

# POST- GROWTH TOOLKIT FOR THE FASHION INDUSTRY



A comprehensive guide to the tools and strategies for fashion companies to transition to a post-growth future.

THE SUSTAINABILITY CLUB

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Thanks to all who contributed their time and expertise to this report.

## **About The Sustainability Club**

The Sustainability Club is a Sustainability Consulting Agency for fashion and lifestyle companies. TSC specializes in enabling companies to operate at the highest level of responsibility. Our team of sustainability consultants supports companies in implementing sustainability into their strategy, operations, and communications. We provide fashion brands and professionals with the necessary tools, training, and methods to take the right actions and become the future heroes that the world needs.

Our services include:

- Sustainability Strategy Development
- Sustainability Communication
- Training, Engagement & Capacity Building
- Interim Sustainability Management & Support

## **A word from the founder**

"My aim is to support fashion and lifestyle companies to operate in line with sustainability regulations and requirements. I help brands to find their own distinct vision on sustainability and to become the most responsible version of themselves. I am there for the fashion companies, CEOs, and professionals who choose to act. I believe in taking a holistic and future-oriented approach to sustainability, without losing sight of what is needed in the industry now. We have created this report to inspire a new way of viewing growth, focusing on practical strategies that can actually be implemented. I hope that you, the leaders, CEOs, and professionals will feel empowered to take the actions to become the future heroes that the world needs." - Nynke Eggen

## **Why are we sharing this information open source?**

We dedicated a lot of time and energy to this report, now that it is finally complete we've decided not to keep it to ourselves and we don't seek monetary compensation for it. Instead, we've chosen to share it free and open-source. But why did we make this decision?

First and foremost we deeply believe that adopting Post- and Degrowth business principles is the only way to achieve true sustainability. While advancements in materials and innovative solutions are undeniably exciting, when we observe the state of the world around us, we realize that the most viable way forward is to simply consume and produce less. With this understanding in mind, we believe that information related to this critical topic should be freely accessible. This is the first reason for making our report open-source.

The second reason behind the choice is our belief in the power of sharing ideas. By collaborating, we hope to speed up the transition process towards more sustainable practices and create fresh, innovative concepts together. Inspiring each other to transition to a Post-Growth Future.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

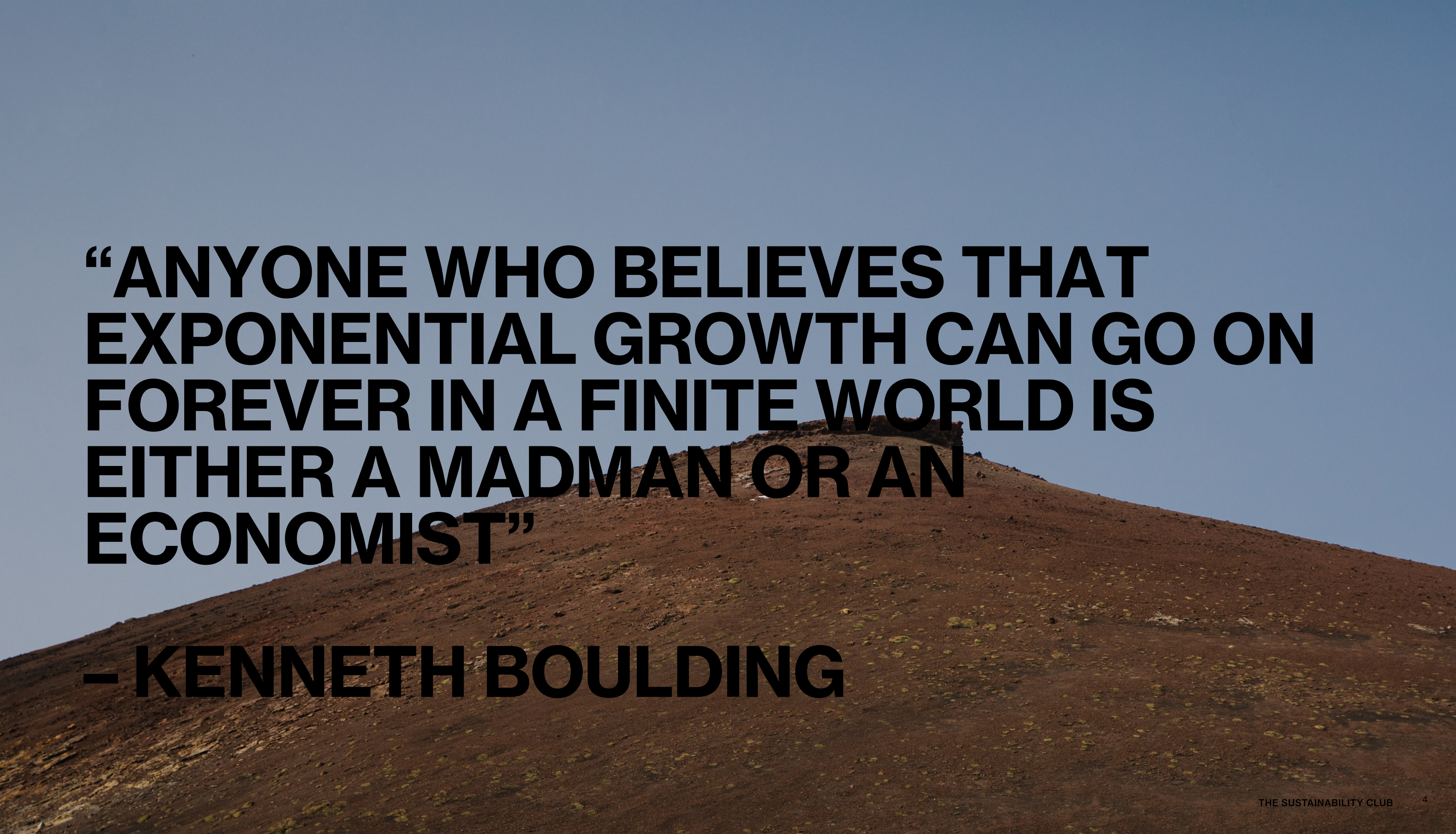
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**1.1** Why is growth a problem?

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**1.2** Defining Post-growth and Degrowth

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**“ANYONE WHO BELIEVES THAT  
EXPONENTIAL GROWTH CAN GO ON  
FOREVER IN A FINITE WORLD IS  
EITHER A MADMAN OR AN  
ECONOMIST”**

**– KENNETH BOULDING**

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry, a symbol of style and innovation, paradoxically stands as one of the largest contributors to global pollution, accounting for up to 10% of total global greenhouse emissions worldwide. It relies on cheap manufacturing, frequent consumption, long complex supply chains, and short-lived garment use. Fashion lives and breathes the expansionist growth model. [2] Consequently, either the scale of activities will surpass the capacity of the environment, or manufacturing materials won't be available anymore. [3] In other words, the current reliance of the fashion industry on exponential growth cannot be maintained.

Luckily there is a growing awareness of these issues. In response, the European Union has taken a proactive stance, initiating regulatory measures to restrain the unsustainable excesses of the fashion industry through the European Green Deal and an EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles. However, these are mere starting points often tethered to the notion of green growth, the strategy that relies on the hope of absolute decoupling between growth and environmental degradation. A hope that has faced widespread skepticism from scholars within academia.[4] To say it in the words of Fletcher and Tham "The fashion industry forms no exception to this state of 'weak sustainability'. Although the fashion industry shows awareness of its socio-environmental impacts, it does not address the systemic problems of overproduction, -consumption, and growth." [5]

As the current environmental crisis becomes pressing, a more radical system transformation is needed to stay within the planetary boundaries: Post-growth and Degrowth. Concepts that question growth and aim at "an equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human wellbeing and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level." [6]

Since business activity is a key driver of economic growth, the role of corporate organizations in a transition toward a post-growth society is crucial. While theoretically compelling, post-growth and degrowth often stand critiqued for their abstract nature and perceived lack of practicality. A lot of papers have been written revolving around the economic aspects of degrowth, but there is a research gap on practical methods that companies can implement. This essay sets out to bridge this gap by summarizing practical strategies that businesses can use to become post-growth entities.

First, we will critically examine the current economic paradigm, followed by a definition of post-growth and degrowth. Chapter three outlines the characteristics of a post-growth business, and explains the methodology. Chapter four explores various post- and degrowth business strategies, informed by academic literature and interviews. In chapter five, we conclude on the most relevant strategies. The goal of this report is to serve as a resource that empowers businesses and sustainability-focused consultancies to move beyond compliance and drive genuine impact, in line with planetary boundaries.

It is relevant to note that this paper, with its central European standpoint, predominantly lights businesses from this region as examples. Furthermore, this report is written at The Sustainability Club (TSC) - a consultancy specializing in sustainable fashion and lifestyle, which can be seen as a limitation.

UP TO  
**10%**  
OF GLOBAL GHG EMISSIONS

**2.1 billion**  
TONS OF GHG EMISSIONS IN  
2018

**100 billion**  
NEW GARMENTS IN 2020

## 1.1

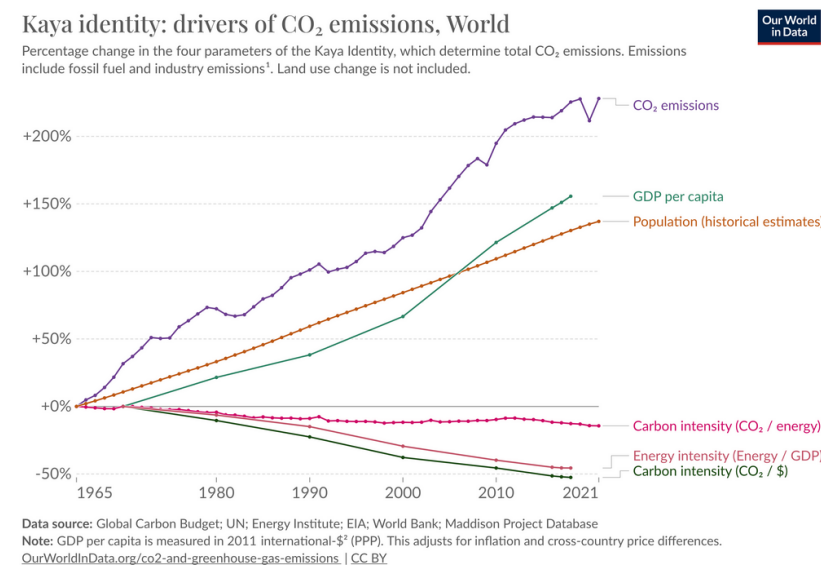
# Why is growth a problem?

Economic growth, determined by an increase in economic goods and services over time, has been the cornerstone of our economic system. Traditionally, it is measured in terms of Gross National Product (GNP) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP). [7] However, the extensive reliance on this growth-centric model has given rise to consequences that threaten the very ecosystem on which it operates. [8]

At the heart of the issue lies the intricate link between economic growth and its impacts: carbon emissions, resource depletion, and energy consumption are just a few examples (Figure 1).[9] Even as far back as 1971, the groundbreaking “Limits to Growth” report highlighted the delicate balance between the Earth's resources and the demands placed by economic and population expansion. The report forecasted a grim future, indicating that the current pace of growth, driven by existing technology and population increase, is unsustainable beyond 2100. The report outlined potential collapses due to resource depletion, pollution, and escalating technology costs, casting doubt on the feasibility of relentless growth.[10]

The answer to this problem proposed by the OECD[11], the World Bank, and the European Union is “Green Growth.” This ideology argues that technological progress and structural change will enable a decoupling of natural resource consumption and environmental impacts from economic growth. Making growth without impact possible. [12] There is only one problem. Empirical evidence suggests that it is impossible to achieve absolute decoupling of GDP from resource use or emissions, and certainly not at a rate fast enough to meet environmental targets and stay within planetary boundaries. [13]

This dissonance underscores the need to reconsider our growth-centered approach and start a transition toward a post-growth economy and society.[14] This essay aims to provide businesses with practical strategies to work towards a post-growth economy.



1. Fossil emissions: Fossil emissions measure the quantity of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emitted from the burning of fossil fuels, and directly from industrial processes such as cement and steel production. Fossil CO<sub>2</sub> includes emissions from coal, oil, gas, flaring, cement, steel, and other industrial processes. Fossil emissions do not include land use change, deforestation, soils, or vegetation.  
2. International dollars: International dollars are a hypothetical currency that is used to make meaningful comparisons of monetary indicators of living standards. Figures expressed in international dollars are adjusted for inflation within countries over time, and for differences in the cost of living between countries. The goal of such adjustments is to provide a unit whose purchasing power is held fixed over time and across countries, such that one international dollar can buy the same quantity and quality of goods and services no matter where or when it is spent. Read more in our article: What are Purchasing Power Parity adjustments and why do we need them?

Figure 1: GDP per capita and global emissions  
Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/kaya-identity-co2>

### 1.1.1 Problem analysis within the realm of business and entrepreneurship

The main problems relating to unsustainable growth within traditional entrepreneurship are investment, financial extraction, and pump-and-dump, often connected to the Silicon Valley model.

Within classical Silicon Valley entrepreneurship, the same curve is expected as in GDP growth—up and to the right: Capital, Scale, Exit. Within this model, businesses are intrinsically extractive and their purpose is to increase shareholder value. This starts with the initial stage of acquiring Capital which necessitates a strategic decision to involve external investors. While initial capital can accelerate growth, it comes at the cost of losing control over one's venture. This dilemma becomes more complex for entrepreneurs aspiring to establish social enterprises that drive positive impact.

A second difficulty is linked to venture capital – it tends to shift the market when startups receive an influx of capital from investors, positioning them in a state of negative revenue. They utilize investor funds (rather than earnings from customer revenue), enabling rapid yet superficial growth, creating a facade of success. However, this approach often means a disconnect from actual market demands and customer needs. [15] In other words, we often talk about the market showing if a product is needed. Here that doesn't happen because the market is shifted with the help of venture capital. There is no demand but there is a lot of money available to the startup.

The second step of the Silicon Valley model – scaling – primarily serves as the ultimate exit. The objective is to expand the company as rapidly as possible to maximize gains during the exit. Within the Exit phase, substantial financial value is extracted from companies, either through Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) direct listings commonly referred to as “going public,” or through acquisitions/mergers also known as “selling your company.” The company then is a pure commodity sold for financial gain not serving any other purpose.[16] The ultimate extraction.

Summarizing all of these points. It can be said that businesses within our current model are primarily extractive and used to increase value for their shareholders.. If we want to stay within planetary boundaries and work towards a post-growth future there is a need to move away from this purely extractive model towards a model in which business our founded and run with the purpose of making a positive impact.

## 1.2

# Defining Post-growth and Degrowth

Degrowth is defined as a transition process towards a post-growth society through downscaling production and consumption and focusing on equity, justice, and ecological sustainability.[17] Given that the concepts of post-growth and degrowth are relatively new within academic literature, there are no universally established definitions. In the subsequent section, we will delve into the specifics of these two terms and define them with the help of academic literature.

### 1.2.1 Degrowth

“Degrowth” is a concept that critiques the global capitalist system's relentless pursuit of growth, which often leads to human exploitation and environmental degradation. The movement advocates for a transition away from excessive production and consumption, aiming for societies that prioritize social and ecological well-being over corporate profits, overproduction, and unnecessary consumption.[18]

The literature primarily discusses two main definitions of degrowth:

1. „A voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society.“[19]
2. „An equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level.“ [20]

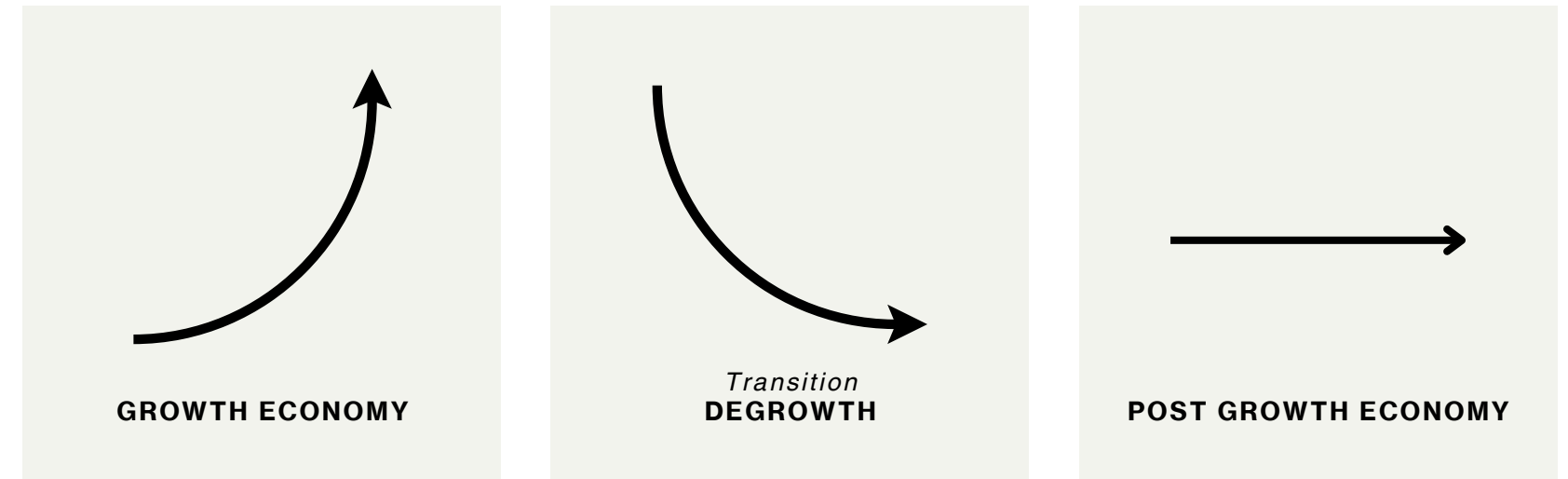


Figure 2: Degrowth as a transition towards Post-growth

Degrowth as a phenomenon is a planned reduction of production and consumption. It is not a recession but rather a democratically planned, and voluntary shrinking of the economy to lighten environmental pressure. A response to the realization that achieving environmentally friendly economic growth is untenable within planetary boundaries. Important to note, it is not a reduction everywhere. A nuanced approach is required, and degrowth positions itself as a macroeconomic diet for very advanced old capitalistic economies, or “obese nations.”[21] These nations must shrink to make room for other economies to grow and reach living standards.[22] The second part of the definition is about well-being. Degrowth emphasizes the importance of enhancing well-being and reducing inequality while shrinking the GDP.[23]

A few key elements are needed for a transition:

1. Decoupling Wellbeing from Growth
  - Ensuring access to universal basic services such as education, healthcare, public transport, housing, food, and essential quotas of energy, water, and internet.
  - Introducing a reduction in the working week to 3-4 days, facilitating the distribution of available jobs.
  - Establishing a federally funded Job Guarantee to ensure opportunities for anyone seeking employment.
  - Providing a minimum basic income for those who are unable to work.

### 2. Reducing Material and Energy Throughput

- Scaling down ecologically detrimental industries like fossil fuels, beef production, private jets, arms manufacturing, single-use plastics, fast fashion, and oversized new constructions.
- Eliminating planned obsolescence and reducing food waste.
- Cutting down advertising practices.
- Shifting from a model of ownership to a focus on “usership.”
- Advocating for governments to be responsible for creating money, as opposed to relying solely on banks.
- Encouraging the transition towards cooperative and steward-ownership organizations while moving away from profit-driven, growth-centric entities.
- Addressing income and wealth inequality through the implementation of minimum and maximum wage structures and progressive tax systems.
- Considering debt cancellation, particularly in the global south.

### 1.2.2 Post-growth

The term „post-growth” is closely intertwined with “Degrowth” and is sometimes used interchangeably. We think of degrowth as a transition phase towards a post-growth state of the economy and society (Figure 2).[25] Degrowth is the start of the discussion, with the initial shrinking of obese countries and post-growth as the ultimate goal.



# 2. METHODOLOGY

# 2. METHODOLOGY

The foundation of this research is established through a comprehensive review of relevant literature, including academic publications and online sources, and further enriched by interviews. This literature review serves as the base for developing the theoretical framework.

