of the three organisations explored in more depth, *em-faktor* shows the strongest integration in formal markets. As practice-formation, *em-faktor* largely engages in commodified practices and its services are tailored to a market economy: marketing, branding, fundraising. Yet beyond market orientation, the organisation annually offers an equivalent of 6000€ worth of labour for a charitable cause, providing 7 days of consultation and design work for a particular organisation or project. This concentration of charity work helps *em-faktor* to separate commercial and non-commercial activities.

*Hobbyhimmel* (translating to 'hobby heaven') is an open workshop (Bürkner & Lange, 2016; Hansing, 2016). Its objective is to provide low-threshold access for people to engage in artisanal practices with a particular focus on do-it-yourself, do-it-together, recycling, upcycling and repair practices. The facilities provide high-tech and low-tech equipment, from fab lab (fabrication laboratories) to woodworking, metalworking, electronics and textiles. After a lengthy process of finding a suitable legal structure, a supporting association was founded from within the workshop's community. Costs for using the workspaces are not market-driven but deliberately kept low. Commercial users have to pay higher rates than private users. In addition, economically disadvantaged persons as well as financially weak initiatives that fit the workshop's visions of sustainability get additional support and might use the workshop free of charge, respectively on a donation basis. There are no formal guidelines, making this procedure case-specific.

> We support others that say 'we do not accept the status quo'. They are people from all kinds of different projects. All say that there is something wrong. And they all do something within their area of focus, an action or a business or whatever. And we can support them in doing that so they can establish themselves. (Hobbyhimmel)

The workshop's income from non-commercial users (including subscribers) does not cover its monthly expenses. Nevertheless, finances are stable and independent of public funding. Besides the aforementioned higher rates for commercial use, the workshop generates income by hosting team-building and training events for solvent enterprises. Furthermore, a range of different courses are offered by self-employed individuals who pay a share to the workshop for using the facilities. *Hobbyhimmel* does not have any paid employees and is based on volunteer work. More than 30 volunteers are organised non-hierarchically in self-governing teams, in-

4 www.em-faktor.de/themen-und-werte/unsere-gemeinwohlbilanz

spired by Laloux' *Reinventing Organizations* (Laloux, 2014). An association, thereby, represents the workshop in formal terms, for instance through bookkeeping and tending to legal issues.

Most notably, the material space of the workshop is an important infrastructure for a broad community revolving around sustainability-related issues. Most of the organisations that are presented in table 1 have links to the workshop. For instance, *Foodsharing* provides free food to visitors to the workshop that would otherwise have been thrown away. In turn, shelving and a refrigerator are provided which function as a distribution point for food sharers ("*Fairteiler*"). *Repair Café* hosts regular meetings, bringing together people with repair skills and knowledge and those who need assistance and tools. *Hobbyhimmel* provides tools and working space free of charge, in turn reaching more people with the idea of the *open workshop*. A similar symbiosis can be observed in *Hobbyhimmel*'s function as a lending point for *Lastenrad Stuttgart*. In more market-oriented terms, socio-ecological start-ups such as *Relumity* and *Smark* – developing long-lasting and reparable LED lights and automated sale of local organic food respectively – find low-threshold access to facilities for prototyping and small-scale production. Links also exist with *Grünfisch e.V.* and *Slowtec,* the latter of which I will turn to next.

*Slowtec* develops sustainability-related technical solutions in both hardware and software sectors. Its main projects revolve around subsistence, autonomous living, and decentralised technologies, for instance as a contractor for *ownworld GbR*. *ownworld*'s main project is the development of an off-the-grid house called *ownhome*. Commission work, however, is not restricted to these areas and includes more software-focused work such as software development for an initiative supporting energy transitions (www.energie-im-zak.de) or an interactive map connecting sustainability-related actors and initiatives (www.kartevonmorgen.org). Besides commissioned work, *Slowtec* develops its own projects that come from within the core team or its wider community. Examples are an automated indoor growing room (www.krautomat.bio) and software tailored to the needs of non-hierarchical organisations. Like *Hobbyhimmel* and *em-faktor*, *Slowtec*'s market orientation is driven by two key motivations: to be financially stable and independent and to disseminate (more) sustainable practices.

