

# **cities BEYOND GROWTH**

**CITIES BEYOND GROWTH**

**Education handbook**



**Commons  
Network**



**FuHem**  
educación +  
ecosocial



**INSTITUTE FOR  
POLITICAL ECOLOGY**



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# Index

|                                                                         |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| INTRODUCTION . . . . .                                                  | 5  |
| About <i>Cities Beyond Growth</i> . . . . .                             | 5  |
| Who this handbook is for and how to use it . . . . .                    | 6  |
| The educational programme in brief. . . . .                             | 6  |
| 1. THE POST-GROWTH CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK . . . . .                       | 8  |
| 1.1 What do we mean by 'post-growth cities'? . . . .                    | 8  |
| 1.2 The conceptual framework of the programme . . . . .                 | 10 |
| 1.3 The six thematic axes . . . . .                                     | 12 |
| 2. THE GENERAL MODULE Online course . . . . .                           | 15 |
| 2.1 Design and objectives of the module . . . . .                       | 15 |
| 2.2 Reach, participant profile, and diversity. . . . .                  | 16 |
| 2.3 Session contents. . . . .                                           | 17 |
| 2.4 Teaching methodology: what worked and what did not . . . . .        | 20 |
| 2.5 Participation, engagement, and the transnational classroom. . . . . | 21 |
| 3. SKILLS ACQUIRED AND PEER LEARNING. . . . .                           | 23 |
| 3.1 Competences developed through the programme. . . . .                | 23 |
| 3.2 Peer learning: the value of the transnational classroom . . . . .   | 25 |
| 3.3 Applicability beyond the classroom. . . . .                         | 26 |
| 4. LESSONS LEARNED AND CRITICAL REFLECTION . . . . .                    | 27 |
| 4.1 On the design of the programme. . . . .                             | 27 |
| 4.2 On the pedagogy of post-growth. . . . .                             | 28 |
| 4.3 On the diversity of European contexts . . . . .                     | 29 |
| 5. THE LOCALLY ADAPTED (TAILORED) MODULES . . . . .                     | 31 |
| 5.1 Rationale and design of the tailored modules. . . . .               | 31 |
| 5.2 The six local modules . . . . .                                     | 32 |
| 5.3 Multi-stakeholder dynamics: shared lessons . . . . .                | 35 |

|                                                            |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPLICATING THE PROGRAMME . . . . . | 37 |
| Annex A. Glossary of key concepts . . . . .                | 39 |
| Annex B. Bibliography and resources by module . . . . .    | 43 |

# INTRODUCTION

## About *Cities Beyond Growth*

Cities are at the heart of the climate and overall ecological crisis –but also have the opportunity to be at the core of its solutions. They concentrate carbon emissions, inequalities, and political decisions that shape the lives of millions. But cities are also where communities organise, where cooperatives build alternatives, and where local governments can act –often more quickly than national states. They are, in short, the most promising arena for transformative change.

This handbook is the product of **Cities Beyond Growth**, a transnational project funded by the European Union's Erasmus+ programme.<sup>1</sup> The project brought together six civil society organisations from five European cities –Transnational Institute (TNI) and Commons Network from Amsterdam (Netherlands), Oikos from Ghent (Belgium), FUHEM from Madrid (Spain), NaZemi from Brno (Czechia), and Institut za političku ekologiju (IPE) from Zagreb (Croatia)– around a shared conviction: that the transition towards sustainable and climate-resilient cities requires not only technical solutions, but a fundamental shift in how we understand the economy, care, and democratic participation.

The project's starting point is that growth-oriented economic models are no longer sustainable – ecologically, socially, or politically. Any economy that aspires to deliver decent living conditions for present and future generations must operate within planetary boundaries. This means moving beyond growth as the organising logic of urban development, and towards a **post-growth economy** built on wellbeing, sufficiency, and democratic self-determination.

The Cities Beyond Growth Project focuses on the educational dimension of fostering the needed change. Between 2024 and 2026, the project designed, tested, and refined a two-part educational programme –a general online course and locally adapted in-person module– delivered to approximately 1300 stakeholders globally and subsequently across six specific cities. The goal was not only to build knowledge, but to design educational processes to directly empower communities and local government representatives to become agents of inclusive, democratic post-growth transitions in their own cities.