In the main part of the paper, practical business strategies are outlined that businesses can employ to transition to or establish themselves as post-growth-oriented entities. This report aims to elaborate on strategies that can form an inspirational starting point for companies that want to transition. Every strategy is set into a post-degrowth context, explained in detail and, when possible, connected to a case study within the realm of fashion and apparel. In instances where examples from this industry do not exist or are not known, examples from non-fashion businesses are utilized.

This report is intended to provide guidance to TSC and other consultancies on how to support companies in their transition towards a post-growth future. For each strategy mentioned, we will explain its relevance and how it can be effectively integrated into business operations, strategies, and training programs.

To pinpoint practical strategies that businesses can adopt as they transition into a post-growth future, it is crucial to first establish a clear grasp of the fundamental principles and values that underlie post-growth business approaches.

As a starting point, this paper works with the triple bottom line framework (People, Planet, Prosperity) and an additional “Company DNA” component. A framework used within TSC’s strategy training and roadmaps.

# 3. WHAT IS A POST-GROWTH BUSINESS?

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**3.1** The Triple Bottom Line

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**3.2** Degrowth business objectives

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# 3. WHAT IS A POST-GROWTH BUSINESS?

## 3.1 The Triple Bottom Line

Examining the definitions of both degrowth and post-growth visions at a macro-economic level shows that they both centered around the concepts of equitable downscaling, redistribution of production and consumption, economic justice, ecological sustainability, and social well-being for all.[26] This perspective aligns closely with Elkington's (1999) "Triple Bottom Line," highlighting three vital dimensions for sustainable business: People, Planet, and Prosperity.[27]

In conventional business terms, the "bottom line" traditionally signifies "profit" or "loss," recorded at the end of a statement. Environmentalists critiqued this and expanded the concept. The triple bottom line "people, planet, prosperity" emerged, often attributed to John Elkington.[28] 1997 the Anglo-Dutch oil company Shell used the triple bottom line as the title of their first sustainability report. As a result, the concept took deep root within the Netherlands.[29] TSC advises companies to construct their sustainability strategies and assess their sustainability performance based on these pillars.

### 3.1.1 People

The "People" pillar includes all aspects related to human relations and human capital. Its primary focus lies on social considerations and the promotion of social equity. Various examples fall under this pillar, including beneficial business practices directed towards labour, the community, and the regions in which corporations operate.[30] When relating this pillar to the concept of degrowth, its essence revolves around respecting social foundations and ensuring social well-being. This is achieved by enhancing the quality of life for stakeholders and empowering them to make sustainable choices.[31]

### 3.1.2 Planet

The "Planet" pillar revolves around natural capital, specifically emphasizing the environmental aspect. Its core principle is to avoid harm and minimize the environmental footprint.[32] Connecting this pillar to degrowth its essence lies in respecting planetary boundaries and safeguarding environmental well-being. This is achieved by minimizing our impact on the environment, and climate, and actively working to restore the ecological harm that has already been caused.[33]

### 3.1.3 Prosperity

Originally, this pillar was centered around the economic aspects of business, specifically its economic value.[34] Examining Hinton's (2021) five essential dimensions of degrowth in business, a crucial element within this pillar is the business's relationship to profit. Additionally, it encompasses areas like business management, planning, and operational practices. Considering the broader perspective, a degrowth-oriented business ultimately boils down to fostering prosperity for everyone by emphasizing equal value creation and the equitable distribution of benefits within communities.[35] The most crucial point within prosperity for a post-growth entity is eliminating all extractive tendencies within a business. Go away from a business model that focuses on maximizing value for shareholders and towards a model that makes a positive impact.

### 3.1.4 Purpose

This Pillar outlines a business's fundamental values. For a post-growth business, this entails an inherent commitment to the principles of degrowth. Additionally, it incorporates the concept of governance, discussed by Hinton (2021), which describes the "rules, protocols, and processes by which decisions are made in a business." [36]

3.2

# Degrowth businesses objectives

The four pillars serve as a foundational starting point. However, to identify strategies for businesses that want to transition towards a post-growth future, it is important to establish specific attributes.[37] These characteristics are phrased using the North Star approach.

This method involves establishing ambitious and motivational long-term goals. In TSC's training, the "North Star" is defined as a "far-reaching goal that is universally understood and supported within a company. It should evoke excitement and energy, compelling employees to take action."

The graph below illustrates the four essential business pillars, along with the associated post-growth objectives and key characteristics. These objectives and characteristics are framed as "North Stars" to facilitate their immediate integration into sustainability strategies and roadmaps.

PILLAR	KEY OBJECTIVES FOR POST-GROWTH BUSINESSES	KEY CHARACTERISTICS [38,39]
Purpose	Embracing a Stewardship Role While Promoting Values in Business Activism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being ethical</li> <li>- Adapt a role as ambassador of the environment</li> <li>- Having voluntary objectives</li> <li>- Adoption of complex systems thinking</li> <li>- Identifying root causes of sustainability problems</li> <li>- Critical reflection on one's own habits and patterns</li> <li>- Seeing Business as a form of activism</li> </ul>
	Employee commitment towards degrowth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Corporate leaders' commitment to company values in their personal life</li> <li>- Pro-environmental behaviour in the workplace</li> <li>- Shift in values towards cooperation</li> <li>- Collaboration</li> <li>- Simplicity</li> <li>- Solidarity</li> </ul>
	Adapting alternative ownership models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Democratic, inclusive, collaborative, decentralized, networked, and adaptive companies</li> <li>- Democratic governance (bringing more stakeholders into management and decision-making)</li> <li>- Democratisation of decision making</li> <li>- Implementation of democratic governance</li> <li>- Alternative business/governance models (e.g. cooperation)</li> <li>- Focusing on a different legal set-up</li> </ul>
People	Customer engagement and community focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaborative value creation</li> <li>- Supporting co- production and presumption</li> <li>- Engaging customers in reuse</li> <li>- Company as a part of a broader community</li> <li>- Collaboration with business partners and other stakeholders on solving social and environmental problems together</li> <li>- Involving consumers in the business operations</li> <li>- Societal wellbeing and embeddedness within local communities</li> <li>- Building personal customer relationships</li> <li>- Locally embedded and community based</li> </ul>
	Employee Welfare and Favorable Working Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Workers wellbeing</li> <li>- Practicing a culture of reciprocal care</li> <li>- Improve the work-life balance of employees</li> <li>- Promoting a good quality of life and decent working conditions (along the entire value chain)</li> </ul>
	Encouraging sufficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sufficiency</li> <li>- Communicating for sufficiency</li> <li>- Encouraging sufficiency</li> <li>- Promoting sustainability-oriented learning and engagement</li> <li>- Promoting the societal acceptance of degrowth thinking</li> <li>- Customer education to promote and increase knowledge</li> </ul>

3.2

# Degrowth businesses objectives

PILLAR	KEY OBJECTIVES FOR POST-GROWTH BUSINESSES	KEY CHARACTERISTICS [38,39]
Planet	Implementing Circular Business Operations	- „Processes/use of products and materials: Frugality/efficiency, Full producer responsibility (closed-loop), Recycling/circular economy approaches, Enabling usage and sharing products.“ (Vennings, 2023)
	Minimization of Resource Usage and Embracing Renewable Alternatives	- „Material and energy use/reduction: Reduction of environmental impacts at all stages of product/service life-cycle, reorientation towards environmental considerations (reduction of material, throughput and waste reduction), renewables, reducing environmental impacts along the value chain, Local sourcing, localisation of sourcing, production and exchange.“ (Vennings, 2023) - Consideration of non-human life - Respecting the planetary boundaries
	Enhancing Product durability and longevity	- „Product characteristics: making products that last and that are repairable, ‘durability + repairability central in product design’, product and service design for sustainability“ (Vennings, 2023)
Prosperity	Eliminate all extractive business operations and re-thinking profit growth and value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alternative understanding of business, moving away from a extractive model towards making impact</li> <li>- Focusing on qualitative change</li> <li>- Deviation from profit maximisation: Seeing profit as a means, rather than an end</li> <li>- Overcoming economic growth dynamics</li> <li>- Redistributing profits</li> <li>- Repurposing the business for environmental and society</li> <li>- Focus on voluntary long-term mutual value creation</li> <li>- Decreased productivity</li> <li>- “Showcasing alternatives to the dominant growth model: Small scale, sufficiency and non-growth. Balancing the organisational scale, remaining at a certain size. Limiting the organisation/operation size according to local ecological conditions. Deviation from productivism and decrease in volume of goods produced“ (Vennings, 2023)</li> </ul>
	Empowerment of local communities	„Empower local communities in ‘weaker’ sections of society helping people to expand their skills and knowledge (capacity to act). Focus on alternatives framings of technology. Low-tech and low-scale technology projects to empower rural populations.“ (Vennings, 2023)
	Prioritizing Collaboration Instead of Competition	„Collaboration, joining forces in mission-drives networks, open to sharing resources, collaborating with all stakeholders, even competitors, willingness to share resources, value networks“ (Vennings, 2023)

# 4. POST-GROWTH BUSINESS STRATEGIES

**4.1** Redefining Business Success and Working with Progressive Financial Practices

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**4.2** Alternative Business Models Practices

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**4.3** Ownership and Governance

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**4.4** Business Relationships

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**4.5** Product

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**4.6** Marketing, Communication, Education and Knowledge Sharing

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**4.7** Meaningful Work and Employer Well-being

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**“I THINK ONE OF THE BIGGEST MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS IS GOING TO BE TO UNDERSTAND HOW TO MANAGE A SUCCESSFUL NON-GROWING COMPANY – AND HOW TO GET OUT OF THE FRAME OF MIND THAT SUCCESS IS MEASURED ONLY BY GROWTH.”**



**– JAY FORRESTER**



# 4. POST-GROWTH BUSINESS STRATEGIES

How can we build businesses with a flat curve rather than with exponential growth curves? How can we create a business that serves as a vehicle of positive impact? The following core section of this paper will delve into the strategies that companies can embrace or incorporate to transition toward a post-growth future.

These strategies are organized into eight categories, though they often exhibit overlaps within these divisions. It is important to note that this paper doesn't strive to create an exhaustive compilation of all existing strategies. Building a post-growth business demands creativity and audacious entrepreneurial thinking. The aim here is to lay down a foundation for business ideas, offer inspiration, and introduce available strategies. It is crucial to mention that the core of a post-growth business is eliminating financial extraction. But if the aim is to transition to a post-growth business, eliminating the extractive element within your business should take center stage.

For every strategy a connection is established with the characteristics of a post-growth business, illustrating how the strategy aligns with a post-growth future. Subsequently, the strategy is examined in detail, and where possible accompanied by a real-life example from the realm of fashion and lifestyle. Every section ends with a concise reference to how TSC could offer guidance to companies seeking to implement the strategy within their services.



*Photographer: Yeelen Tavilla*

4.1

# Redefining Business Success and Working with Progressive Financial Practices

Redefining profit and embracing new, progressive financial practices stands out as the most significant and biggest transformation that companies can and must undertake to transform towards a post-growth future. How crucial this step is, is widely discussed, but often practical strategies and new definitions of success are only briefly touched upon. This section of the paper will therefore explore redefining profit and progressive financial practices from a post-growth perspective in depth.

## 4.1.1

# Redefining profit: Non-Monetary Metrics of Success

When envisioning a post-growth future, the most apparent notion that arises is a new definition of growth and a step away from financial extraction. Moving away from a primary focus on profit, and the growth-centered paradigms of the economy and GDP, towards a paradigm that embraces novel metrics of success and impact instead of financial gain as a business purpose.[41] This is also a crucial step for businesses undertaking a degrowth transition. As defined earlier in this paper, a fundamental characteristic of such businesses is the redefinition of profit and the elimination of financial extraction.

Profit-driven economies represent a relatively new concept when we consider the entirety of human civilization. The notion of surplus, which equates to profit, emerged only with the advent of the agricultural revolution.

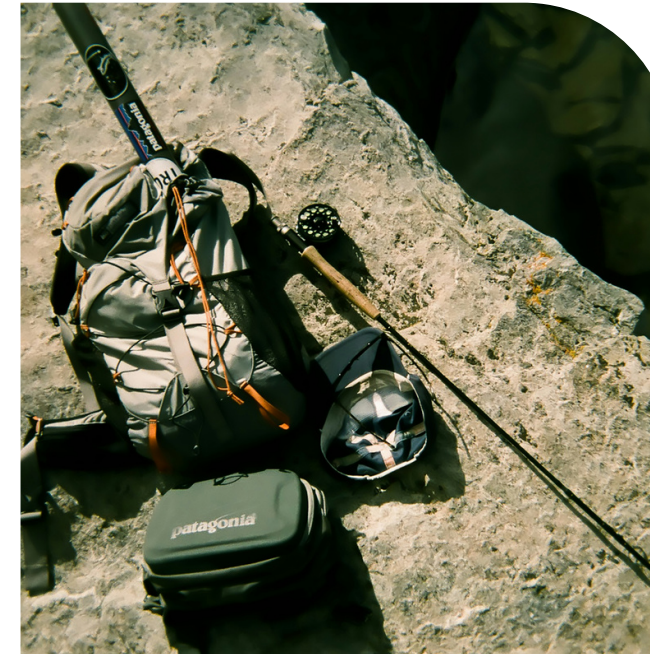
In those times, however, any surplus was consistently shared among community members. The pursuit of individual financial gain and structuring economic institutions around this principle is a relatively recent development. Markets historically revolved less around the idea of accumulating as much as possible and were more centered on the exchange of goods to fulfill the needs of the community. Money was meant to be a strategy for facilitating transactions, rather than the ultimate goal.[42] Within the current economic system on the other hand business is seen as a product that money can be extracted from.

It should be noted before starting this section of the paper that it is not a prerequisite that a post-growth company does not generate profits. Profits are within our current economic system necessary for the existence of a company. But it is essential to consider how such profits are distributed and if they are prioritized over other interests.[43,44] Hinton asks the question “Is profit a means to an end or an end to itself?” She goes into detail about setting up not-for-profit business structures where profit and growth is redirected to an end mission driven cause rather than being the end itself.[45] This paper will go into depth about Not-for-profit within the section on Alternative Business Models.

However, the first operational mechanism of this shift is quite straightforward: Consider alternative markers of success beyond profit. Such non-financial performance indicators can be:

- Focusing on the quality of products and services, prioritizing product quality over quantity, adhering to the principles of a “small giant.”
- Striving for high efficiency in production, optimizing resource utilization and environmental performance by reducing the impact of goods.
- Working towards high ethical performance, fostering a high quality of life and ensuring favorable working conditions for employees.

## EXAMPLE: PATAGONIA AND MUD JEANS



Patagonia Hiking Backpack  
Source: unsplash

- Contributing to local social and environmental value, fostering a sense of community strength by keeping capital local and reinvesting it within the locality.
- Shifting from pursuing sales growth to adopting strategies such as cost reduction and true cost pricing.[46,47,48]

It's important to note that these new metrics need to carry the same level of significance as profit within the context of an old business model. This strategy isn't just about establishing Environmental and Social Sustainability goals; it's about fundamentally altering the success metrics and objectives of a company. Instead of striving for increased output, a company shifts its focus towards for example improving quality without escalating resource consumption.[45] It helps to find legal setups to prevent a mission drift away from this non-profit motive. [50] A legal setup for a company like this could be a Not-For-profit business in which 100% of the profit goes into a charitable foundation.[51] Another big point is that for this strategy to work, financial extraction needs to be eliminated.

No stakeholders should have unnecessary financial gain from the company and the business purpose is to create positive impact. A shift away from a profit motive can be so profound that traditional indicators of sales growth might be perceived as undesirable by a company. An example is provided by Liesen et al. (2015), where the CEO of Richard Henkel, a furniture company[52], expressed that sales were “much too high last year.” Henkel would have rather focused on efficiency and sufficiency. This idea of creating a company that is “Great instead of big” is also elucidated in Bo Burlingham book “Small Giants: Companies That Choose to Be Great Instead of Big.” This paper will come back to this form of making business within the section on alternative business models.[53]

An example within fashion are the jeans brand MUD Jeans and the outdoor clothing brand Patagonia. Within both brands profit and growth are not the end goal but a means to achieve socio-environmental goals. This results in setting other priorities (e.g. lower marketing budgets), accepting lower margins, and (slower) organic growth. MUD Jeans even intended to cap its growth between 250.000 – 500.000 jeans, and Patagonia experimented with zero growth. However, the latter was unsuccessful due to motivational problems within the company.[54]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*Looking at how to implement this strategy within TSC, it is noticeable that the notion of redefining or uncovering a new purpose is closely tied to the North Star utilized in strategy sessions. This strategy elevates the North Star concept, placing it at the core of business operations. This could be one way to advise and guide companies towards a post-growth future. Another possibility is adding an exercise that stimulates questioning profit growth and redefining success within the strategy and goal-setting sessions.*

## 4.1.2

# Bootstrapping

The paper's problem analysis has delved into why the conventional Silicon Valley model of entrepreneurship often leads companies into a path of full extraction by injecting funds, rapidly scaling, and then pursuing quick exits. In contrast, bootstrapping offers an alternative starting point for entrepreneurs, fostering the development of robust, independent, and non-extractive businesses.[55]

At its core, bootstrapping describes a scenario in which an entrepreneur initiates a company with minimal capital, relying on means other than external investments. This is underpinned by a "preference for organic growth rather than highly leveraged growth and acquisition in order not to dilute or lose the corporate ethos and values." (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2018).[56] With bootstrapping social entrepreneurs can maintain control and ensure a more democratic allocation of financial resources.[57]

In her course on constructing post-growth businesses [58], Melanie Rieback outlines five key principles of bootstrapping [59]:

1. Having a vision and conveying the vision.
  - Articulating Vision and Expertise: It's not just about having a vision; it's about effectively communicating that vision to others.
  - Early Engagement with Companies: Start searching for collaborations from the outset.
  - Attracting Initial Customers: Secure initial customers who believe in your vision.
  - Collaborative Funding Ventures: Engage in co-funding initiatives with other companies.
1. Engage with a wide audience and find a pain in the market.
  - Open Dialogue: Engage with anyone willing to listen. Sharing your story repeatedly leads to refining it over time.
  - Listen: People act as mirrors, reflecting insights back to you. Understand people's challenges and the solutions they would pay for.
2. Focus on a supportive community.
  - Selective Advocacy: Convincing everyone isn't necessary. Start with those who are already aligned with your ideas.
3. Start small.
  - Lean Startup Approach: An Idea described by Eric Ries in his book "The Lean Startup". It is about being less wasteful and still doing things that are big. [60]
  - Simplified Planning: Lean toward a Business Model Canvas instead of a detailed plan. [61]
  - Initial Emphasis on Core Business: Establish the fundamentals before diving into complex tech. Initially, refrain from extensive technological investments.

- Refactoring.
  - Minimize Overhead: Start with minimal overhead costs.
  - Customer-Centric Services: Identify services that initial customers are willing to pay for.
  - Evolutionary Refinement: Continuously refine your operations as the business grows. Transform repetitive tasks into streamlined processes. Introduce small automation steps financed by reinvestable margins.
  - Organic Growth: These small automation increments will organically evolve into a supportive platform. Ultimately, this process leads to a solid revenue base, critical intellectual property mass, established processes, and a proficient team. [62]

A common form of bootstrapping can also be crowdfunding. Crowdfunding ensures that financial resources are allocated in a more democratic way.[63] But it is important mention is that it is only in certain cases if extractive qualities are ruled out a degrowth strategy. That means the strategies needs to be combined with for example progressive ownerships structures to ensure a not-for-profit not-for-growth motive.

## EXAMPLE: NEW OPTIMIST



*New Optimist Crowdfunding*  
Source: New Optimist, Team, Photograph, CrowdAboutNow, 2022,  
<https://crowdaboutnow.nl/campaigns/newoptimist>.

The Dutch clothing brand New Optimist shows how this can work in Dutch clothing. New Optimist is a steward-owned company splitting the decision-making (by stewards) and profit-sharing rights (investors). Additionally, there is a cap on the upside for financial investors. Holders of shares bought during the crowdfunding rounds are entitled to dividend payments to a certain maximum amount, to prevent financial extraction. Ultimately when all investors are fully paid their capped return on investment, New Optimist will be self-owned. It will continue to exist to serve its purpose and will be governed by its stewards. This structure allows to locking of the not-for-profit motive within the company while still getting starting capital.[64]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

TSC could implement this strategy within its sustainable business strategy development services. Advising companies on how crowdfunding and bootstrapping at the early stages is a key strategy to keep integrity and prevent mission drift.