> I need something that works, that can finance itself. But this doesn't mean it has to be a maximisation of profits, rather a maximisation of meaning. (Slowtec)

> I know about them [the negative effects of my practices] and deliberately make a compromise. If I were to follow my idealism 100% then I may have my idealism but no team and no enterprise, and consequently no effect. (Slowtec)

*Slowtec* is partly embedded in the same network as *Hobbyhimmel* and has ties to various organisations that were researched, such as *Relumity GmbH, Geco-Gardens*, *ownworld GbR and Grünfisch e.V.*

## Diverse Logics of Post-Growth Politics

Post-growth organisations are practice formations that (1) address social and environmental concerns and (2) simultaneously engage in post-growth politics**.** *Hobbyhimmel*, *Slowtec* and *em-faktor* clearly deviate from the goal of profit maximisation. Market orientation is primarily motivated by financial stability and independence, in order to further social and environmental objectives. Commissions and (formal) inter-organisational cooperation are selected according to sustainability-related principles, but are frequently at odds with socio-ecological values, requiring trade-offs between desired impacts and financial aspects. All three organisations are in local ownership and allow for democratic processes of decisionmaking. *Slowtec* and *Hobbyhimmel* in particular use non-hierarchical forms of organising and are closely connected to a wider community. With that said, *em-faktor*, *Hobbyhimmel* and *Slowtec* might be described as eco-social enterprises (Johanisova & Fraňková, 2017).

The second part of the definition – post-growth politics as the *practice of changing the rules of practice to support parallel and mutually enforcing processes of cultural and institutional change within the diverse meanings of post-growth* – requires us to return to the conceptual discussion discontinued in part II. In an attempt to structure diversity, the notion of logics was introduced as *identified patterns in the relatedness of practices.* Part II then left off with a reference to methodological and empirical discussions.

Structuring the diverse practices that continuously (re)constitute (post-growth) organisations and therefore simultanously the conditionalities for (post-growth) practice sheds light on the enactment of post-growth politics. By linking empirical findings to the preliminary typologies of systems, institutional logics and worlds, a framework for structuring diversity emerges. The process itself is difficult to track and involves intuition on the part of the researcher. In the vein of the aforementioned abductive approach, some categories could be merged (e.g. legal system, state, civic), some were left off (e.g. sports, health), others were added (e.g. ecology). The remainder of this discussion is structured along six logics that became consolidated across different rounds of analysis: economies, communality, narratives, experience, governance, and ecologies. The typology is one of many options for structuring diversity and does not claim superiority over other approaches. Discussions of alternative typologies are explicitly invited. An overview provides an initial orientation. It should be noted, however, that the logics are not reducible to these rather short descriptions.

**Table 3: Diverse Logics**

| Logic | Description |
|---|---|
| **economies** | Practices' relatedness through moments of creation, appropriation, reciprocity, comparison and material provisioning |
| **communality** | Practices' relatedness through moments of togetherness, solidarity, conviviality, non-violent and non-hierarchical negotiation, disagreement and belonging |
| **experience** | Practices' relatedness through affects, experiencing, capacities, habits, and aesthetics. |
| **narratives** | Practices' relatedness through stories, imaginaries, meanings, knowledges, theories and concepts. |
| **governance** | Practices' relatedness through moments of rule, domination, power and norms. |
| **ecology** | Practices' relatedness through moments of interrelatedness, interdependence, balance, metabolism, conativity, and symbiosis |

The logic of ***economies*** captures practices' relatedness through moments of creation, appropriation, reciprocity, comparison and material provisioning. It is particularly visible in practices of production, consumption, exchange, and distribution.

*em-faktor*'s practices of production – marketing, campaigning, fundraising, branding for social profit enterprises – can be said to shift the "making" (Ouma, 2013, p. 205) of (capitalist) markets. By subordinating monetary profits expressly to socio-environmental impacts, *em-faktor* does not reproduce ruthless competition. Furthermore, em-faktor's practices partly disrupt price mechanisms by not going for the financially most expedient offer, instead taking the clientele's social and ecological impact into account. Yet, while social and ecological problems are addressed and (partly) solved, the mode of operation is largely compatible with growth-based institutional arrangements. Marketing, campaigning, fundraising, branding do not challenge the overall alignment of market practices. For instance, the commodity form, ownership structures and general inter-organisational competition – variously identified as drivers of growth (including Harvey, 2010; Meretz, 2015) – remain largely untouched. CSR and branding practices can distract from more radical changes, and largely concur with green economy and green growth ideologies. By and large, *em-faktor* works towards a "symbiotic transformation" (Wright, 2010).