### 4.1.3

# Cross-subsidizing charity or redistributing profits

A method to make sure that profit is used in a different way involves the use of progressive financial instruments, such as profit redistribution or cross-subsidizing charity through businesses. This strategy serves as a means to embed the not-for-profit, not-extractive motive within a company, and it can even be anchored as a distinct legal entity.[65] This paper will go into further detail on what such a business model could look like in the chapter on alternative business models.

## EXAMPLE: RADICALLY OPEN SECURITY.

Cross-subsidizing charity entails structuring a business in a manner where a majority (preferably 100%) of the generated profits are directed toward a charitable foundation. A notable illustration of this concept exists outside the realm of fashion. Cybersecurity company Radically Open Security (ROS) has adopted the legal structure of a Dutch “Fiscaal Fondswervende Instelling” (Fiscal Fundraising Institution) to operate a commercial front-end that channels 90% of its profits tax-free to the charitable foundation Stichting NLnet.[66] While ROS firmly integrates cross-subsidization within its legal framework, this approach can also be employed using diverse profit-sharing systems.

A profit-sharing system originally grants employees a stake in a company’s profits. But it can be taken a step further by equitably distributing all profits among employees, suppliers, and environmental and social projects. The extent of profit sharing is determined by the company; for this to be recognized as a degrowth strategy, 100% of the profits should be shared.[67] An example of a lifestyle company is Viva con Agua Wasser GmbH. Working on behalf of the Viva con Agua association, which spearheads charitable water projects, this company enters into licensing agreements with manufacturers of items like mineral water and toilet paper. The company’s profits are directed towards funding Viva con Agua’s charitable endeavors and supporting social business initiatives. Viva con Agua is like Radical Open Security, an example in which the not-for-profit motive is also secured within a legal framework. [68]



Photographer: Yeelen Tavilla

It’s crucial to underscore that these strategies don’t merely involve offering a small fraction or incorporating a charitable component; instead, they are financial mechanisms wherein an entire profit of a business, is diverted towards a different purpose. This approach ensures a flat growth curve and helps structure and give a framework to a non-extractive business.

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*TSC can give these examples as an aim and advise companies to change from a for-profit business model to a not-for-profit model by cross-subsidizing or adapting profit-sharing principles. It needs to be mentioned that from the moment on stakeholders are involved within a company that is getting extremely hard. It is easier to start a non-extractive business from the start with bootstrapping and then create legal entities to secure this business structure.*

#### 4.1.4

# Real-cost-pricing True-pricing Pricing in cost instead of profit

In the realm of economic competition and consumerism, products are mostly offered at competitive prices without accounting for high social and environmental costs. It is therefore important from a degrowth perspective to shift towards “real” or “true pricing.” This entails accounting for and incorporating the authentic costs associated with maintaining elevated environmental and social standards while also prioritizing price transparency.[69] Moreover, this shift involves moving away from profit-oriented pricing, emphasizing instead the coverage of costs and the elimination of profit margins.[70]

## EXAMPLE: TONY’S CHOCOLONELY

negative externalities through their monetization. Secondly, the shift from profit-centered pricing to the pricing of costs themselves.

An example from the lifestyle sphere is the chocolate company Tony’s Choclonely they regularly report on true pricing with the help of True Pricing™ [71] and work on degreasing their own true costs with every year.



Cocoa beans  
Source: unsplash

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

Connecting this strategy to the work of TSC. TSC could encourage companies to start a Real-Cost pricing process for one or more of their products. Collaboration could be formed with the social enterprise “True Pricing” which introduced a method for impact measurement and valuation to calculate the external costs throughout a supply chain.[72,73].

TSC could also introduce the subject of price transparency within companies. Helping them to explain prices, and educating the consumer towards understanding the price of environmental and social standards. An example of this is the Slow Label which provides price transparency on its website.[74]

## EXAMPLE: PATAGONIA

# “EARTH IS NOW OUR ONLY SHAREHOLDER.” - PATAGONIA

In 2018 the outdoor brand Patagonia changed their company purpose to “We're in business to save our home planet.” The founder Yvon Chouinard struggled with what this meant for the business: “We could sell Patagonia and donate all the money. But we couldn't be sure a new owner would maintain our values or keep our team of people around the world employed. Another path was to take the company public. What a disaster that would have been. Even public companies with good intentions are under too much pressure to create short-term gain at the expense of long-term vitality and responsibility.”

There was no good option out there therefore they decided to create their own option. A team of board members and executives was tasked with devising a new ownership model. The objectives were clear: liberate as much of Patagonia's financial value as possible to combat the climate crisis, shield the company from external influences that could compromise its environmentally focused mission or harm employees, and provide like-minded businesspeople with an option to reshape the narrative around capitalism and consumption.

In September 2022, Yvon Chouinard, the founder of outdoor apparel company Patagonia, announced a new ownership model for his company: 100% of the company's voting stock transfers were to the Patagonia Purpose Trust, created to protect the company's values; and 100% of the nonvoting stock were given to the Holdfast Collective, a nonprofit dedicated to fighting the environmental crisis and defending nature. Every dollar that is not reinvested back into Patagonia will be distributed as dividends to protect the planet.

Yvon Chouinard, Patagonia founder, former owner, and current board member said:

“It's been a half-century since we began our experiment in responsible business. If we have any hope of a thriving planet 50 years from now, it demands all of us doing all we can with the resources we have. As the business leader I never wanted to be, I am doing my part. Instead of extracting value from nature and transforming it into wealth, we are using the wealth Patagonia creates to protect the source. We're making Earth our only shareholder. I am dead serious about saving this planet.”

Ryan Gellert, CEO of Patagonia and Patagonia board member said:

“Two years ago, the Chouinard family challenged a few of us to develop a new structure with two central goals. They wanted us to both protect the purpose of the business and immediately and perpetually release more funding to fight the environmental crisis. We believe this new structure delivers on both and we hope it will inspire a new way of doing business that puts people and planet first.”

Patagonia, “Patagonia's Next Chapter: Earth Is Now Our Only Shareholder – Patagonia Works,” Patagonia Works, September 7, 2023, <https://www.patagoniaworks.com/press/2022/9/14/patagonias-next-chapter-earth-is-now-our-only-shareholder>.



## 4.1.5

# Alternative and sustainability-oriented currencies

Traditional hierarchical monetary systems rely on interest-based credit and contribute to economic competition, growth, and power imbalances among lenders, wealthy individuals, workers, and credit-dependent organizations. This cycle can be broken by using community currencies and local exchange systems, which involve new forms of money. These systems offer an alternative social structure that can encourage post-growth types of exchanges and consumption patterns.[75]

### EXAMPLE: ECO

Adopting or partially utilizing an alternative local currency, which operates without interest, follows democratic and decentralized principles, and is resource and energy-efficient. As a result, local economies can be strengthened. This approach also fosters stronger social connections within the community and reduces dependence on the interest and debt-based monetary system.[76]

In Catalonia (Spain), regional networks have introduced self-organized currencies like the „Eco,“ which are adopted by local organizations and citizens. These alternative currencies are exchanged electronically but are only valid within a specific geographic area, promoting interactions among local participants. To prevent speculative activities, no interest rates are applied, and the creation of new money is directly tied to the provision of goods or services.[77]

This strategy is undoubtedly ambitious and may not seamlessly fit into every business model due to inherent challenges. Yet, when we narrow our focus and examine alternative currency forms, we encounter point systems and exchange methods that operate outside the realm of traditional money. One instance involves point-based systems for handling clothing returns or the establishment of free swap and exchange shops.

### EXAMPLE: SWAP SHOP



*Swap Shop Amsterdam*

Source: Lotte Spek, Swapshop, Photograph, Honeyguide,  
<https://crowdaboutnow.nl/campagnes/newoptimist>.

A concrete example that somewhat aligns with the domain of fashion is the "swap shop" in Amsterdam. Here, customers have the option to trade in items, accrue points, and subsequently redeem those points for new items.

#### **ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES**

*This type of system TSC could also advise companies.*



4.2

# Alternative Business Models Practices

To anchor a not-for-profit motive within businesses, new alternative business models are needed. This chapter will focus on what such post-growth and degrowth business models can look like. To build a strong foundation these strategies can also be combined within one business.

## 4.2.1

# The not-for-profit not-for-growth business

Starting with the not-for-profit model, a business model widely explored by researcher Jennifer Hinton in her book “How on Earth: Flourishing in a Not-For-Profit World By 2050.” This model fundamentally shifts the business motive away from the pursuit of profit and redirects it towards a mission centered around social benefits.[78] It is the most important strategy to build a post-growth business.

In a not-for-profit business, all profits serve as a means to achieve social and environmental benefits instead of focusing on private financial gain.

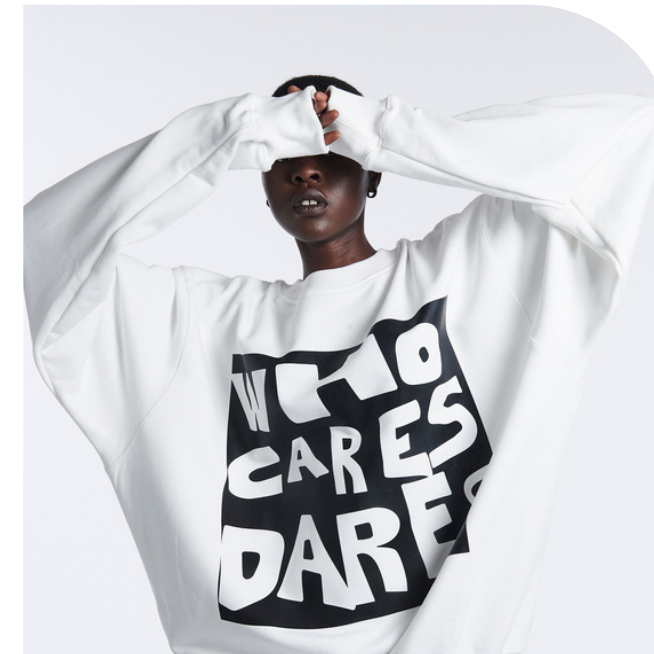
Distinguishing itself from traditional non-profit charities and for-profit enterprises.

It differs from a non-profit charity by its pursuit of financial self-sufficiency through the sale of goods and services in the market. While engaging in market activities, they differ from conventional for-profit businesses in terms of legal structure, purpose, and the distribution of profits.[79]

For-profit businesses operate with the primary purpose of private financial gain. Investors support such businesses with the expectation of earning returns on their investments. Profits are eventually distributed to owners and investors, increasing their wealth. Not-for-profit businesses are centered around a core social benefit mission. 100% of profits and surplus funds are dedicated to serving this social benefit mission.

Hinton describes the difference with the question: “Is profit merely a means to an end, or is it an end in itself?” In the context of not-for-profit businesses, profit is harnessed and redirected toward social or environmental good. Profit and growth become strategies to advance a mission-driven cause rather than an end in itself.[80]

To maintain fidelity to the non-profit motive and prevent mission drift, it is essential to establish appropriate legal and ownership structures.[81] There are different strategies of ownership and governance that a business can apply an example is charity-owned companies.[82] But there are also other ways to structure ownership they will be further explored in the ownership and governance section of this paper.



New Optimist Collection 2023

Source: New Optimist, Who Cares Dares, Photograph, newoptimist, <https://newoptimist.nl>.

**“IS PROFIT MERELY A MEANS TO AN END, OR IS IT AN END IN ITSELF?”**

**- JENNIFER B. HINTON**

## EXAMPLE: NEW OPTIMIST

To maintain fidelity to the non-profit motive and prevent mission drift, it is essential to establish appropriate legal and ownership structures.[81] There are different strategies of ownership and governance that a business can apply an example is charity-owned companies.[82] But there are also other ways to structure ownership they will be further explored in the ownership and governance section of this paper.

An example within the realm of fashion is the Dutch fashion brand New Optimist. Which has a unique governance structure that locks its not-for-profit motive. [83]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*Within the context of TSC, this business model stands as the ultimate example of redefining profit. While most companies assisted by TSC may not be willing to fully adopt such a model, integrating it into their strategic planning can provide a glimpse of what the future of business might look like. Furthermore, TSC can also start advising mixed forms. Helping non-profits get self-sufficient by starting to sell products in the market and for-profit companies to start investing some of their profit into a social benefit.*

## 4.2.2

# Co-production and (community) prosumption

Co-production and prosumption are strategies where a consumer takes over some of the activities and risks from the producer. By sharing risks and responsibilities with consumers, this approach mitigates financial production risks, and supports decentralization and localism. It closes the gap between consumption and production, avoiding wasteful overproduction and sustainably meeting the needs of both sides.[84]

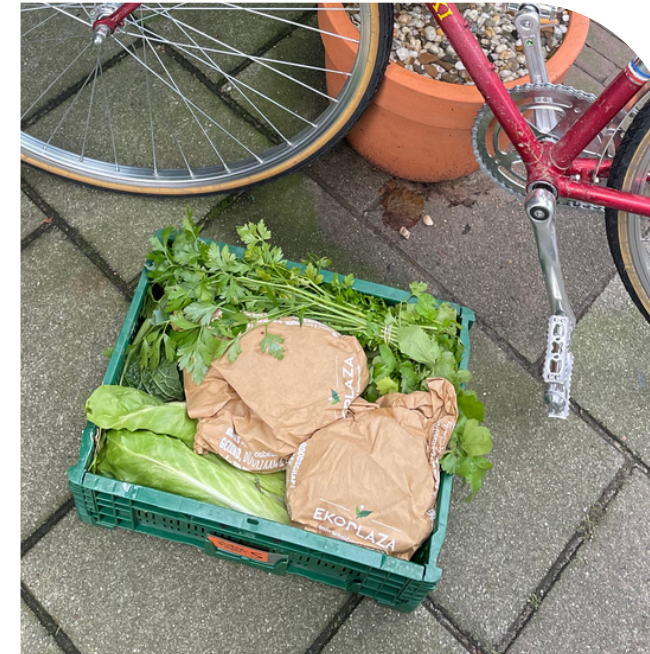
Looking at the fashion industry it is centered around long complex global supply chains, creating an anonymous marketplace. This results, among other things, in a significant mismatch between supply and demand, leading to a waste of resources. Moreover, profit-oriented intermediaries hold a powerful and centralizing position, often fostering risky competition among producers while disregarding social and environmental concerns.[85]

### EXAMPLE: DE STADSGROENTEBOER

As a consequence, consumers find themselves alienated and disconnected from both the products they consume and the circumstances of their production.[86] Bridging this gap is the core idea of co-production and prosumption. Prosumption blurs the lines between production and consumption, moving closer to what Hankamm (2021) describes as prosumers – individuals who act as both consumers and producers of a product. This can for example include facilitating hands-on experiences of production, including consumers in the design process, participatory education, collaborative peer production, and shared access to manufacturing tools.[87]

An existing example of such a practice is community-supported agriculture (CSA) or 'crop-sharing'. It is a system that connects producers and consumers within the food system and allows producers and consumers to share the risks of farming. A concrete example in the Netherlands, Amsterdam is De Stadsgroenteboer.[88] Community members purchase shares in advance for the entire growing season. In return for their subscription to the harvest, these members receive a weekly box of fresh vegetables.

This arrangement benefits the farm in several ways: the running cost of the farm are always covered regardless of the farm's production outcomes, and the risk of for example having a dry season are spread among consumer and producer and fosters a sense of cooperation among subscribers. Furthermore, the system shifts the focus from selling produce at market prices and, to some extent, diminishes the emphasis on monetary exchanges. Simultaneously, the practice of paying upfront provides the farm with the necessary capital precisely when it is needed.[89]



Weekly share from De Stadsgroenteboer  
Source: Carlotta Luisa Kelber, photograph, 2023

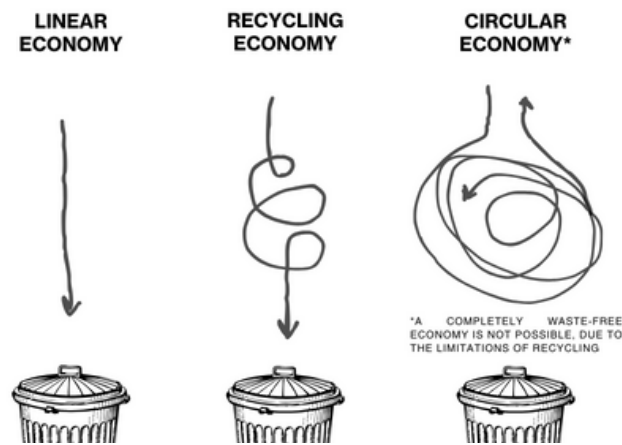
In addition to these advantages, members of De Stadsgroenteboer can actively participate in harvesting activities. This involvement fosters social connections, facilitates mutual learning processes, and offers opportunities for leisure in green, natural surroundings. [90] These aspects effectively bridge the gap between consumption and production. As a result, economic relationships diversify, and consumers eventually transform into "community prosumers." [91]

#### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

Looking at TSC it would be interesting to support companies in thinking about localism. What raw material is around us and how could it be utilized within fashion production? But also think about ways to share risk with manufacturers. Simply mapping out and knowing where a company's material grows could be the first step, utilizing local materials and creatively thinking about ways to share risks with manufacturers a second one. A third one could be advising companies to cut out as many middlemen as possible and localize production.

### 4.2.3

# Circular Business Model



When envisioning a post-growth future, the most apparent notion that arises is a new definition of growth and a step away from financial extraction. Moving away from a primary focus on profit, and the growth-centered paradigms of the economy and GDP, towards a paradigm that embraces novel metrics of success

Circular companies focus on various key aspects:

- Closing the loop, recycle and recover resources instead of using virgin material.
- Apply circular economy principles, such as repairing and recycling products, as well as extracting value from waste.
- Predominantly relying on renewable energy sources.
- Continually reducing materials, energy consumption, and emissions (efficiency).
- Minimizing or eliminating hazardous waste from production processes.[94]

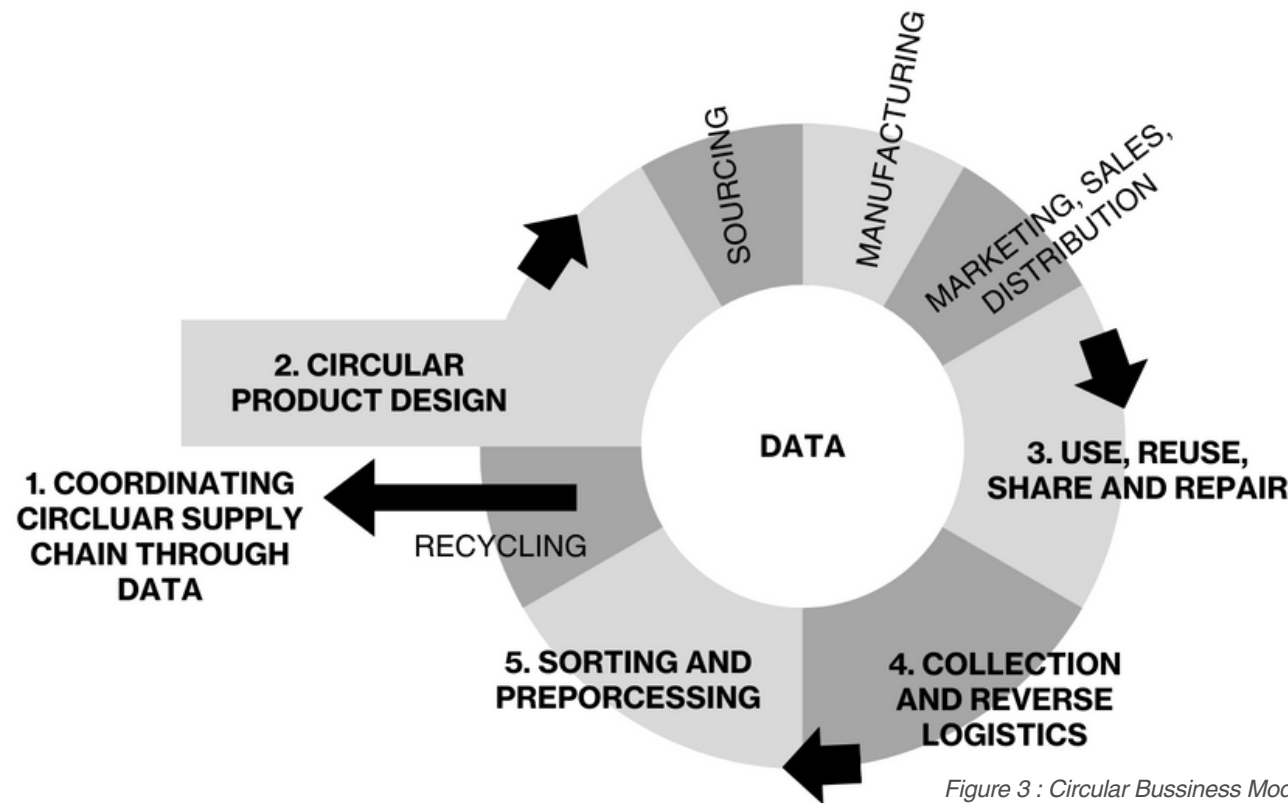


Figure 3 : Circular Business Model  
Inspired by: World Economic Forum (2023)

The World Economic Forum (2023) summarises these key aspects into four steps (Figure 3):

1. Coordinating circular value chains through data: To create or transition towards a circular business model it is necessary to know where the resources are within a resource stream.
2. Circular product design: The circular product is the cornerstone of circular business models, with key terms here being the R 'strategies, circularity principles, and cascading. This paper will delve into the product section.
3. Circular Business models: Creating a business model around circular products and focusing on things like refuse reuse, share, or repair.
4. Collection and reverse logistics
5. Sorting and reprocessing [95]

Circular business models like the ones examined above are widely discussed in the current business landscape. However, the actual impact a circular company can make without connecting a not-for-profit motive is limited. Fletcher and Tham argue that there isn't enough time left to scale up a circular economy to the necessary impact level within the next 10 years.[96] While circular innovations are becoming increasingly interesting, there is still no conclusive proof of these models working effectively, and they are also lagging behind the cumulative growth in production.[97] Boulding (1966) already argued that a circular economy could only be achieved if global demand for the volume of products stabilized. Moreover, numerous problems and barriers are associated with circularity. A paper by Korhonen et al. (2018) describes seven limitations, which are summarized in the table to the right (Figure 4).[98]

From a post-growth perspective, it is crucial to recognize that applying a circular business model shouldn't only serve the purpose of achieving green growth or greening a business. Instead, it should involve a fundamental rethinking of the business's core values before implementing circular strategies to create products with reduced environmental impact.

#### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

When analyzing the industry from the perspective of TSC, it's intriguing to note that many companies are beginning to put "circularity" on the agenda. It's essential to provide these companies with the right guidance and ensure they understand what real circularity entails, working with cascading and the R strategies.

#### SIX LIMITS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY-CONCEPT

1. **Thermodynamic Limits**
  - Cyclical systems consume resources and create waste and emissions.
2. **System Boundary Limits**
  - **Spatial:** Problems are often shifted along the product life cycle.
  - **Temporal:** Short-term non-renewable resource use can hinder the development of long-term renewable infrastructure.
3. **Limits Imposed by the Physical Scale of the Economy**
  - These limits include the rebound effect, Jevons's Paradox, and the boomerang effect.
4. **Limits Imposed by Path-Dependency and Lock-In**
  - First-generation technologies may retain their market position despite their inefficiency.
5. **Limits of Governance and Management**
  - These limits involve the challenges of managing physical materia and energy flows, both within organizations and across sectors.
6. **Limits of Social and Cultural Definitions**
  - The concept of waste significantly influences its handling, management, and utilization.
  - The concept of waste is culturally and socially constructed.
  - The concept of waste is always constructed within a specific cultural, social, and temporal context, which is dynamic and subject to change.

Figure 4 : Limits and challenges of the circular economy  
Source: Korhonen et al. (2018))

## 4.2.4

# The small giants Value versus volume

In today's business landscape, most companies are primarily focused on increasing their revenues and profits. This is largely achieved by increasing efficiency in production processes, negotiating better buying prices, or increasing order volumes to get the price advantage of 'bulk' orders. Consequently, a rise in revenue is achieved by increasing production and sales figures. This contributes to a competition-driven growth dynamic and rebound effects in terms of absolute resource and energy consumption. A solution to this from a degrowth perspective is focusing on efficiency gains without a profit motive.[99]

## EXAMPLE: ZINGERMAN'S COMMUNITY

The small giant model is described by Bo Burlingham in his book "Small Giants: Companies That Choose to Be Great Instead of Big." Companies here move away from a focus on growth and, instead, focus on being "great." in what they do: creating a great workplace, providing excellent customer service, making products and services with the lowest impact possible, or making substantial contributions to their communities. Firms maintain their productive capacity and become non-growing firms, just focusing on improving, from an ecological and social perspective what they are doing already. This is closely connected to the idea of redefining profit from a business model perspective.[100]

An example is Zingerman's Community, which started as a delicatessen store in Ann Arbor, Michigan. While it had the opportunity to franchise and expand, it chose to stay local and become great instead of big. One of the arguments was that the local community had played a significant role in shaping the business, and one of the founders believed that opening in a different place would not be the same. Instead, they decided to open other small food businesses in the same area to be good community citizens and strengthen their position in the neighborhood, fostering resilience.[101]



Zingerman's Delicatessen Storefront  
Source: Zingerman's, Storefront, Photograph, zingermansdeli,  
<https://www.zingermansdeli.com>.

Another related principle is value versus volume. It revolves around the idea of spending more time on producing excellence through materials and product design and less time on creating desire through marketing and advertising.[102] Richard Henkel, a manufacturer of high-quality furniture serves as a prime exemplar of this approach. The business recognized that when sales do not grow, gaining efficiency becomes an important strategy to maintain profitability. Shifting away from a focus on sales the company now regards efficiency in all its facets as an opportunity to unlock untapped potential, introducing a significant element of enjoyment into their daily work, while also aligning their production site with a conscientious commitment to both environmental sustainability and the well-being of people. [103]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

For TSC this model is an example that can be used how the profit motive of a business can be shifted.

## 4.2.5

# Need based sufficiency driven business model innovation

Most of the current approaches towards sustainability focus on efficiency improvements, productivity improvements, and impact reduction: “greening” supply chains and products, by using less harmful chemicals, switching to renewable energy sources, lower impact materials, etc.

The problems connected to this were already widely discussed within this paper, but the main one is probably that an approach like this can facilitate rebound effects, leading to more consumption, and making the greening obsolete. Therefore, it is important to not only focus on efficiency but also on sufficiency: reducing absolute demand by influencing and mitigating consumption behavior, covering customer needs, not wants.[104,105] Productivism or production for its own sake should be avoided, and production should be centered around genuine needs.[106]

## EXAMPLE: RED ORKA, BABYLOOP, VEJA

Sufficiency-driven business model initiatives described by Bocken and Short (2016) and Nesterova (2020) can be:

- Sharing: Sharing the same product across multiple customers. Satisfying customers' needs without delivering ownership.
- Demand reduction services: Solutions that mitigate the use of energy and resources by individuals and businesses.
- Moderating sales and promotion: Focus on satisfying needs rather than promoting wants by implementing conscious sales and marketing techniques.
- Extending product life: Providing products designed to last a lifetime, avoiding built-in obsolescence.
- Direct reuse
- Full life cycle sufficiency: Design and product use focused on minimizing resources, with the most important example being “frugal innovations” (reducing the complexity and cost of a good and its production).

An important step towards exploring our needs instead of wants central to these initiatives is localization. Additionally, it is important to mention that the notion of needs satisfaction can also apply to satisfying the needs of non-humans, especially considering the already existing dire state of the biosphere and biodiversity. [107,108]

An example of an initiative within the fashion sector that focuses on sharing is the Dutch baby clothing rental platforms Red Orka and Babyloop. They both offer babywear through a renting model. Families can rent clothing and send it back when their babies grow out of it so it can be given to the next family. Consumers do not buy the piece of clothing but the right to use it, which saves resources and energy.[109]



Babyclothing  
Source: unsplash

Another example within the realm of fashion that focuses on moderating sales and promotion is the shoe brand VEJA. Based on the observation that 70% of the cost of a normal big sneaker brand is related to advertising they decided to cut advertising and rather invest in their production chain. With this step, they not only improve their production but also give the consumer the space to make a buying decision without extensive marketing. [110]

## ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

The TSC should build upon this concept by not only advising companies to improve efficiency but also by focusing on sufficiency and advising the implementation of strategies that reduce customer demand.



VEJA Sneakers  
Source: unsplash

#### 4.2.5.1

# Collaborative Value Creation (CVC)

A strategy for need-based business innovation is Collaborative Value Creation (CVC). CVC can be defined as the active integration of consumers and users into the value-creation process within an organization. It relies on a robust cooperative process in which consumers participate at various stages of the product lifecycle. Consumers (or users) contribute by generating ideas for new products, co-developing concepts, and even designing and configuring new products.[111] The primary goal is to ensure that products align more closely with customer needs.[112] As Hankammer and Kleer (2017) describe, “Turning consumers into prosumers, who co-create products, co-fund production, and contribute their ideas to challenges, could facilitate the transition to sufficient consumption.”

As a result, a CVC-based business model helps overcome overproduction and obsolete production capacity. It can also enhance resilient and self-sufficient local economies by gradually decentralizing and re-localizing the economy, producing knowledge and goods according to the needs of the local community. Furthermore, since CVC models actively involve consumers in decision-making, design, and production processes, they can lead to more collective and democratic downsizing of consumption and production. [113]

Hankammer and Kleer (2017) present several concepts of CVC that are partly also discussed in other chapters of this report:

- **Mass Customization:** This concept enables customers to purchase products that closely align with their individual needs. It aims to provide personalized products and services at costs comparable to mass-produced goods. To achieve this, organizations must establish resilient and adaptable production processes capable of accommodating a wide range of product variations.
- **Crowdsourcing:** This method addresses larger consumer groups simultaneously, incorporating open innovation and crowdfunding. It involves the collection of ideas and solutions from a large community. A famous example is Reddit, launched in 2005. Reddit is a social media platform and online community where users can submit, discuss, and vote, fostering diverse discussions and interactions.
- **Crowdfunding:** This refers to the financing of a project or venture by a large community.
- **Innovation Toolkits:** These are collections of information gathered from individual consumers to enhance a product or service.
- **Commons-Based Peer Production:** This involves the creation of commons-oriented goods through the voluntary contributions of a large community. Commons-based peer production (or peer-to-peer production) leverages distributed knowledge and task division, an example is the platform Wikipedia.

**“TURNING CONSUMERS INTO PROSUMERS, WHO CO-CREATE PRODUCTS, CO-FUND PRODUCTION, AND CONTRIBUTE THEIR IDEAS TO CHALLENGES, COULD FACILITATE THE TRANSITION TO SUFFICIENT CONSUMPTION.”**  
**- HANKAMMER AND KLEER**

## 4.2.6

# Non-financial reporting

For a degrowth transition, it is critical that a company accounts transparently and purpose-driven.[117] This involves not only transparent reporting but also a focus on the intention behind financial disclosure for example willingly providing financial information upon request. [118] Such transparency can help with the previously mentioned Real Cost pricing, but also ensure accountability and safeguards against mission drift. Interestingly enough, this is an area in which legislation within Europe is currently evolving. As part of the European Green Deal, under the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), large corporations are now required to engage in non-financial reporting. This reporting focuses on mapping and mitigating their impact. To work towards a degrowth transition next steps are essential like considering factors beyond the profit motive and aiming to create a positive impact.[119]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*TSC already offer guidance to companies, nudging them towards transparency and openness concerning sustainability benefits and challenges. Sustainable Accounting tools are already embedded in the the roadmap and strategic training. The key lies in their adaption to embrace post-growth characteristics.*

**“WE ARE ATTENTIVE TO WHAT WE MEASURE.”**  
**- DR. HA VINH THO,**  
**PROGRAM DIRECTOR OF**  
**THE GROSS NATIONAL**  
**HAPPINESS CENTRE IN**  
**BHUTAN [114]**



Financial reporting  
Source: unsplash

Sustainability-orientated accounting tools help to prevent undesired commodification and growth drivers.[115]

Sustainability accounting focuses on disclosing activities that have a direct impact on society, the environment, and the economic performance of an organization to external stakeholders. Among the most widely recognized measurements are Corporate Sustainability Reporting (CSR) and triple-bottom-line accounting. These approaches acknowledge the importance of financial data while expanding traditional accounting by addressing the People, Planet, and Prosperity.[116]



## 4.2.7

# Let's talk about Bcorp

Hankammer (2021) examined whether B Corp aligns with a post-growth framework. They concluded that none of the B Corp-certified companies they examined aimed to fully embrace the principles of organizations approaching degrowth. The primary challenge for most companies lies in their central focus on profit orientation. The relentless pursuit of private financial gain is a driving force behind environmental and social problems. Even in models like social enterprises and B Corps, the pursuit of private financial gain remains at its core. To move towards a more sustainable post-growth direction, businesses must shift their core purpose away from profit and instead prioritize human well-being and planetary boundaries.

### **ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES**

*For TSC this implies that while B Corp is a commendable first step, and should be complemented by other strategies focusing on governance, ownership structures, and a fundamental shift away from profit as the primary motive.*

A widely discussed certification within the realm of sustainability in fashion, but also among sustainable companies in general, is the “B Corporation.” B Corporation is a private certification that assesses the social and environmental performance of for-profit companies. I want to dedicate a short chapter within this paper to set B Corp into the context of post-growth.



B Corporation Logo

Source: Bcorp, Bcorp Logo, Graph, brevity, <https://brevity.marketing/what-it-means-to-be-certified-b-corporation/>.

## 4.3

# Ownership and Governance

In our current economic system, the primary objective of companies is to generate profits for their shareholders, and legal structures are designed with this goal in mind. Ownership of a business grants upon shareholders both governance rights (such as voting rights) and economic rights (which include the right to share in the profits generated by the company's operations). As a result, companies often become treated as commodities, representing private property from which wealth can be extracted, either through profit distributions or a sale. This legal framework tends to prioritize value creation over purpose and frequently separates control of the business from its operations and stakeholders.[120]

To navigate these challenges, embracing alternative democratic ownership and governance models becomes essential for businesses in a post-growth era. These models involve redefining the motivations that guide decision-making within a business, thus preventing mission drift. They also shift a firm's focus away from an individual profit motive and toward the concept of community-owned businesses driven by a clear sense of purpose. By doing so, these models ensure that a company maintains a not-for-profit orientation.

In this chapter, we will explore legal strategies and innovative ownership structures that aim to safeguard independence and maintain control within the hands of those actively involved in the business or invested in its mission. These strategies empower individuals to make decisions aligned with the company's purpose and support its long-term success.[121,122]

## 4.3.1

# Steward Ownership

### Regarding self-governance:

- Control is retained by those actively connected to the company's mission, known as “stewards.” This control is typically conveyed through a majority of voting rights which are exclusively accessible to stewards and are not transferable as a tradable asset.
- Through the establishment of a trust to hold company control, it becomes impervious to external purchase or sale.
- While a steward can pass on their stewardship role, it can only be transferred to another individual who shares the company's vision and is committed to its long-term purpose. These stewards can be both “insiders” (e.g., managers, employees) and “outsiders” (e.g., deeply involved advisors, stakeholder representatives, the prior generation of stewards, etc.).[124]

### Regarding profit:

Profits serving a purpose entail that wealth generated cannot be privatized. Instead, profits are dedicated to advancing the company's mission, whether through reinvestment, sharing with stakeholders, or charitable contributions. Founders and investors receive fair compensation with capped returns or dividends in a manner that supports the company's long-term growth under the guidance of stewards.[125,126]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*TSC can collaborate with other consultants specializing in steward ownership to assist companies in transitioning to this model.[127] This transformation involves converting for-profit entities into non-profit enterprises using the Steward-Ownership Model and helping them secure alternative sources of capital. Another intriguing avenue to explore is adapting TSC's legal structure towards steward ownership to align with its mission.*

It's important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all legal entity for companies pursuing steward ownership. Different strategies are available to integrate steward ownership into a company's structure, and the choice depends on legal jurisdictions and the specific needs of each company. In the following sections, this paper will give a short introduction to these strategies. It's essential to emphasize that none of these strategies, in isolation, is sufficient to achieve steward ownership; both the principles of self-governance and profit serving a purpose must form the foundation.[128,129,130]

Steward ownership represents an alternative to conventional ownership structures by embedding a company's mission and independence within its legal framework.[123] This innovative approach essentially locks two fundamental principles essential for a post-growth future within a company's legal documents.

The two core principles of steward ownership are self-governance and the purpose-driven allocation of profits.



Photographer: Yeelen Tavilla

### 4.3.1.1

# Golden Share

# Veto Share Model

The Golden Share principle represents a strategy that divides voting and economic rights into distinct categories among stakeholders. One percent of the voting rights is designated as the “Golden Share,” which carries the exclusive authority to veto any attempted sale of the company or changes to the structure. This mechanism guarantees mission lock. The Golden Share is typically entrusted to an independent entity or an external organization.[131,132]

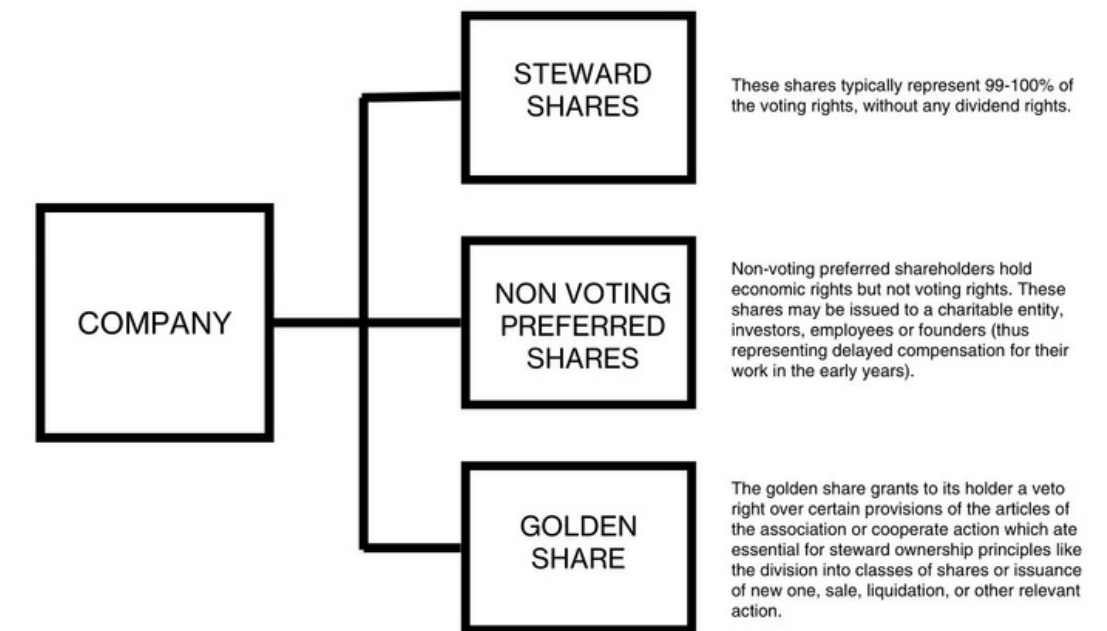
This model is an affordable and secure solution for embedding the principles of steward ownership within a company without implementing complicated and costly structural changes. Shares are divided into three different types:

- Steward shares, which grant voting rights without economic privileges.
- Preferred shares, which possess economic rights but lack voting power.
- Golden share, which holds veto rights over critical decisions.[133]

This approach is applicable in various jurisdictions, including Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, and the USA.[134]

An illustrative example is Ecosia, a German search engine. Ecosia channels the profits generated from search queries into tree-planting initiatives in regions heavily affected by deforestation. Crucially, neither internal nor external parties hold economic rights to Ecosia. The company is unequivocally committed to never being sold, ensuring that control perpetually resides with those directly involved in its mission and day-to-day operations. Their veto share is held by the Purpose Foundation and lacks dividend rights.[135]

## GOLDEN SHARE MODEL



#### 4.3.1.2

# Single Foundation

A foundation is, by definition, a self-owned entity. Within a Foundation model, a foundation is used as a vehicle to secure the mission and independence of the company. The business is majority-owned by a self-governing non-profit institution. Often, there are two boards: one that holds controlling rights and the other that holds rights to distribute dividends to charitable causes.[136]

This approach is applicable in various jurisdictions, including the EU, USA, Central and South America.[137]

A Dutch example is Triodos Bank, its connected foundation is the “Triodos Foundation.”