*Hobbyhimmel* and *Slowtec*, too, decentre price mechanisms and competition by considering social and environmental concerns. In addition, some of their practices can be seen to challenge current practice alignments more deeply. Open source, the revival of repair and DIY counteract growth-driving practices such as planned obsolescence (Bertling & Leggewie, 2016) and privatization of knowledge. Low-threshold access partly replaces the need for individual ownership and allows for more resource-efficient collective use. Sharing, repairing, DIY in combination with reduction, reuse, recycling, upcycling, modular construction and availability of spare

parts are important components of more self-sufficient lifestyles and regionalised economies (Latouche, 2009; Paech, 2016). Besides reducing material flows, the relocalisation of production generates greater local autonomy and less capital-intensive supply structures. In this vein, a shift towards regional and local markets and subsistence alleviates pressures of growth (Paech, 2016). Practices of commoning and open source, such as de-commodified access to food, mobility, tools, information, materials, and collective ownership of the workshop, withdraw spaces from capitalist valorisation (Mason, 2016; Meretz, 2015). These practices can be described with Wright's notions of interstitial and ruptural transformation. The following quote shows how this is reflected:

> To be able to operate within this system, I have to have an outer shell that simply appears to be normal. That is why we have the limited company outwardly as a capitalist shell. But I can determine what it looks like inside. This is where it gets interesting. When I say that I have developed a core and now *Hobbyhimmel* does the same and *Grünfisch e.V.* and others, then there are some enterprises that change within. And when they connect, they can practise a different kind of economy within capitalism that does not need to be capitalist. (Slowtec)

While a range of post-growth-oriented practices can be observed, caution needs to be exercised not to over-interpret these findings. From a post-growth perspective, open-sourcing, decentralisation, subsistence, commoning, non-hierarchical and collective decisionmaking and other practices stand out as desirable. Yet, for everyday operations, their relevance is often limited. All three organisations are embedded in growth-based institutions and enduring effort is needed to meet financial and legal requirements. Therefore, the organisations often prioritise formally commodified practices to ensure their material survival. Moments of challenging and reproducing dominant economic practice formations are closely interwoven.

***Communality*** describes practices' relatedness through moments of togetherness, solidarity, conviviality, non-violent and non-hierarchical negotiation, disagreement and belonging (Nancy, 1991; Illich 1973; Rancière 2004). It is particularly visible in practices of participation, cooperation, and politics.

Organisations can provide spaces of encounter to (re)solidarise and (re)politicise collectives, while they can equally foreclose these spaces (Taylor Aiken, 2017). Furthermore, (new) forms of organising can enable individuals to collectively "turn […] the world to their purposes" (M. Parker, 2011, p. 37). In particular, *Hobbyhimmel* and *Slowtec* can be seen as institutionalised pillars within (a) broader community/-ies. They are embedded in and simultaneously form a web of non-commodified relations that are superimposed on market-oriented practices. Whilst this has ambiguous effects in terms of employment conditions – some work 70+ hours a week or juggle voluntary engagement and a full-time job – a community of like-minded practitioners with the potential to address and mitigate socioeconomic injustices more radically has emerged. Analogously to North's observations on environmentally and socially-minded business actors, local politicians and activists "creat[ing] a climate change 'regime' driving change through from below at the city level"

(North, 2016, p. 450), a local coalition around post-growth economies arises. In this way, *Hobbyhimmel* in particular is an important place in which materials, meanings, knowledges and socialised bodies come together to generate more sustainable practices. The workshop constitutes a *site* (Everts, 2016) for the materialisation of a broader community around technical solutions, resource efficiency, autonomous living, gardening and other sustainability-related topics.

In their own way, all three organisations cross-subsidise individual and collective projects that aim to build socially and ecologically just futures. In doing so, they do not only support the spread of more sustainable practices but also foster community building, including the integration of marginalised groups. In addition, all organisations attempt to democratise economic practices more fundamentally. To different degrees, decisions about the organisations' practices as made collectively. Apart from political encounter, *Hobbyhimmel* and *Slowtec* in particular constitute places for belonging and identification. Non-hierarchic organising and regular meet-ups with a larger circle of interested people are conducive for mutual trust, collective meanings and goals (Laloux, 2014). Yet, although monetary and administrative barriers to access have been scaled down, exclusive mechanisms are still in place. As has been observed for community initiatives elsewhere (Grossmann & Creamer, 2016), the participants in the present study do not reflect the population's diversity. White middle-class male participants are overrepresented. Also, despite a sensitivity for economically disadvantaged groups, many products or services still come at a high financial cost. Perspectives that are sensitive to gender, class and race are much-needed avenues for further research and analysis.