#### 4.3.1.3

# Trust Foundation Shareholder foundation (NL Beheerstichting)

This model separates voting rights and dividend rights completely by placing them into separate legal entities. Dividend rights are held by a charitable foundation, while voting rights are kept in a trust, foundation, or association that is managed by stewards. Trust foundation models are particularly effective because profits are fully decoupled from charitable contributions.[138]

This approach is applicable in various jurisdictions, including Germany and the Netherlands. [139] Looking at the research done within this paper, this seems to be the most common option within the Netherlands.

Examples of companies implementing this approach include Robert Bosch GmbH, Coffee Company, and the Efteling.[140]

But also, the Dutch fashion company “New Optimist.” As the company becomes profitable, investors and founders receive compensation with a capped return on investment. Once all investors are compensated only one share remains the “Type S share.” This share is owned by the foundation, which results in the complete ownership of the business by the foundation. The foundation is overseen by stewards, who can be either internal or external as described earlier. They all have a connection to the company as stakeholders but are motivated by purposes beyond profit.[141]

#### 4.3.1.4

# Perpetual Purpose Trust

The Perpetual Purpose Trust (PPT) is a non-charitable trust established for the benefit of a purpose rather than an individual and may operate indefinitely. At least 51% of the company is held by this PPT, with various stakeholders having representation on the Trust Protector Committee, responsible for electing the company's board. This approach ensures that all stakeholders have a voice without the ability to trade their rights for profit. The company's profits are distributed and shared among its diverse stakeholders, rather than being concentrated within one particular group. Many companies can include provisions to ensure reinvestment of capital in innovative projects.[142]

This model is applicable in several jurisdictions, including the USA (DE, NH, WY, ME). A closely related model implemented by John Lewis in the UK is the Trust Partnership.

Examples of companies using this approach include Organically Grown Company and Metis Construction.[144]

#### 4.3.1.5

# Neutralized kapitaal



*Photographer: Yeelen Tavilla*

In the neutralized capital model, economic ownership over the company is held by a foundation. The value of the company is thus completely “neutralized.” The voting rights lie with stewards and can never be traded.

An example of a company using this model is surf school The Shore or the food cooperation Odin.[145]

#### 4.3.1.6

# Employee Ownership Trust (EOT)

An Employee Ownership Trust is a specific type of trust structure (PPT) that enables a company to become owned by its employees. This structure secures self-management, freedom, and autonomy, which correspond with the ideals of pos growth.[146] Employee ownership in the trust is connected to employment, all privileges and rights are terminated when an individual leaves the company. Membership rights and privileges are strictly non-transferable and non-saleable. In the event of company liquidation, any resulting profits can be directed towards charitable contributions, specifically benefiting non-profit organizations that champion worker ownership.[147]

#### 4.3.1.7

# Cooperatives (Co-ops, NL coöperatie)

A cooperative is an independent association of individuals joined together to pursue shared economic, social, and cultural objectives.

Cooperatives possess a set of distinctive characteristics:

- Open and Voluntary Association: Membership in a cooperative is open to all who are willing and interested, and it is entirely voluntary
- Democratic Structure: Within a cooperative, each member holds an equal vote, promoting a democratic decision-making process.
- Equitable Distribution: Economic benefits are fairly distributed among members.

Cooperatives serve the needs of their members who contribute to their capital.[148]

As cooperatives achieve success, their member-owners also prosper. It is not uncommon for members to sell the cooperative to an external entity or restructure it into a non-cooperative form to personally gain from the enterprise's achievements. This transformation process is known as "demutualization." Such demutualization tends to be more prevalent in cooperatives organized as "producer cooperatives," where member-owners are other businesses rather than individual worker-owners. To mitigate the risk of demutualization, one potential solution is to merge cooperatives with other stewardship models.[149] Examples of such cases can frequently be observed in the housing sector, as well as in the food industry.

#### 4.3.1.8

# Decentralized autonomous organizations (DAO)

A decentralized autonomous organization (DAO) represents an innovative legal structure characterized by the absence of a central governing body and is based on blockchain technology. DAOs operate in a manner akin to cooperatives but with a distinctive feature – each share or token embodies voting power. This means that every owner can not only propose initiatives but also actively participate in organizational decision-making.[150]

#### 4.3.1.9

# Non-profit Associations

Non-profit associations can be used as a vehicle to hold either the voting rights or the economic rights of a steward-owned entity strategy towards all the above-described foundation-owned models.[151,152]



## 4.3.2

# Holacracy

While organizations must consistently make decisions that have repercussions for all stakeholders involved, there often exists an inherent power imbalance among different actors, such as shareholders, top managers, and other employees. This imbalance can frequently lead to tensions, exemplified by the conflict between an organization's sustainability ideals and its actual practices.[153]

Thus, the adoption of democratic and inclusive methods of governance becomes imperative when constructing a post-growth business. Moreover, organizations characterized by a democratic ownership structure are less prone to externalizing their costs and are better equipped to address genuine needs.[154]

## EXAMPLE: FREITAG

Holacracy is a decentralized management and organizational governance approach, which distributes authority and decision-making through a holacracy of self-organizing teams rather than being vested in a management hierarchy. The concept of a corporate hierarchy is discarded in favor of a fluid organizational structure where employees can make key decisions within their designated areas of authority. Instead of adhering to static job descriptions, individuals within a holacracy undertake multiple roles, each associated with a defined purpose, domain, and set of accountabilities. Individuals in a holacracy are granted extensive authority to make decisions within their roles, provided they do not contravene any pre-established rules in doing so. Any issues arising within the organization can be brought up in periodic governance meetings.[155]

An exemplary case of a fashion company that adopted holacracy is the Swiss bag brand FREITAG, which implemented the Holacracy organizational structure in 2016. They distribute authority across the company in the form of roles rather than putting it in the hands of a few supervisors and managers. The governance hierarchy is fluid, flexible, and revolves around expert roles. This also changes what kind of governance meetings FREITAG has and who is present at these meetings which leads to an overall more inclusive decision-making process that focuses on expertise rather than authority.[156]



*Holacracy at FREITAG*

Source: Roland Tännler, Holacracy, Photograph, freitag, <https://media.freitag.ch/en/media/about/holacracy>.

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*For TSC, it might be worthwhile to consider incorporating questioning governance within its strategic training, while also evaluating its governance structure as the team expands.*

### 4.3.3

# Commons-based peer production (CBPP)

## EXAMPLE: WIKIPEDIA

This idea is also evident in community renewable energy projects, which prioritize civic engagement and participation and employ collective legal ownership structures. In such projects, citizens collectively invest in renewable energy sources, simultaneously becoming users and investors.[158]

But more commonly, we encounter this concept in the context of the internet. For example, Wikipedia, which focuses on knowledge and resource sharing, as well as initiatives in manufacturing like Arduino, FabLabs, and Thingiverse, along with social marketplaces such as SmartEU and Fairmondo.[159]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*This approach can serve as a source of inspiration for TSC. But could also be adapted within a company as an add-on solution for addressing repair issues or facilitating knowledge sharing regarding upcycling options.*

Another illustrative example of democratic and inclusive methods of governance, but also production and ownership is commons-based peer production.

This concept transforms the traditional relationship between production and consumption into a model where production and consumption are based on peer collaboration within a common framework. It represents an emerging and innovative production in which communities actively participate in building common resources.[157]

page, see [Main Page](#). For Wikipedia's visitor introduction, see [Wikipedia:About](#). For other uses, see

[lists of encyclopedias](#).

**Wikipedia** (<sup>i</sup>k-ee-pee-dee-ə) is a multilingual online encyclopedia, is the largest and most popular general reference work ed by [Alexa](#) as of June 2019.<sup>[6]</sup> It features exclusively [Wikimedia Foundation](#), a non-profit organization funded

inger,<sup>[11]</sup> Sanger coined its name,<sup>[12][13]</sup> as a . Initially an English-language encyclopedia, versions in [English Wikipedia](#) is the largest of the more than 290 articles in 301 different languages<sup>[15]</sup> and by February ors per month.<sup>[16]</sup>

from *Encyclopædia Britannica* and Wikipedia and hough critics suggested that it might not have fared so social science or contentious social issues.<sup>[18][19]</sup> The nyone to edit had made Wikipedia the biggest and n of Jimmy Wales.<sup>[20]</sup>

ixture of "truths, half truths, and some falsehoods",<sup>[21]</sup> never, [Facebook](#) announced that by 2017 it would help [YouTube](#) announced a similar plan in 2018.<sup>[23]</sup>



The screenshot shows the Wikipedia homepage. At the top is the Wikipedia logo, a globe with various characters. Below it is the word "WIKIPEDIA" in large, bold, black letters. Underneath that is the tagline: "The logo of Wikipedia, a globe featuring glyphs from several writing systems". Below the tagline is a "Screenshot" button with a "[show]" link. To the right of the screenshot is a table with the following information:

Type of site	Online encyclopedia
Available in	303 languages
Owner	Wikimedia Foundation
Created by	Jimmy Wales Larry Sanger <sup>[1]</sup>
Website	<a href="http://www.wikipedia.org">www.wikipedia.org</a>
Alexa rank	— 5 (Global, June 2019)
Commercial	No
Registration	Optional <sup>[note 1]</sup>
Users	>282,227 active users <sup>[note 2]</sup> and >83,706,533 registered

Wikipedia Website  
Source: unsplash

#### 4.3.4

# Localism

The fashion and textile industry is characterized by global mass production based on long, complex supply chains, starting from agriculture and petrochemical production to manufacturing, logistics, and retail.[160] This results in the concentration of power, reliance on intermediaries, disconnection between products and consumers, and extensive transportation, among other issues.

A degrowth solution involves reshaping ownership structures and power dynamics by decolonizing and localizing the fashion industry, thereby empowering suppliers and producers. [161]

## EXAMPLE: THE LINEN PROJECT

The process of (re)localization entails promoting local livelihoods through activities like local production and consumption, sourcing, and local exchange, as well as the promotion of local identity. Embracing localism fosters the development of democratic, inclusive, collaborative, and decentralized businesses and government structures. Consequently, this approach reconnects people, places, communities, and environments, fostering more sustainable consumption. It allows communities to feel the impact of their actions and aids firms in integrating with their local communities, tailoring products to local needs, and promoting circularity.[162,163]

A prime example of a fully localized value chain in the textile industry is The Linen Project in the Netherlands. This initiative involves small-scale, local agriculture aimed at cultivating flax, which is used in the production of linen cloth. The overarching objective is to create garments that embody the essence of homemade, artisanal craftsmanship while prioritizing sustainability. [164]

Another example illustrating the benefits of meeting local needs and enhancing circularity is provided by Grimstad-Klepp (2022) in the context of local Norwegian clothing. These garments are often crafted from locally sourced materials, making repair and recycling easier.

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*TSC could play a role in assisting companies with production and localization in the Netherlands by connecting them with experts knowledgeable about local material sourcing and production methods.*



*The Linen Project Flax Harvest*

Source: Rob Velker, the Linen Project flax harvest at the Netherlands Open Air Museum 2020, Photograph, Craft Council Netherlands, <https://craftscouncil.nl/en/the-linen-project/>

**“IN FASHION AS IN FOOD,  
LOCAL IS THE NEW  
GREEN.”**

**- HOOVER AND KAISER**

### 4.3.5

# The Rightsized Business - Balancing organizational scale

Competitive dynamics and economic prospects often drive organizations to focus on short-term goals and expansion. However, from a sustainability perspective, organizations face the challenge of determining and maintaining an optimal size that is both economically viable and within the sustainable boundaries of local socio-ecological conditions, while also promoting a higher level of social and ecological standards.[165]

This consideration is closely connected to the idea of no-growth and no-profit companies.

By balancing organizational scale, organizations tailor their size and operations according to local ecological conditions, refraining from excessive pursuit of economic growth. This approach ensures economic sustainability, mitigates the risk of overexploiting local ecosystems, and promotes flatter organizational structures with active engagement among members.[166] All things are central to a post-growth business.

An interesting question raised in this context was raised by an interview with a “New Optimist”: How large is large enough? What constitutes “too big”? Post-growth businesses need to grow until they reach a sustainable size. But what precisely is that size? This question was explored by Reichel and Seeberg (2011) in their paper on the “rightsized business.”[167] They introduced a framework for measuring the absolute scale or “Ecological Allowance” to address the question of what size of production is just right.[168] It's a valuable strategy for businesses looking to calculate and delve deeper into the idea of a right-sized business.[169]

A tangible example of a right-sized business concept is seen in a community-supported farm in Belgium. The farmer ensures that the harvest aligns with natural rhythms and metabolic cycles. This might involve forgoing certain crops in specific years and limiting overall cultivation. Additionally, potential new members seeking to join the community are placed on a waiting list if their participation exceeds the farm's regenerative production capacity. The overarching goal is to prevent resource overuse and labor exhaustion.[170]

## EXAMPLE: WALDVIERTLER



Photographer: Yeelen Tavilla

In the fashion industry, the concept of a not-for-profit is closely tied to the organizational scale. At Waldviertler, the absence of profit in some years is not deemed a failure. The CEO explains that “a zero on the balance sheet is acceptable because it signifies that we covered our necessary expenses.” This outlook, combined with Waldviertler's commitment to minimizing ecological impacts, aligns with the idea of right-sizing profits proposed by Reichel (2010) as discussed earlier.[171]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*In TSC's consulting work, particularly when assisting companies in transitioning to a not-for-profit, not-for-growth strategy, the next crucial phase in this journey involves asking and evaluating when the endpoint is reached. When is the business big enough? What is the right size for a certain business? This question is equally relevant for TSC as a company itself, offering an opportunity for introspection from a business perspective.*

4.4

# Business Relationships

From a Marxist perspective, one of the drivers for economic growth and capital expansion is competition. Within a post-growth society and economy, it is therefore important to overcome this competition and establish new business relationships focusing on collaboration rather than competition.[172]

## 4.4.1

# Joining forces in mission-driven networks

Addressing the significant global challenges we face cannot be achieved by a single entity. One company alone will not change the world. Therefore, contributing to a more significant socio-ecological transformation requires companies to help facilitate change by joining or supporting mission-driven networks.[173]

## EXAMPLE: PATAGONIA

This involvement can take on a traditional form, where a company either creates new environmental or social organizations or becomes a part of existing ones. Alternatively, companies can offer support to grassroots environmental or social organizations through financial contributions or the provision of goods.[174] Another approach is engaging in and helping to provide infrastructures that allow a diverse group of actors, including social movement participants, to support each other and leverage synergies. This could be facilitating the sharing of knowledge, space, or equipment, to collectively gain the strength and capabilities to implement socio-ecologically change.[175]

An illustrative instance of this approach is Patagonia's initiative, which grants its employees five days of paid leave annually to volunteer at their children's schools. Additionally, Patagonia offers an internship program where employees can take one to two months of paid leave to work on environmental issues in non-profit organizations.[176]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*For TSC, this implies a focus on connecting people, a theme already emphasized in strategy workshops. It also entails initiating collaborations with NGOs to link them with larger corporations.*



*Shipping Employees Volunteer with Environmental Non-Profits*

Source: Patagonia Shipping Department, *Our Shipping Employees Volunteer with Environmental Non-Profits*, Photograph, patagonia, <https://www.patagonia.ca/stories/shipping-out-for-the-environment/story-17843.html>.

#### 4.4.2

# Building personal customer relationships

In a sales-driven economic model, companies often prioritize the quantity of transactions over the quality of their customer relationships. Consequently, they may have limited knowledge of their customers' needs and their marketing efforts can contribute to environmentally harmful overproduction by tempting consumers to purchase more than necessary.[177]

#### EXAMPLE: BRM

For a degrowth transition, it is therefore crucial to engage with customers directly and consistently build long-term, loyal, trustful, and needs-oriented relationships. These relationships in turn help reduce growth pressures and enable sufficiency-oriented marketing and sales practices.[178] Community creation which is closely related, also helps with themes like emotional durability and creating a need-based product. Themes this report will focus on within the product section.

An example of this customer-centric strategy can be seen in the IT consultancy BRM, which intentionally restricts its customer base. This deliberate choice allows BRM to maintain direct and intensive relationships with existing customers, who, in turn, become loyal and return for their services.[179]



*Business Consulting*  
Source: Christina @wocintechchat.com, Photograph, unsplash.

#### 4.4.3

# Value-based business relations

Engaging in business necessitates working with and sourcing from partners and suppliers.[180] To maintain a clear mission focus it is therefore crucial for businesses to adopt a rigorous approach when selecting suppliers that align with the company's values.[181]

Degrowth-oriented businesses should focus on consistently selecting and collaborating with suppliers, economic partners, and customers based on shared social and environmental values and practices and treating them as equals. This approach also leads to the long-term benefits of trustworthy and loyal cooperation, ultimately helping businesses move beyond a narrow market-centric mindset.[182]

For example, em-faktor, a self-described social profit communications agency, adheres to a principle when selecting B2B customers: "We work for social profit enterprises. For us, it doesn't matter whether they are legally non-profit or not, as long as they serve a social purpose..." (Froese et al., 2023).

#### 4.4.4

# Collaborating with all stakeholders and competitors – Open license production

## EXAMPLE: THE SUSTAINABILITY CLUB

As already outlined in the introduction of this theme, the current economic system is based on competition, which is one of the main drivers for growth. From a degrowth perspective, it is, therefore, important to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders, including competitors.[183]

Various strategies can support this collaboration, with the simplest being open communication and sharing of knowledge globally. Enterprises connected on a global scale can establish new knowledge networks that rely on shared knowledge, code, designs, and software.[184] Additionally, other methods, such as open license production [185], can facilitate this collaborative approach. Shared open design strategies allow for designs to be shared, modified, replicated, and improved by anyone. In addition to sharing know-how and designs, sharing infrastructure through open spaces promotes resource sharing. The use of crowdsourcing enables the sharing of knowledge and prevents the unnecessary duplication of efforts, leading to more efficient resource utilization.[186]



*The Sustainability Club Post-Growth Toolkit*

All of these reasons are also why we, here at TSC, have chosen not to keep this report to ourselves but to share it freely and open-source. We firmly believe that adopting Post- and Degrowth business principles is the only way to achieve true sustainability. Therefore, information related to this critical topic should be freely accessible. We believe in the power of sharing ideas. By collaborating, we hope to expedite the transition process towards more sustainable practices and create fresh, innovative concepts together, inspiring each other to transition to a Post-Growth Future.



## 4.5

# Product

In a world already saturated with clothing the question arises: What can a product look like to create a positive impact? What defines a truly sustainable product? And what type of products and services can help to move towards a post-growth future?

As Puhakka (2018) describes the real challenge in the process of developing a sustainable, post-growth business model lies in ensuring that the product or service offering is genuinely sustainable to its core, encompassing every aspect of value creation, delivery, and capture. This entails the imperative to reduce environmental impacts at all stages of a product or service's life cycle while also focusing on strategies like repair, reduction, reuse, and recycling.[187,188],

In the upcoming chapter, will explore strategies for envisioning products suited to a post-growth world. In terms of products, innovations and strategies are popping up by the day therefore this is only a small selection of starting points. However, it's crucial to bear in mind that every product carries a negative impact. No product is inherently sustainable, and consumption itself is not sustainable. Therefore, the most critical step for a business within a degrowth transition is thoughtful consideration and reflection on every product being offered for sale.

## 4.5.1

# Rethink product that is sold and cap production

One of the core characteristics of a post-growth business is the emphasis on minimizing resource usage and embracing renewable alternatives.

Every product that is produced has an impact, so the central question that a business within a degrowth transition must consider is the reevaluation of the products it offers.[189] Questioning whether a product truly needs to be produced, especially in an oversaturated market like fashion.

## EXAMPLE: BEARMADE

If the decision is that there is a genuine need for the product, another strategy to consider in this context is capping production. This locks a not-for-profit not-for-growth motive within a company and ensures that production efforts are primarily geared towards consistently creating an environmentally and socially more sustainable product rather than just more product. This improvement includes enhancing product durability and longevity.[190]

An illustrative example is the brand Bearmade. They are specializing in crafting bags with a focus on longevity, utilizing GOTS-certified organic dry-waxed cotton and capping their production at a maximum of 25 bags per week. The durability of their bags is guaranteed for life, and they are designed to be repairable. Furthermore, Bearmade even accepts worn-out bags in exchange for a credit.[191,192]



Bearmade

Source: Bearmade, Photograph, vividlifestyle, <https://www.vividlifestyle.com/en-nl/blogs/magazine/bearmade-the-british-bag-brand-getting-everyone-outdoors>.



Photographer: Yeelen Tavilla

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*For TSC it is first and foremost already interesting to not only hint companies towards rethinking profit but also rethinking product. A simple connection and introduction to the theme could be that the sustainability regulations that are being introduced right now are easier to comply to if less product is made from a company side.*

For those companies willing to take more progressive steps, the act of capping production and reevaluating their product lines is closely tied to the concept of the “right-sized business” discussed earlier in this essay. The question can be raised with those companies when production could be appropriately capped, to sustain the business but not be dependent on growth rates anymore. Try doing this very early within a business existence and lock it legally to prevent a mission drift.

## 4.5.2

# Facilitating having less

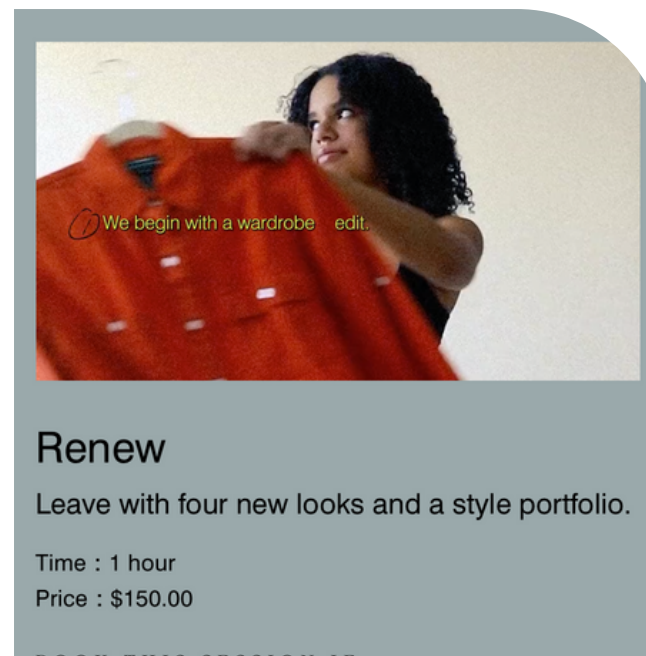
In a sales-driven economic model, organizations often lack the incentive to promote the most environmentally friendly use of their products or services. This reluctance stems from the fact that educating customers on how to use a company's offerings more efficiently or prolong the lifespan of a product typically leads to a reduction in revenue.[193] However, for degrowth companies, the focus shifts from solely prioritizing revenue to adopting a more holistic approach toward their products.

To address this shift, businesses should explore strategies for encouraging reduced consumption and offering demand-reduction services.[194] One effective approach involves providing advisory services that enhance clients' resource and energy efficiency, delivering financial savings that outweigh the cost of the service. This approach allows both the company and its clients to benefit from improved environmental and economic performance.[195]n.

### EXAMPLE: LOTTE V1

Another strategy involves narrowing the range of available products to emphasize more modular or capsule dressing systems.[196]

As an example within the fashion and styling industry, Lotte offers a remote sustainability styling service that centers on a client's existing wardrobe. Instead of encouraging the purchase of new clothing, Lotte's service focuses on maximizing the potential of the clothes people already own.[197]



*Lottev1 Services*

Source: Lottev1, Renew, Photograph, lottev1, <https://lottev1.com>.

### 4.5.3

# Renewable resources, environmentally and socially minded sourcing

Material choices are of paramount importance when creating a product. The impact of a product can be significantly altered by selecting different materials, and this consideration should begin during the design stage.

Approximately 80% of a product's environmental footprint is determined by choices made during the design phase.[198]

## EXAMPLE: FULL CIRCLE

From a post-growth perspective, it is essential to recognize the distinction between renewable and non-renewable resources. Degrowth-oriented firms should prioritize the use of renewable resources.[199] As Schumacher (1993) points out, "Non-renewable goods should only be utilized when absolutely necessary, and even then, with the utmost care and meticulous conservation efforts."

An example within the fashion space is the Amsterdam-based zero-waste brand Full Circle. They work with yarn from RECOVER Tex which is a mix of 50% recycled cotton from returned T-shirts and 50% virgin organic cotton. Their textile and manufacturing process is in Portugal and GOTS certified. At the end of a T-shirt's lifetime, it can be given back to the company and recycled into new yarn.[200]

However, the concept of sourcing extends beyond simply considering renewable resources. In the degrowth business context, being environmentally and socially sustainable is crucial. Businesses should explore partnerships with other organizations that share similar values, as this collaborative approach can facilitate the transition to a post-growth world. This could involve partnering with small firms, farmers, cooperatives, and Fair Trade initiatives.[201]



Full Circle Circular Bag

Source: Full Circle, Circular Messenger Bag (Brown), Photograph, fullcircle, <https://www.fullcircleclothing.eu/collections/circular-bags/products/circular-messenger-bag-brown?variant=39589325799490>.

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*Looking at TSC it is imperative to ensure that clients understand the profound impact that material and design choices have on product sustainability. Within the strategy sessions companies should assess whether their values are reflected not only at their European headquarters but throughout the entire supply chain. TSC can help companies with their knowledge about the business to switch to more environmentally and socially minded sourcing.*

However, it is worth noting that exclusively using renewable resources and adopting socially and environmentally friendly sourcing practices is not the sole criterion for becoming a post-growth business. Other central factors include moving away from a profit-driven motive and embracing alternative ownership structures.

## 4.5.4

# Frugality

The term “Frugality” describes the quality or state of being frugal, which involves the careful management of material resources. In its essence, frugality describes the act of doing more with less and therefore differs from sustainability which is about ensuring needs will be met for the future.[202]

## EXAMPLE: CONSCIOUS KITCHEN

Frugality as a concept is highly relevant in various aspects of a degrowth business, particularly when considering efficiency. As mentioned previously the most sustainable choice is not to produce at all. When the use of resources is required, a valuable guiding principle in resource management can be frugality or efficiency. However, it's crucial to recognize that efficiency should always go hand in hand with sufficiency, as solely focusing on efficiency can still result in increased production.[203,204], Frugality goes further than just considering production, it also has a significant effect on the consumer itself. Degrowth businesses applying frugality should support consumers in consuming less, preventing impulsive purchasing, and redefining their relationship with consumption.[205,206],

Classical strategies for embracing frugality include waste reduction, the curbing of costly habits, resisting instant gratification through fiscal self-restraint, striving for efficiency, avoiding common pitfalls, challenging expensive social norms, identifying and avoiding manipulative advertising, engaging in barter, and being connected to local conditions.

Nesterova (2021) focuses more on the production process itself and describes frugal practices, such as preventing over-heating and over-lighting, waste minimization and avoidance, prudent use of materials, water conservation, recognizing waste as a resource, reducing food waste, repurposing, exchanging, sharing, reusing and recycling strategies.



Conscious Kitchen Den Haag

Source: Conscious Kitchen, Weekly Dinner, Photograph, <https://www.consciouskitchen.nl>

An illustrative example within the food sector is the Conscious Kitchen in The Hague. A volunteer group that cooks community dinners using food from the Haagse Markt that would otherwise be discarded.[207,208]

## EXAMPLE: ZEEMAN



Zuning Zeeman

Source: Zeeman, Zuning, Screenshot, zeeman, <https://www.zeeman.com/nl/zuning>.

An example in the fashion sector is Zeeman with their strategy called “zuning.” Within this strategy, they explore how to offer “more sustainable” products at a low price. However, it's important to note that Zeeman's approach is not a method to initiate a degrowth transformation. To facilitate such a transformation, it should and must be complemented with other methods.

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*In summary, frugality is a term that summarizes a multitude of degrowth strategies, with a strong focus on prudent resource management. TSC can offer guidance to companies, emphasizing the importance of evaluating product effectiveness and sufficiency.*

## 4.5.5

# Circular Product

One of the most widely discussed strategies in the realm of fashion and sustainability is circularity. Often, it is closely linked to the green growth paradigm, which is questioned in the introduction of this paper. Nevertheless, the fundamental strategies associated with circular product design remain relevant for post-growth businesses as they prioritize a consistent reduction in material and energy consumption.[209]

The following chapter will delve into the multitude of strategies connected to circularity and provide detailed explanations of some of them. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation is a significant player in the circular economy space, offering extensive information and strategies in their publication titled "A New Textiles Economy: Redesigning Fashion's Future." [210]

It is essential to note that merely adopting circularity principles does not automatically transform a business into a degrowth entity. Businesses looking to embrace post-growth models must consider additional factors, such as transitioning to a not-for-profit approach rather than a for-profit one.

## 4.5.5.1

# Circular Principles

The butterfly diagram, a representation of the circular economy system, visually demonstrates the perpetual movement of materials within a circular economy. This system comprises two primary cycles: the technical cycle and the biological cycle. Within the technical cycle, products and materials are sustained in a continuous loop through practices like reuse, repair, remanufacturing, and recycling. Conversely, in the biological cycle, the nutrients extracted from biodegradable materials are reintroduced into the Earth's ecosystem to support the regeneration of nature (Figure 5 ).[211]

The according circular principles described by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) can be summarized as follows:

1. Maximizing the inner circle's potential: Utilize the highest possible R strategy.
2. Extending the lifespan of products: Create products that endure over time, and overcome planned obsolescence.
3. Harnessing the power of cascading use: If a can't be reused, or lost its value it should be cascaded to a simpler product. Always finding new forms of utility.
4. Power of pure circles: Avoid mixing raw materials whenever possible. Strive for 100% purity in materials, as opposed to blends like 50% cotton and 50% something else. Aim for absolute purity within the design phase to make circularity possible.

For products to effectively circulate within either the biological or technical cycle, and in alignment with circular principles, it is imperative that they are designed with their eventual circulation in mind. An example of this is Nudie Jeans. Every pair of Nudie jeans comes with a commitment to free repairs to extend their lifespans and reduce waste. The brand also offers a take-back program for its garments, which are then repurposed to craft other items within its collections as part of Nudie Jeans' closed-loop material system. In its efforts to recycle products after extensive reuse, organic cotton is meticulously separated from conventional cotton to enhance the recycling process, resulting in new products that are both organic and recycled.[212]

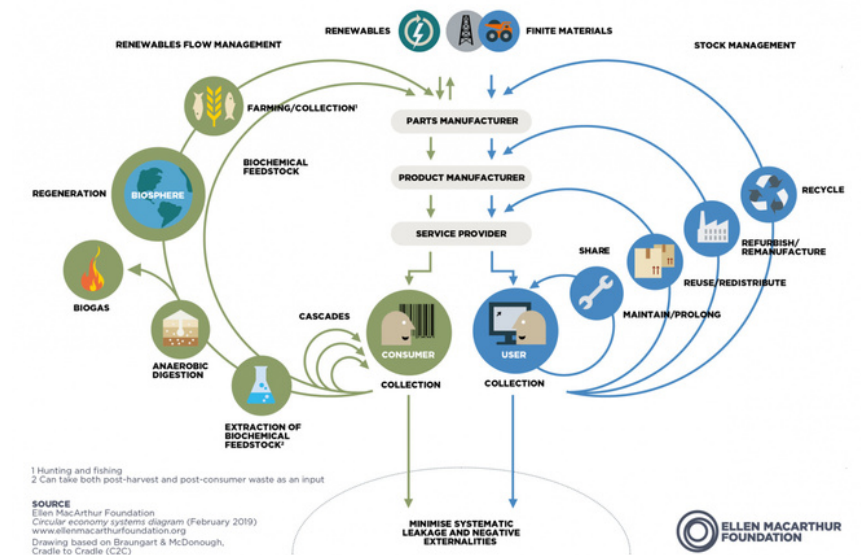


Figure 5: Butterfly Model

Source: Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Circular economy system diagram, graph, February 2019, <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org>.

#### 4.5.5.2

# Cradle-to-cradle design

The Cradle-to-Cradle design strategy, which complements the principles of the circular economy, was developed by the German chemist Michael Braungart and the American architect William McDonough. The approach aims to create a design system that is highly efficient and waste-free. The central tenet is the idea that there should be no waste, only valuable nutrients, capable of being endlessly reused.[213] Because of the previously described limits, full circularity is not possible. Still, it can be viewed from a post-growth perspective as a strategy for thinking about product design.

In 2010, the Cradle to Cradle Products Innovation Institute was founded and created an exclusive license, certification program and methodology to certify cradle-to-cradle products based on certain parameters. One of the certified products under this standard is the classical Cashmere Sweater produced by Ralph Lauren.[214,215]

#### 4.5.5.3

# Cascading

Cascading is the process of using the sidestream from one process as feedstock for the next process: the sequential and consecutive use of resources. It is a method to create added value in a circular economy and one of the key principles of circularity.[216]

Important to note is that, cascading often leads to downcycling, which involves recycling something in a manner that results in a product of lower value than the original item. Therefore, it is essential to explore alternative options first.

## EXAMPLE: FREITAG

An exemplary fashion company that has embraced cascading is FREITAG. The bag manufacturer is making bags from discarded truck tarps. Truck tarps today consist of a polyester fabric and a PVC coating which can't be separated and therefore can't be reused or recycled. FREITAG upcycles the tarps into bags, that are long-lasting and repairable.[217]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*TSC can advise companies to consider cascading as an option to source materials or to contribute their materials for cascading use.*

#### 4.5.5.4

# 10 R- strategies

The 10'R strategies are simple approaches to product circularity that can either be used independently or in combination with each other. They can be seen as a base framework for circular strategies:

1. Refuse
2. Reduce
3. Rethink/ Redesign
4. Reuse
5. Repair
6. Refurbish
7. Remanufacture
8. Repurpose
9. Recycle
10. Recover [218]

#### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*For TSC, especially within the context of degrowth businesses, employing R-strategies can help in the decision-making process. For instance, when rethinking products, the strategies can be a valuable strategy. Moreover, they can offer a structured approach for companies that want to start a circularity journey.*

#### 4.5.5.5

# Deposit- Refund system

Introducing deposits is a strategic measure to help with circularity. With items like glass and often plastic bottles, consumers in for example the Netherlands pay a deposit. If the bottles are returned to a supermarket, distributor, or producer, the consumer gets the deposit back. This ensures that the bottles are not lost in general waste and can be recycled accordingly.[219]

In the autumn of 2023, the Dutch fashion company "New Optimist" initiated a project to implement deposit systems for their clothes. This allows them to collect clothes when they are no longer in use and guarantees that a garment will eventually be recycled or given a second life. When a customer purchases a New Optimist garment, they are charged a small deposit fee. That money stays in an account of the independent N.E.W. Foundation and is refunded when the clothing is returned.[220]

#### EXAMPLE: NEW OPTIMIST



*New Optimist Statiegeld*

Source: Carlotta Luisa Kelber, New Optimist Event, Photograph, 13 September 2023.



## 4.5.6

# Need-based-product and local orientation

In the current economic model, products are often directly linked to profit and are completely separated from genuine needs. However, from a degrowth perspective, it is crucial to avoid productivism or production for its own sake. Instead, production should be centered around fulfilling genuine needs.[221]

This can be achieved by reducing absolute demand through the influence and mitigation of consumption behaviors, focusing on covering customer needs rather than mere wants. [222,223]



Photographer: Yeelen Tavilla

From a post-growth standpoint, the primary reason for establishing a company should be to implement solutions to social and/or environmental problems.[224] A local orientation can help achieving this objective. This local orientation must take place at the product design level involving local actors, skills, and local production processes.[225]

### **ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES**

*This kind of product creation is a valuable strategy for TSC to question production within a company.*

## 4.5.7

# User-centered design

User-centered design, or designing for optimal use, means allowing the use phase to influence decisions regarding materials and design. This design approach is rooted in viewing the problem of fashion as a systemic issue, requiring a reevaluation of the system in which products cycle longer to ensure optimal utilization and longevity.

The strategy is similar to the CVC model but then adopted in the development or ideation phase of determining if there is a need for a specific product and what the look and function of the product should be to best serve the use of the intended target group.



Photographer: Yeelen Tavilla

From a post-growth perspective, it's crucial to engage the consumer and bridge the gap between the design process, production, and consumption. This strategy can help ensure that a product remains in circulation for an extended period, promoting longer product longevity.

There are three different methods described by circular.fashion (2022) that designers can apply to gain insight:

1. Step into the shoes of your user: Immerse yourself in the user's world; place yourself in a situation where you would encounter them and attempt to experience their world and thoughts.
2. Cultural probes: Provide the user with a kit they can use on their own to observe themselves and share feedback afterward.
3. Talk to Extreme Users: Conduct interviews with extreme users. Extreme users have either extensive experience with your product or none at all. The reason for focusing on extreme users is that they can articulate their needs more explicitly than the average customer.

## 4.5.8

# Product as a Service

In a conventional linear economic model centered around sales and customer ownership, companies typically aim to boost their profits by constantly striving to exploit economies of scale and sell more.

This is problematic because the expansion of production brings with it an increasing environmental burden in the form of energy and material consumption as well as pollution and waste generation.[226]

A potential solution lies in the concept of “servicization.” This term refers to the practice of offering products as services, with a focus on long-term and sustainability-oriented service contracts. By providing customers with access to a product's functionality, companies can economically benefit from its resource efficiency, durability, reliability, repairability, and reusability. [227,228] The business retains ownership of the product, which can be utilized by multiple customers. The emphasis is on delivering functionality and service rather than promoting ownership.[229]

Nonetheless, it's essential to acknowledge that servicization is not a universal solution. It must be implemented with caution to mitigate rebound effects. In a degrowth context, collaborative consumption initiatives become crucial. Take the example of Airbnb, a peer-to-peer service and online home-sharing platform. It could increase the travel frequency of users and the range of lower-cost destination choices.[230] Such examples can also be found within fashion Sara Arnold launched the clothing rental platform, Higher Studio, promoting rentals and re-use over consumption. She soon realized that her business was contributing to the growth of the clothing market instead of working against this expansion.[231]

### **ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES**

*For TSC and companies that are consulted by TSC this means that within a degrowth context, it is very important to mitigate these effects. Peer-to-peer services should if possible “based on mutual help and the exchange of skills or knowledge rather than the exchange of money.”[232]*

## 4.5.9

# Durability

### EXAMPLE: MUD JEANS

When it comes to clothing, extending the active service life of garments is considered one of the most effective ways to reduce the overall impact of the clothing industry. Prolonging the life of existing clothing reduces the need for new resource extraction and manufacturing. [235] Therefore, it is widely acknowledged in post-growth literature that the principles of durability and reparability should take center stage in product design. This includes creating products that are not only more durable in terms of materials but also offer repair services, considering emotional durability as well as strategies like reselling and creating second-hand markets. [236] Important is to keep the previously mentioned rebound effect in mind and always have a not-for-profit not-for-growth motive underlining these strategies.

An example within the fashion industry is the denim brand MUD Jeans. They offer a repair service and a system for taking back jeans for resale or recycling, making them a closed-loop brand. While environmentally and socially responsible production may come at a higher price, the company also offers a leasing system to make their jeans more accessible. [237,238]



*MUD Jeans*

Source: MUD Jeans, Case study, Photograph, ecochain, <https://ecochain.com/case-studies/mud-jeans-saved-15-million-tons-of-co2/>.