***Narratives*** capture practices' relatedness through stories, imaginaries, meanings, knowledges, theories and concepts. It is particularly visible in practices of explanation, reporting, analysis, sense-making and identification. ***Experience*** refers to practices' relatedness through affects, experiencing, capacities, habits, and aesthetics. It is particularly visible in practices of learning, (re)subjectivation, and (re)adjustment.

Narratives and experience are closely linked, yet provide two distinct perspectives on practices' relatedness. Non-commercial economising has effects on people's stories, subjectivities, and abilities, creating alternative narratives and imaginaries one the one hand, as well as counter-experiences and (what might be called) post-growth competences one the other hand (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Healy, 2015; Hopkins, 2014; Miller, 2010).

Basing exchange on trust instead of monetary equivalences opens up palpable alternatives to alienated social relations. Participation in non-capitalist modes of production, exchange and governance allows for the direct experience of economies based on care and communality. Both, abilities as well as sensorimotor experience, play an important role in practising repair, do-it-yourself, recycling and others. People experience self-efficacy and a sense of worth through their engagement in productive

practices and furthermore acquire skills for sufficiency- and subsistence-oriented economies. "Prosumers" (Blažek, 2016) are not content with passive consumption but regain an active role in shaping economic being-in-common. Overall, people experience that the organisations as a whole, as well as individual practices, can be organised differently, without focusing on profits. All three organisations provide tangible alternatives to prevalent experiences of exclusion, distrust, competitiveness and objectification (Brown, 2015), instead cultivating trust, community and solidarity.

Concurrently, the way people talk and think about economies shifts, and with it, the "belief in and […] acceptance of particular relations of social power which in turn constrain the possibilities of imagination" (Lee, 2016, p. 275). Even if a profound transformation of large social phenomena through small-scale adoption of post-growth-oriented practices might seem unlikely (Adler, 2017), "such practices enable the possibility of the impossible, the unrealistic and the illegitimate and so return the political to the heart of the economic. That really does make a difference." (Lee, 2016, p. 284). It is particularly through the common enactment of alternative economies that individuals are encouraged to explore post-growth avenues of economising despite adverse institutional arrangements.

***Governance*** captures practices' relatedness through moments of rule, domination, power and norms. It is particularly visible in bureaucratic practices, law (enforcement) and policing.

All three organisations are at odds with formal as well as informal norms and rules – most prominently through the inadequacy of the respective legal forms. Hybridising for-profit and non-profit practices challenges prevailing laws around profit, financing and enterprises' contribution to society. *em-faktor*'s social profit manifesto questions the legal status quo explicitly (http://www.spo-manifest.de/). More implicitly, practices such as repair, open source, sufficiency and subsistence contain elements of administrative intervention. Repair, upcycling, artisanal production and others draw attention to issues of waste, obsolescence, and reparability. Besides fostering the technological responsibility and autonomy of citizens (Bertling & Leggewie, 2016), spreading these issues also puts pressure on policymakers to respond (for repair see Streibl, 2017). Similarly, the creation and use of open-source licences demand a corresponding reflection in codified rules. Proprietorship is questioned, and social conduct based on the exclusionary consequences of ownership rights is problematised (Bollier, 2015; Bollier & Helfrich, 2012). Technological developments, too, provoke legal revisions. Through its high-tech water recycling system and avoidance of black water, the *ownhome* (one of the projects *Slowtec* is involved in) currently tries to set a precedent for cases in which centralized fresh water provision and a sewage hook-up are ecologically undesirable[5].

5 Current German law requires the connection of permanently occupied properties to the public wastewater system and strongly regulates fresh water provision.

***Ecology*** refers to practices' relatedness through moments of interrelatedness, interdependence, balance, metabolism, conativity, and symbiosis. It is particularly visible in practices of extraction and environmental destruction that disrespect balances and interdependencies. As well as in spiritual and other practices that affirm human and more-than-human interrelationships and ecological boundaries (Matthews 2011; Naess, 1973; Shaw & Taylor Aiken, 2017).