In the current economic system, we observe a trend towards minimizing durability in pursuit of profit. The faster products wear out, the greater the flow of production and income can be. Traditional economics favors products that have a shorter lifespan because their replacement stimulates economic activity, and the concept goes as far as planned obsolescence. [233]

Especially within fashion Fletcher (2010) the lacking fabric and construction quality of garments which fail to withstand laundering, encouraging a culture of rapid replacement. [234]

#### 4.5.9.1

# Provide repair services

A practical strategy to promote durability is for organizations to offer their customers the option of renewing or repairing their products, even decades after purchase.[239] This can either be organized by the company itself or can work as a collaboration with local businesses for example small tailor shops.

### EXAMPLE: WALDVIERTLER

An example of a company that implemented a repair system is Waldviertler. The company encourages customers to send in their shoes for repair instead of purchasing new ones, actively discouraging excessive consumption. Even though selling new shoes would yield higher company profits, the company prioritizes the conservation of resources by encouraging customers not to waste them.[240]

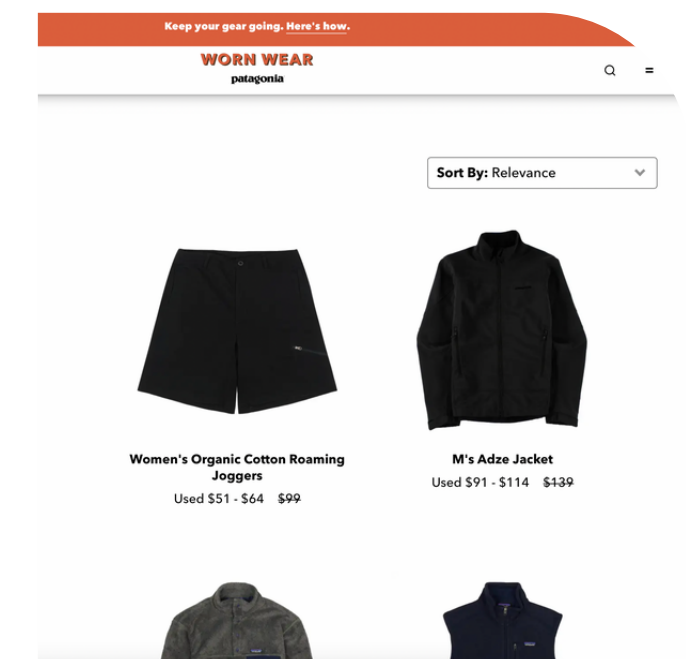
#### 4.5.9.2

# Promote reuse

The linear, sales-oriented, and competitive economy in overdeveloped countries leads to environmental pollution due to the excessive consumption of newly produced goods.[241] Creating opportunities for customers to reuse products, such as by establishing second-hand markets, can play a significant role in reducing general waste, landfills, and material consumption.[242] By diminishing the necessity for new product production, extending a product's life cycle, and enhancing product utilization.[243]

Second-hand clothing shops serve as a fitting example of this concept. For instance, Patagonia has established an online shop section where consumers can sell their old Patagonia gear without incurring any commission charges.[244] However, it is also crucial to keep the rebound effect in mind when implementing these strategies.

### EXAMPLE: PATAGONIA



Patagonia Worn Wear Online shop  
Source: Patagonia, Worn Wear, Screenshot, Patagonia,  
<https://wornwear.patagonia.com/shop/all>

### 4.5.9.3

# Emotional durability

When we take a closer look at the fashion industry, especially its emphasis on low prices, we can observe a significant shift in purchasing and wearing habits. People often acquire multiple garments quickly and discard them due to their perceived low value.[225] This perception of low value is closely tied to the concept of durability. To enhance durability, businesses should not only consider the construction of the garments but also focus on the emotional aspect. Emotional durability involves designing products that people genuinely want to keep. While physical durability resists wear and damage, emotional durability counteracts our natural inclination to desire the next new thing.[246]

Companies need to explore ways to enhance this emotional durability. For example, tailoring garments to individual customers, known as custom tailoring [247], is one approach. When something is custom-made for a person, it often holds greater perceived and therefore emotional value. Companies can consider options like allowing customers to change the garment's color or style to prolong their attachment to the product. Further strategies are explored by Jonathan Chapman in his book "Emotionally Durable Design".

A tangible example could be designing a blouse that can be recut into various styles. The consumer purchases a blouse that can be returned to have it redyed or redesigned to, for example, remove the sleeves. This extends revenue streams and engages the user.[248]

## 4.5.10

# Convivial products

Economic organizations engage in a competitive “tech or innovation race,” constantly developing and marketing innovations. However, they often lack the incentive to design products that are accessible, adaptable, durable, and repairable – key components of post-growth product strategies. A convivial product embodies the idea of creating products that are customizable, repairable, and appropriately scaled to their core function.[249]

Economic organizations compete with each other in developing and marketing ever-new technological innovations (“tech race”) but lack a strong incentive to design products that are accessible, adaptable, durable, and repairable. Convivial product is the idea of creating a product that is customizable, repairable, and appropriate in complexity and scale to its core function, and as a result, enables self-determined and inclusive use.[250]

## EXAMPLE: DR. BRONNER'S

An example of this concept can be seen in Dr. Bronner's, which offers a simple and versatile soap product. This soap can be used in various ways, such as for personal hygiene, cleaning cosmetic brushes, and dishwashing. The three basic versions of the product differ only in the addition of essential oils, and they are sustainably sourced and designed to have a long lifespan due to their high concentration. The product provides an alternative to owning a complex set of cleaning products. [251]



Photographer: Yeelen Tavilla

## 4.5.11

# Upcycling

Aesthetic preferences can contribute to environmental pollution in our economic system as functional products are discarded and replaced before needed. Marketing and, if necessary, transforming these can help reduce product waste. This practice is commonly referred to as “upcycling”. [252]

### EXAMPLE: URBAN TEXTILE COMMONS

Examples include the London Urban Textiles Commons, which provides “regenerative textiles” to clothing makers. Or Dr. Amy Twigger Holroyd's project, ReKnit Revolution, which encourages people to reknit the knitwear in their wardrobes.[253]

Connected to this concept is the idea of collecting and salvaging used products. Products that are no longer in use are collected, often through take-back services, and if suitable, they are salvaged for materials and spare parts. This allows them to be reused by customers or the organization itself, ultimately extending their useful life and reducing waste.[254]



*London Urban Textile Commons*

Source: alicesuzannehollow, WHAT IS A COMMONS?, Photograph, lutc.studio, <https://www.lutc.studio>.

### EXAMPLE: REKNIT REVOLUTION



*Reknit Revolution*

Source: Jamie Grey at Rugby Art Gallery & Museum, REKNIT REVOLUTION, Photograph, <https://reknitrevolution.org>.



4.5.12

# Collection of additional strategies

Because strategies for creating truly environmentally and socially sustainable products are continually evolving, and some of the ideas are self-explanatory and don't require connections or links, a list of additional strategies can be found here. Nevertheless, it is crucial to always assess these strategies through a post-growth lens.

- Engaging consumers in packaging reuse [255]
- Seasonal produce [256]
- Digital sampling
- Zero Waste production techniques
- Collecting and salvaging used products [257]



Photographer: Yeelen Tavilla Model: Paula Chacartegui

# Marketing, Communication, Education and Knowledge Sharing

In today's economy, marketing and communication by brands primarily serve as strategies to sell more products to consumers. Most of the marketing theories and models are being employed to promote the growth of consumer culture. This approach was based on the assumption that increased consumption leads to economic growth, which is generally seen as a positive outcome.

However, in a transition towards a post-growth world, it becomes imperative to shift our communication goals when it comes to marketing and branding. The central question here is whether marketing still has a role, or if it becomes irrelevant (or even contradictory) when the objective is to reduce consumption. This question will not be answered within this chapter. But this chapter will explore various strategies for rethinking marketing and communication and shift it towards a strategy to promote sufficiency and educate the consumer.[258]

## 4.6.1

# Limiting Advertising

Within the realm of degrowth, scholars widely agree that limiting and restricting advertising is one of the most crucial steps in a degrowth transition. This is because advertising is often employed purely to maximize profit.

Shifting from the profit-maximization logic in a degrowth transition also means shifting away from traditional marketing practices. Instead, businesses should focus on genuine engagement within communities and foster interactions with customers to better understand their authentic needs.[259]



Veja Shoes  
Source: unsplash

Advertising's role, in a degrowth transition, could serve as a means of education. Consumers should become aware of the impacts of their purchasing and consumption choices. This awareness can facilitate a shift from consumption as a way to fulfill needs to using consumption to express identity. Therefore, campaigns could not merely raise awareness of environmental issues but could also promote lifestyle movements that support post-growth and degrowth.[260]

### **ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES**

*TSC could start advising brands to redirect their financial resources from marketing to improving supply chains (reducing environmental impacts and improving working conditions). This simple shift in profits is an easy step that can set companies on the path to degrowth.*

**“THE ULTIMATE AIM OF ADVERTISING IS TO PROVIDE A SUSTAINED PROPAGANDA ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CORPORATE GOODS AND SERVICES WHILE NO SIMILAR CASE IS MADE ON BEHALF OF ARTISTIC, EDUCATIONAL, OR OTHER HUMANE ACHIEVEMENTS”  
- SPASH AND DOBERNIG (2017)**

## 4.6.2

# Communicating for sufficiency

In the current market-driven economy and culture where the satisfaction of needs is often synonymous with material consumption, companies compete by offering and marketing a wide range of products and services. Consumers mostly don't need this wide range of products or services but with the help of marketing a want is created.[261]

For a degrowth transition, it is therefore important to adopt a sufficiency-oriented approach in customer communication and marketing. This approach aims to educate customers and prompt them to reconsider the actual necessity of their consumption decisions.[262] Furthermore, it can go even a step further by encouraging consumers to make do with less and actively collaborating with them to reduce material and energy consumption.[263]

### EXAMPLE: PATAGONIA

An example of communicating for sufficiency is Patagonia's "Don't buy this jacket" advertisement. This campaign urges customers to reflect on their consumption choices before finalizing a purchase. But it is important to mention that this campaign actually led to an increase in sales for Patagonia.[264]

## DON'T BUY THIS JACKET



It's Black Friday, the day in the year when firms from retail to tech and others try to make real money. But Black Friday, and the culture of consumption it reflects, puts the economy of natural systems that support all life firmly in the red. We're now using the resources of our world at a rate that's faster than ever and only planet.

Because Patagonia wants to be a business for good long-term, we have a responsibility to our future generations to do the opposite of every other business today. We ask you to buy less and to reflect before you spend a dime on the jacket or anything else.

Environmental damage is not inevitable. It's a choice we have made. We can do better. This is what we have asked you to do. When you buy a jacket, you're also buying the water, the energy, the heat, the water, the paper, the ink, the glue, the thread, the buttons, the zippers, the dyes, the finishes, the packaging, the shipping, the retail, the store, the staff, the lights, the heat, the air conditioning, the security, the insurance, the taxes, the interest, the debt, the risk, the uncertainty, the fear, the greed, the power, the corruption, the war, the violence, the suffering, the death, the destruction, the pollution, the climate change, the sea level rise, the ocean acidification, the ozone depletion, the loss of biodiversity, the loss of ecosystems, the loss of resilience, the loss of hope, the loss of love, the loss of life.

WE make useful gear that lasts a long time. YOU don't buy what you don't need.

**REPAIR**  
WE help you repair your Patagonia gear. YOU pledge to fix what's broken.

**REUSE**  
WE help find a home for Patagonia gear you no longer need. YOU sell or pass it on.

**RECYCLE**  
WE will take back your Patagonia gear that is worn out. YOU pledge to keep your stuff out of the landfill and incinerator.

**COMMON THREADS INITIATIVE**  
WE make useful gear that lasts a long time. YOU don't buy what you don't need.

**REPAIR**  
WE help you repair your Patagonia gear. YOU pledge to fix what's broken.

**REUSE**  
WE help find a home for Patagonia gear you no longer need. YOU sell or pass it on.

**RECYCLE**  
WE will take back your Patagonia gear that is worn out. YOU pledge to keep your stuff out of the landfill and incinerator.

There is much to be done and plenty for us all to do. Don't buy what you don't need. Think before you buy anything. Go to [patagonia.com/CommentThreads](http://patagonia.com/CommentThreads) or scan the QR code below. Take the Common Threads Initiative pledge, and join us in the "No TC" to rethink a world where we take only what nature can replace.

patagonia.com

Patagonia advertisement from 25 November, 2011

Source: Patagonia, Don't Buy This Jacket, Photograph, patagonia, <https://eu.patagonia.com/gb/en/stories/dont-buy-this-jacket-black-friday-and-the-new-york-times/story-18615.html>.

### EXAMPLE: SOM ENERGIA



Som Energia, Catalonia

Source: Susanne Hirschmann, Board members, Photograph, energy-democracy, <https://energy-democracy.net/som-energia-the-first-energy-cooperative-which-provides-an-alternative-to-the-traditional-energy-suppliers/>.

In a different context unrelated to fashion, consider Som energia, a Catalan energy cooperative, which includes monthly energy-saving tips with its electricity bills. Additionally, the bills provide customers with a comparison between their individual electricity consumption and the average. This information is intended to raise awareness and motivate individuals to improve their energy consumption habits.[265]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

Within TSC it is important to make companies realize why they do marketing and in what way it pushes a consumer to buy. Where is it only information and where is it creating a want? What do we actually need to communicate and what are we communicating to sell a product?

### 4.6.3

# Promoting sustainability-oriented learning

Long global supply chains contribute to the alienation between consumers and production processes, leading to societal trends where people and businesses lose practical knowledge, empathy, and experience regarding the conditions of production, self-subsistence, community affairs, other cultures, and nature.[266]

A solution from a degrowth perspective lies in promoting practical knowledge and learning in general to break this alienation, promote sustainable-oriented consumption production, and foster creativity, autonomy, and a sense of local socio-cultural connectedness, awareness, and development.[267]

## EXAMPLE: NEW OPTIMIST

One approach is to provide resources, such as time and social connections, along with guidance, such as instructions, to facilitate participatory and hands-on learning experiences for stakeholders. This includes employees and customers.[268]

An example within the fashion industry is the “Optimist sessions” hosted by New Optimist. The brand hosts panels and talks on themes like design and sustainability or post-growth. In which they explain their shared knowledge, engage their consumer, and spread the post-growth idea. However, these sessions are not their only educational strategy. New Optimist also aims to bridge the gap between the production process and consumption by combining the store and production atelier in Amsterdam, showing their customers where and how the products are made.[269]



*New Optimist Community Sessions*

Source: Carlotta Luisa Kelber, NO SUSTAINABILITY NO DESIGN, Photograph, 27 September 2023.

Looking at this example it is crucial to add not to limit efforts to consumers in the global north but also extend them to education throughout the entire supply chain to promote sustainability across all stages.

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*TSC is already making steps in this direction. However, TSC could consider expanding its services to include more speaking and projects like the one with New Optimist for event planning, helping companies effectively communicate and promote learning.*

#### 4.6.4

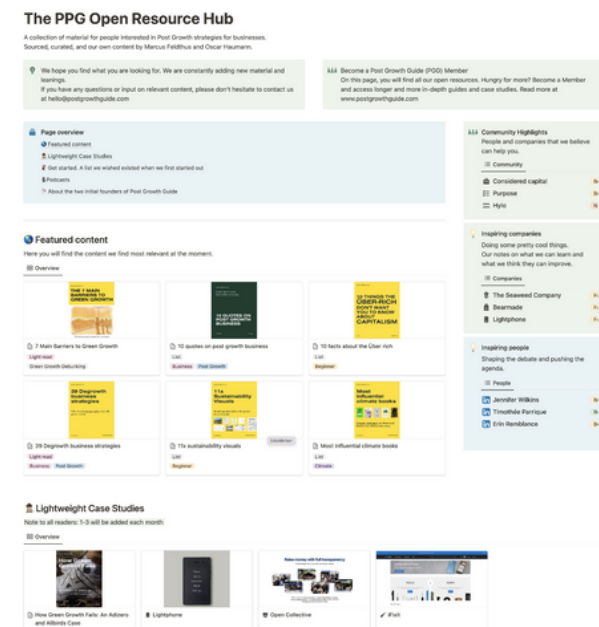
# Sharing and developing knowledge openly

In many economic sectors, a trend toward centralization can be observed. Large, specialized companies are patenting their knowledge and striving to secure monopoly positions. This practice hinders collaborative, continuous, and sustainability-oriented design processes. In some cases, it may even involve deliberate investments in planned obsolescence.[270]

To build a post-growth future it is therefore important to actively share knowledge, development and skills, competencies within open (online) communities.[271]

This extends beyond a product level and should especially also include governance and business-specific knowledge. For example, sharing lawyers, suppliers, and experts that can help with a degrowth transition.

## EXAMPLE: POST GROWTH GUIDE



Post Growth Guide Landing page

Source: Post Growth Guide, PPG Open Resource Hub, Screenshot, <https://www.postgrowthguide.com>.

An example of an open community is the “Post Growth Guide, which gathers information and creates guides on how to build a company with limits to growth in the pursuit of sustainability. Post Growth Guide is run by Oscar Haumann and Marcus Feldthus. [272]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*TSC is already doing this by openly sharing various resources related to sustainability and post-growth, among other things, in this report.*

#### 4.6.5

# Setting and communicating corporate values

Organizations are faced with the need to make decisions on a regular basis. However, making these decisions can be complex, especially when there are tempting opportunities for growth or when a lot of stakeholders are involved. It's crucial for organizations for companies aiming towards a post-growth future to have clear guidance in place to ensure they stay aligned with their core social and environmental objectives.[273]

One effective approach is to define and integrate core values into various aspects of the organization, such as statutes, processes, training, and both internal and external communication. This integration serves the purpose of fostering a community spirit centered around the organization's mission and ensuring consistency in actions and words.[274] In the words of Khmara and Kronenberg (2018), it involves the “strong and consistent communication of corporate values both internally and externally.”

#### **ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES**

*For TSC, this might entail incorporating exercises to enhance the company values into the existing sustainability strategy workshops. To solidify the organization's overarching purpose. Rather than incorporating the company's current values into the sustainability strategy, the focus should be on enhancing the company's values to include sustainability and future-oriented values.*

#### 4.6.6

# Commitment to company values in personal life

A defining characteristic of a degrowth business lies in the commitment to company values by both corporate leaders and employees in their personal lives. Khmara and Kronenberg (2018) highlight the significance of leaders' commitment to company values in their personal lives. This commitment not only reinforces the organization's mission and purpose but also extends support to other businesses with similar objectives.

#### **ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES**

*Interestingly, within TSC, the strategy and goal-setting training programs incorporate a thought-provoking question for participants: they are encouraged to reflect on their values and consider how these align, or don't, with the company's values. This introspective strategy can also be harnessed to facilitate a company's transition toward degrowth, serving as an explanation and motivation for moving towards a post-growth future.*

# Meaningful Work and Employer Well-being

In today's fast-paced business world, organizations often primarily focus on efficiently dealing with high and dynamic market demands, which leads to high workloads, psychological stress, and resistance to change. Prioritizing a healthier work environment and employee well-being is crucial for initiating a degrowth transformation. Businesses need to provide employees with the time and space to contemplate their purpose, reflect on the future, and transition into a post-growth mindset. Additionally, there's a significant link between CO2 reduction and reduced working hours which will be explored later in this chapter.

But beyond environmental considerations, social factors need to be considered as well, especially in industries like fashion. Promoting social sustainability across the supply chains is crucial. It's important to mention that this paper won't go into details about due diligence processes and every other form of forced labor or child labor, which are significant problems in the fashion industry right now. All these issues need to be addressed before thinking about the next step, a degrowth transformation.



## 4.7.1

# Reducing workhours and focus on meaningful work

In a post-growth company, the production process should be oriented towards promoting happiness and well-being. This involves reducing working hours, emphasizing meaningful work, and nurturing human potential.[275]

Some straightforward strategies to achieve these goals include despecialization, the pursuit of meaningful participation of people in the production process, and the creation of meaningful jobs that foster fulfillment and the development of human potential. Here, we can draw a connection to Hannah Arendt's theory of labor, which highlights how a good workplace can bring fulfillment and happiness and with it openness for change. In the context of the fashion industry, stable and long-term employment should also be considered.[276]

## EXAMPLE: IN LIGHT

Ultimately, in a degrowth transition, the aim should be to have industrial improvements that do more than just accumulate wealth; they should also reduce the amount of labor required.[277] Flexible and unconventional working hours can enhance well-being within a business. It's essential to maintain an appropriate workload level to ensure a high quality of life, good health, and ample leisure time.[278]

Additionally, numerous studies have found a correlation between shorter work hours and lower greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to reduced global climate change. While the exact relationship between these variables is complex, it's logical that lower consumption, all else being equal, would lead to reduced greenhouse gas emissions.[279] Also, another consideration is crucial from a post-growth perspective. A shorter work time also increases the time that can be spent on care work or voluntary activities. Which ultimately shifts a focus on low-productivity sectors such as education or care.



*In Light Beauty*

Source: Elth, Insight Beauty, Photograph, elth, <https://elth.co.uk/collections/inlight-beauty>.

An example within lifestyle is the UK skincare brand In Light Beauty which states to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 14.6 per cent since dropping to 4.5 days, with additional savings on its energy and water bills.[280]

### **ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES**

*This strategy, for some companies, seems very far away, but the first steps can involve addressing the issue of excessive overtime, especially along the entire supply chain. Interestingly enough, TSC's founder is experimenting with shorter workweeks to improve work-life balance and overall happiness.*

#### 4.7.1.1

# Job sharing

One strategy that allows for reduced working hours is job sharing. In job sharing, two or more individuals share a single job and its corresponding salary. By increasing leisure time, organizations contribute to what is known as the “amateur economy,” where a significant portion of free time can be utilized for unpaid, voluntary activities driven by personal motivation. Furthermore, reducing working hours can also yield positive environmental benefits. When working hours are reduced, income and consequently consumption, including energy consumption, are also reduced.[281]

#### 4.7.1.2

# Decreased productivity

In a growth-based capitalist economy, an increase in labor productivity is typically viewed as positive, with a historical trend of channeling these productivity gains into greater output rather than reducing the effort required. However, in a post-growth world, the opposite is true; decreased productivity becomes desirable and should be considered to prevent unemployment. Reduced productivity is associated with a shift from productivism and a decrease in the volume of goods produced. Nevertheless, an increase in labor productivity achieved through existing technological innovations can make shorter working hours possible.[282] The idea here is to utilize the gained efficiency not to produce more goods but to provide individuals with more free time and reduce working hours.

## 4.7.2

# Practicing a culture of reciprocal care

The management of many organizations primarily focuses on efficiently addressing high and dynamic market demands. However, the effects, such as uncertainty and fluctuating or heavy workloads, can lead to increased psychological stress and high turnover rates among employees, often deteriorating overall social relations.[283]

Proactively caring for fellow organizational members and, consequently, structuring internal systems around aspects of mutual support, reward, security, autonomy, dignity, and trust can help mitigate the impact of market pressures on employee well-being. Recognizing and valuing collaboration as an intrinsic asset to build a post-growth future is key. Within a post-growth business, employees should have the freedom to express creativity, experience comfort, find happiness, and be treated with dignity. Their needs should be acknowledged, and their mental and physical well-being should be supported through skill development and empowerment. [285] It's important to note that skill development should be considered with the ultimate goal of reducing working hours and increasing happiness, not as a factor that enhances growth.

Connected strategies for achieving this include caring for employees by promoting work that offers personal satisfaction, fostering a trust-based atmosphere, offering flexible working hours, and providing special accommodations for employees with children. Additionally, encouraging employees to align with the company's values, such as rewarding positive social and environmental performance in their personal lives, can contribute to a caring culture. But also a change in management and governance structures that was explored earlier in this report. This culture of care can become the driving purpose of a business, shifting the profit motive towards qualitative growth in terms of the quality of work and life.[286]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*While it can be challenging for TSC to address these aspects within the fashion industry, given the numerous other issues that need fixing, shifting the profit motive towards a focus on quality care and introducing measures of care throughout the entire supply chain, along with a due diligence process, can be initial steps in the right direction.*



Photographer: Yeelen Tavilla Model: Paula Chacartegui

### 4.7.3

# Paying uniform, fair, and needs-oriented salaries and limit wage difference within a company

## EXAMPLE: WALDVIERTLER

In many non-public organizations, salary structures are often non-transparent and inconsistent. This lack of transparency can lead to feelings of envy, suspicion of injustice, and repeated individual requests for salary increases. These requests can, in turn, create pressure for growth and higher profit margins within the respective organizations.[287]

One approach to address this issue is to implement uniform salary structures that take into account employees' living situations and basic needs. This should be done democratically and transparently, aiming to uphold democratic values and reduce individual envy, and economic inequality.[288]

Especially within the fashion industry, it's essential to consider the entire supply chain when moving toward a post-growth future. Practices such as fair trade ensure that small-scale producers and cooperatives in developing countries are fairly compensated for their products. While some growth may still be necessary in developing countries, fair trade principles can help strike a balance.[289]



Waldviertler Werkstätten

Source: Waldviertler, Die Schuhwerkstatt, Photograph, Waldviertler, <https://gea-waldviertler.at/unternehmen/werkstaetten/>.

Another strategy to consider is limiting wage differences within the company. This not only controls overall wage costs but also promotes a sense of purpose and fulfillment rather than a focus solely on annual salary increases.[290] For instance, the Austrian shoe manufacturer Waldviertler set a limit where the highest wages can only be double the lowest wage.[291] Another famous example is Gravity Payments, a Seattle-based credit card processing company. In 2025 CEO Dan Price implemented a \$70,000 minimum wage by cutting his own \$1 million wage.[292]

### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*TSC could initiate a thought process in this direction by encouraging companies to make wages transparent across the entire supply chain. This transparency would allow reflection on whether wage disparities are fair and aligned with employees' needs.*

#### 4.7.4

# CEO life priorities outside firm

A study by Leonhard et al. in 2017 showed that it is significant for a degrowth business that the CEO has priorities beyond the firm. Personal goals such as social relationships, health, and values are considered equally or even more important than their work.

This is connected to the idea of growth being less important, with a shift towards continual improvement and development, not limited to the confines of the firm. It signifies a shift away from a profit-centric focus for the firm, as the firm is no longer the sole source of fulfillment for a CEO in a post-growth world. However, a strong identification with the firm persists.

Interestingly, from a personal standpoint and based on conversations I've had during this research, a typical turning point can be the decision to have children. Suddenly, one's life goals shift towards a different dimension, and these foundational shifts can also catalyze changes within a business.

#### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*In a way, TSC is already addressing this aspect in their strategy workshops. Here, employers are encouraged to reflect on their personal lives and values this could be utilized as a source of motivation and a driving force for change.*

#### 4.7.5

# Build a social foundation within the business

A social foundation is a way for businesses to contribute to their communities and provide opportunities for economic and social participation to everyone.

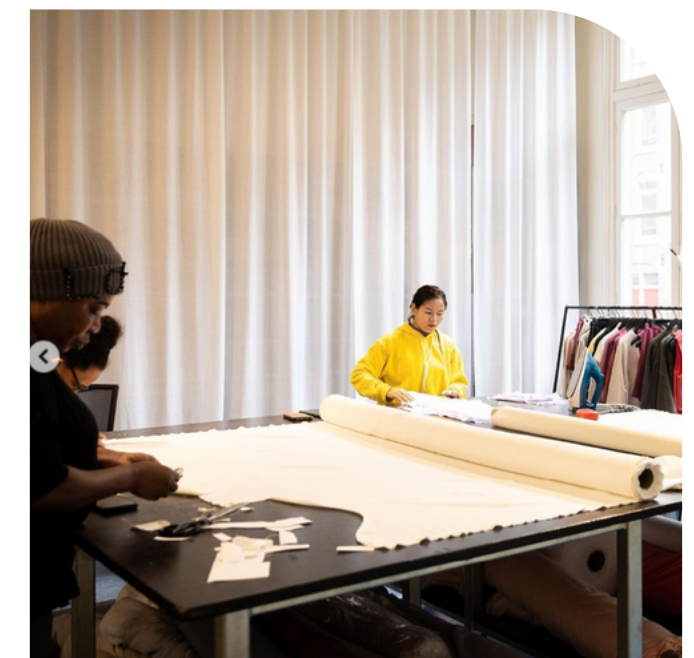
An example of this practice is the new Optimist collaboration with de Regenboog Groep. De Regenboog Groep and New Optimist are working together to integrate individuals into the workplace, providing work integration options. They create a space for people with diverse learning goals from various parts of the world to collaborate.

This approach helps ensure that the motive is not solely for profit, as the organizational structure needs to be different. The entire company needs to embrace a slower pace, shifting its focus towards learning from and with each other.[293]

#### ADVICE FOR CONSULTANCIES

*TSC could assist companies in establishing such a social foundations and foster collaboration among people, in every part of the chain.*

## EXAMPLE: NEW OPTIMIST X DE REGENBOOG GROEP



New Optimist Atelier

Source: New Optimist, Photograph, instagram, [https://www.instagram.com/new\\_optimist/](https://www.instagram.com/new_optimist/).

# 5. CONCLUSION

# 5. CONCLUSION

This report examined various strategies and strategies available for businesses to start a degrowth transition towards a post-growth future. It explored financial practices, alternative business models, ownership and governance structures, business relationships, product marketing, communication, education, knowledge sharing, meaningful work, and employer well-being.

First and foremost, this report highlights that there are many strategies and initiatives out there. Maybe still hidden but the foundation is there for a degrowth transition. Looking and reflecting on the strategies described the most important aspect for companies that want to transition towards a post-growth future is the shift away from a profit motive, the elimination of financial extraction, limiting growth, and moving towards purpose as a key driver. Seeing money and profit as a means for social and environmental good is not an end in itself.[294] A real post-growth business entity rules out financial extraction and works on impact rather than financial gain for stakeholders. This non-extractive, not-for profit motive requires to be coupled with ethical production and resource efficiency and needs to be locked into the business structure using legal strategies of ownership and governance.[295] Businesses should - like Puhakka (2018) says - ask themselves: "Firstly, does the business generate positive externalities? Secondly, does it enhance the quality of life and social well-being of people?"

This summary already shows that becoming a post-growth business is not applying just one of these strategies. No, starting a degrowth transition means changing or building a company in a different way combining a multitude of strategies. At its core ruling out financial extraction. Only then can a business become a lever for change.

After writing this report, I have hope. There are so many options and ways out there to create a positive future. We just need to apply them. Rule out financial extraction. Change how we view business and profit. For me personally, fashion is the perfect industry to start. We create product that is so close to the human body, this industry is built on innovation and creativity. We just need to utilize all of this talent in the right way!

For TSC, this report lays the groundwork for a new strategy and client base interested in adopting innovative and future-oriented strategies for a genuine and positive impact. Consider this report as a starting point, a foundation for further exploration of strategies and collaborative initiatives with companies to revolutionize the industry from within. But already adapting wording within a session, helping companies reflect on their profit motives and start communicating about post and degrowth will help within a transition.

## Acknowledgements

Written and Researched by Carlotta Luisa Kelber

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- Lotte
- New Optimist

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# 7. ENDNOTES

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# 8. APPENDIX



# Appendix 1:

## Original table from Vennding (2023)

Degrowth business archetypes and characteristics found in degrowth literature (1)									
Category	Concept keyword	Archetypes and characteristics in this category according to degrowth literature	Vandervoort (2018)	Puhakka (2018)	Khamara & Kronenberg (2018)	Nesterova (2020)	Nesterova (2021)	Hankammer et al. (2021)	Froese et al. (2023)
Core Values	Business activism and adopting a stewardship role	Business activism, doing the right thing, being ethical, adapt a role as ambassador of the environment,	X		x			x	
	Employee commitment towards degrowth	'Corporate leaders commitment to company values in their personal life', 'pro-environmental behaviour in the workplace' 'Shift in values towards cooperation, collaboration, simplicity, solidarity.	x	x	x		x		X
	Alternative ownership model	'Democratic governance, democratisation of decision making', 'implementation of democratic governance', 'in practice: Alternative business/governance models (e.g. cooperation)'. 'Collaborative value creation', 'supporting co-production and prosumption', 'engaging customers in reuse', 'company as a part of a broader community', 'collaboration with business partners and other stakeholders on solving social and environmental problems together', 'Involving consumers in the business operations', 'Societal wellbeing and embeddedness within local communities', 'building personal customer relationships', 'locally embedded and community based'.			x		x	x	X
People	Customer engagement and community focus	'Collaborative value creation', 'supporting co-production and prosumption', 'engaging customers in reuse', 'company as a part of a broader community', 'collaboration with business partners and other stakeholders on solving social and environmental problems together', 'Involving consumers in the business operations', 'Societal wellbeing and embeddedness within local communities', 'building personal customer relationships', 'locally embedded and community based'.	x	x	x	x	x	x	X
	Workers wellbeing and decent working conditions	'Workers wellbeing', 'practicing a culture of reciprocal care', 'improve the work-life balance of employees', 'promoting a good quality of life and decent working conditions (along the entire value chain)'. 'Sufficiency', 'communicating for sufficiency', 'encouraging sufficiency', 'Promoting sustainability-oriented learning and engagement', 'promoting the societal acceptance of degrowth thinking', 'Customer education to promote and increase knowledge'	X	x	x	x	x	x	X
	Encouraging sufficiency	'Sufficiency', 'communicating for sufficiency', 'encouraging sufficiency', 'Promoting sustainability-oriented learning and engagement', 'promoting the societal acceptance of degrowth thinking', 'Customer education to promote and increase knowledge'	x	x		x	x	x	X
Planet	Adopting circular operations	<b>Processes/use of products and materials:</b> Frugality/efficiency, Full producer responsibility (closed-loop), Recycling/circular economy approaches, Enabling usage and sharing products.	X	x	x	x	x	x	X
	Reduction of resources and use of renewables.	<b>Material and energy use/reduction:</b> Reduction of environmental impacts at all stages of product/service life-cycle, reorientation towards environmental considerations (reduction of material, throughput and waste reduction), renewables, reducing environmental impacts along the value chain, Local sourcing, localisation of sourcing, production and exchange.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Degrowth business archetypes and characteristics found in degrowth literature (2)									
Category	Concept keyword	Concepts in this category	Vandervoort (2018)	Puhakka (2018)	Khamara & Kronenberg (2018)	Nesterova (2020)	Nesterova (2021)	Hankammer et al. (2021)	Froese et al. (2023)
Planet	Product durability and longevity	<b>Product characteristics:</b> making products that last and that are repairable, 'durability + reparability central in product design', product and service design for sustainability.	x	X	x	X	X	X	
Prosperity	Re-thinking profit growth and value	Alternative understanding of business', 'Focusing on qualitative change', 'deviation from profit maximisation', 'Overcoming economic growth dynamics', 'Redistributing profits', 'Repurposing the business for environmental and society', 'Focus on voluntary long-term mutual value creation'. Decreased productivity, 'showcasing alternatives to the dominant growth model', small scale, sufficiency and non-growth. Balancing the organisational scale, remaining at a certain size. Limiting the organisation/operation size according to local ecological conditions. Deviation from productivism and decrease in volume of goods produced.	x	x	x	x	x	x	X
	Empowerment of local communities	Empower local communities in 'weaker' sections of society □ helping people to expand their skills and knowledge (capacity to act). Focus on alternatives framings of technology. Low-tech and low-scale technology projects to empower rural populations.	x	X	X	x	x	X	X
	Collaboration over competition	Collaboration, joining forces in mission-drives networks, open to sharing resources, collaborating with all stakeholders, even competitors, willingness to share resources, value networks	x	x	x	x	x	x	X

## Appendix 2:

In the following table the framework of Vennings (2023) is extended by Hinton (2021).

Pillar	Key characteristics	„Archetypes and characteristics in this category according to degrowth literature“ <sup>4297</sup>
Core Values	„Business activism Values and adopting a stewardship role“ (Vennings, 2023)	„Business activism, doing the right thing, being ethical, adapt a role as ambassador of the environment“ (Vennings, 2023)  “Voluntary objectives, non-market behaviors, and everyday practices.” (Hinton, 2021)  “Adoption of complex systems thinking; identifying root causes of sustainability problems; critical reflection on one’s own habits and patterns” (Hinton, 2021)
	„Employee commitment towards degrowth“ (Vennings, 2023)	„Corporate leaders commitment to company values in their personal life“, ‘pro-environmental behaviour in the workplace’ ‘Shift in values towards cooperation, collaboration, simplicity, solidarity.“ (Vennings, 2023)
	„Alternative ownership model“ (Vennings, 2023)	„Democratic governance, democratisation of decision making’, ‘implementation of democratic governance’, ‘in practice: Alternative business/governance models (e.g. cooperation).“ (Vennings, 2023)  “Democratic, inclusive, collaborative, decentralized, networked, and adaptive companies“(Hinton, 2021)  “bringing more stakeholders into management and decision-making” (Hinton, 2021)  Focusing on a different legal set-up. (Hinton, 2021)
People	„Customer engagement and community focus“ (Vennings, 2023)	„Collaborative value creation’, ‘supporting co- production and prosumption’, ‘engaging customers in reuse’, ‘company as a part of a broader community’, ‘collaboration with business partners and other stakeholders on solving social and environmental problems together’, ‘Involving consumers in the business operations’, ‘Societal wellbeing and embeddedness within local communities’, ‘building personal customer relationships’, ‘locally embedded and community based’.“ (Vennings, 2023)
	„Workers wellbeing and decent working conditions“ (Vennings, 2023)	„Workers wellbeing’, ‘practicing a culture of reciprocal care’, ‘improve the work-life balance of employees’, ‘promoting a good quality of life and decent working conditions (along the entire value chain).“ (Vennings, 2023)
	„Encouraging sufficiency“ (Vennings, 2023)	„Sufficiency’, ‘communicating for sufficiency’, ‘encouraging sufficiency’, ‘Promoting sustainability-oriented learning and engagement’, ‘promoting the societal acceptance of degrowth thinking’, ‘Customer education to promote and increase knowledge’“(Vennings, 2023)
Planet	“Adopting circular operations” (Vennings, 2023)	„Processes/use of products and materials: Frugality/efficiency, Full producer responsibility (closed-loop), Recycling/circular economy approaches, Enabling usage and sharing products.“ (Vennings, 2023)

	„Reduction of resources and use of renewables.“ (Vennings, 2023)	„Material and energy use/reduction: Reduction of environmental impacts at all stages of product/service life-cycle, reorientation towards environmental considerations (reduction of material, throughput and waste reduction), renewables, reducing environmental impacts along the value chain, Local sourcing, localisation of sourcing, production and exchange.“ (Vennings, 2023)  “consideration of non-human life” (Hinton, 2021)  “respecting the planetary boundaries” (Hinton, 2021)
	„Product durability and longevity“ (Vennings, 2023)	„Product characteristics: making products that last and that are repairable, ‘durability + reparability central in product design’, product and service design for sustainability,“ (Vennings, 2023)
Prosperity	“Re-thinking profit growth and value“ (Vennings, 2023)	„Alternative understanding of business’, ‘Focusing on qualitative change’, ‘deviation from profit maximisation’, ‘Overcoming economic growth dynamics’, ‘Redistributing profits’, ‘Repurposing the business for environmental and society’, ‘Focus on voluntary long-term mutual value creation’. Decreased productivity, ‘showcasing alternatives to the dominant growth model’, small scale, sufficiency and non-growth. Balancing the organisational scale, remaining at a certain size. Limiting the organisation/operation size according to local ecological conditions. Deviation from productivism and decrease in volume of goods produced,“ (Vennings, 2023)  “sustainability-oriented accounting tools...” (Hinton, 2021)  “seeing profit as a means, rather than an end...” (Hinton, 2021)
	„Empowerment of local communities“ (Vennings, 2023)	„Empower local communities in ‘weaker’ sections of society helping people to expand their skills and knowledge (capacity to act). Focus on alternatives framings of technology. Low-tech and low-scale technology projects to empower rural populations.“ (Vennings, 2023)
	„Collaboration over competition“ (Vennings, 2023)	„Collaboration, joining forces in mission-drives networks, open to sharing resources, collaborating with all stakeholders, even competitors, willingness to share resources, value networks“ (Vennings, 2023)

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