Direct encounters between (social) beings and natures outside of instrumental and objectified relations (re)create an appreciation of the complex interdependencies through which life comes about. Empirically, this ranges from the resource-conscious approach of *em-faktor*, to the (re)discovery of materials, their texture and qualities in the open workshop and a more explicit incorporation of mindfulness (Doran, 2017) in the everyday conduct of *Slowtec*. The very name *Slow-tec (hnology)* reflects this sensitivity.

An ecologically sensitive development of technology enables resource-efficient lifestyles while connected to politics of sufficiency. The *ownhome*, for instance, combines a high level of comfort with minimal use of resources. Water and electricity circuits are off the grid and the nutrient cycle is partially closed through dry toilet and bioponic systems. Besides reducing resource consumption, the *ownhome* increases autonomy and a partial withdrawal from exploitative social relations. The actual effects in terms of the organisations' practices on material throughput, however, are difficult to trace. While repair, local production and other practices have the aforementioned potential to radically challenge growth-based economies, their actual instantiations have diverse effects. In particular, the amenities of the open workshop are also used for practices closer to consumerism and material self-fulfilment than to the implementation of post-growth economies. This ranges from engendering new ways of consumption without replacing old ones to a simple relocation of sedimented practices, reconfiguring but not altering growth-based economies. Even practices rooted within discourses of post-capitalism or post-growth could actually have adverse effects. Under current socio-economic conditions, small-scale local production has been found to be more resource-intensive at times than prevalent global value chains (for a discussion see Hielscher & Smith, 2014).

## Conclusion

This paper explores post-growth organisations as practice formations that address social and environmental concerns and simultaneously engage in post-growth politics. Drawing on practice theory's ontological commitments, a notion of post-growth politics is proposed as the *practice of changing the rules of practice to support parallel and mutually enforcing processes of cultural and institutional change within the diverse meanings of post-growth* (Adler, 2017; Dünckmann & Fladvad, 2016). Reflexivity and relatedness are constitutive moments of political practices, whereas a diverse logics perspective operationalizes the latter. Providing a notion of structured

diversity facilitates the analysis of post-growth organisations' practices across non-hierarchical scale. Against this background, the paper analyses three potential post-growth organisations – *em-faktor*, *Hobbyhimmel* and *Slowtec* – through the logics of economies, communality, narratives, experience, governance and ecology.

Several of the organisations' practices break with growth-based institutions. Open-sourcing, commoning, providing low-threshold access, cross-subsidising, and various non-commodified practices transcend capitalist markets. In doing so, they also shift norms and question formal rules of pro-growth policies. All three organisations enact non-hierarchical and more inclusive forms of communality. In particular *Hobbyhimmel* and *Slowtec*'s more radical challenging of growth-based institutions contribute to a shift in the ways in which economies are narrated and experienced. To different degrees, the presented organisations reconfigure human and more-than-human interrelationships materially and spiritually. Yet all the organisations are embedded in growth-based economic, political and cultural constellations and their everyday enactment is rife with ambiguities and compromise. In particular financial and administrative restraints limit the organisations' scope to enact post-growth economies.

Although the material impact of post-growth organisations is contradictory and the challenging of market logics is very limited, post-growth perspectives should not be dismissed as a utopian vision. Economic growth is sedimented across political, economic and cultural practices, rendering non-growth economies seemingly unimaginable. In particular, a shift in narratives and experiences may constitute important stepping stones towards post-growth economies. Researchers can contribute by making the diversity of organisations' practices visible, which is a pivotal part of re-politicising economic discourses and (re)gaining collective democratic control over economies' creative processes.

This paper does not provide a simple answer to the question of distinguishing post-growth organisations from other organisations. Rather, it proposes seeing post-growth organisations through the interplay of diverse logics. Empirically, a "thick description" (Geertz, 2003) is needed to explore organisations' contradictory relations to growth-based institutions. In collectively enacting post-growth ideals, while pragmatically relating to institutional arrangements, post-growth organisations expand spaces of non-capitalist being-in-common. Contradictions and ambiguities, therefore, are part of the transformative process. Instead of seeing them as a sign of incompleteness or impurity – a "not yet" of the post-growth economies envisioned – scholars might embrace hybridity as a sign of struggle and a resource for postcapitalist possibility.

"In my mind I should never accept compromise, in practice I always have to trade off." (Slowtec).

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