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<sup>1</sup> The full project name is 'Wellbeing for All: Building Climate Resilient Cities Together', although for promotional reasons it was afterwards re-branded to Cities Beyond Growth.

## Who this handbook is for and how to use it

This handbook is a practical resource for anyone who wants to **understand, replicate, or adapt the 'Cities Beyond Growth' educational programme** – or draw inspiration from it to design their own.

It is written for:

- **Educators and trainers** in civil society organisations, universities, and non-formal education settings who want to teach about post-growth cities
- **Activists and community organisers** seeking a structured framework for mobilising around issues of housing, food, energy, mobility, democratic technology, democracy and care
- **NGOs and networks** looking to replicate this kind of multi-stakeholder, transnational learning experience in their own contexts

You do not need to be an expert in post-growth economics to use this handbook. It is designed to be accessible to a broad audience with varying levels of prior knowledge, to serve both as a **reference document** and as a **practical guide**.

The handbook can be read from cover to cover or navigated by section depending on your needs. Part I introduces the conceptual framework underlying the programme. Part II documents the general online module in detail – its design, content, and methodology. Parts III and IV reflect on the skills developed through the programme and the lessons learned. Part V presents the six locally adapted modules; each tailored to a specific city and stakeholder context. The handbook closes with concrete recommendations for replication (Part VI), as well as a Glossary of key concepts (Annex A) and a link to Bibliography and resources by module (Annex B).

## The educational programme in brief

The Cities Beyond Growth educational programme was structured in two complementary modules, designed to move participants from conceptual understanding to local action.

The **general module** was delivered as an online course accessible to up to 1,000 stakeholders across Europe. Structured around six thematic sessions –Democracy & Care; Energy; Housing; Food; Mobility; Technology– it provided a shared conceptual framework for understanding post-growth transitions, explored inspiring examples of alternatives from across Europe, and fostered cross-border dialogue among participants with diverse backgrounds and roles. The course was delivered in English (with simultaneous interpretation in Spanish and Czech) and supported by multilingual preparatory materials in Spanish, Czech, Dutch, and other languages.

The **tailored modules** were designed and implemented by each of the six partner organisations. These five local in-person sessions went deeper into the specific challenges and opportunities of each city, and one online course went deeper into the energy transition, bringing together in all cases smaller groups of 20 to 30 local stakeholders –community representatives, civil servants, activists, and social entrepreneurs– to work through post-growth strategies relevant to their context.

Together, the two modules offered a **multi-stakeholder learning experience** that deliberately brought together people from different sectors and backgrounds: NGOs and community organisations, local government officials, academics, activists, cooperatives, and marginalised communities. This mix was not incidental –it reflects Cities Beyond Growth’s core conviction that post-growth transitions can only succeed if they are built democratically, with the active participation of those most affected by current inequalities.

The pages that follow document what was taught, how it was taught, and what was learned –so that others can build on this experience and take it further.

# THE POST-GROWTH CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## 1.1 What do we mean by ‘post-growth cities’?

We live in economies built around a main overriding goal: growth. For decades, governments across the world have treated GDP expansion as their primary measure of success, their central political promise, and the organising logic of public policy. And yet the evidence of what this has produced is impossible to ignore –an accelerating climate crisis, deepening inequality, the systematic under-valuation of care and community life, and an ever-growing gap between the so-called “health of economies” and the lived experience of the people within them. However, the GDP indicator was never designed as a measure of societal progress. What GDP accounts for is the monetary value of all goods and services produced in the economy. This doesn’t consider other activities essential for life, such as unmonetized care work or the proper functioning of ecosystems. Instead, it includes activities not necessarily positive for societies, leading to the contradictory situation in which GDP goes up when there are oil spills, deforestation and floods or when factories lay off workers and shareholders pocket the gains.

Underlying these failures is an **ecosocial crisis**: the convergence of ecological, social and political breakdowns originating from capitalism. This is not a coincidental accumulation of separate problems. The same structures, institutions, and power relations that drive the constant expansion of material and energy flows –transgressing planetary boundaries– simultaneously exacerbate inequalities across income, gender, and ethnicity. Those who have contributed least to the concentration of profits suffer most from its consequences. Already seven of the nine planetary boundaries identified by scientists have been breached,<sup>2</sup> and the 10% of Europeans with the highest incomes generate more greenhouse gas emissions than the poorest 50% combined.<sup>3</sup> These are not technical failures amenable to technical fixes. They are structural tendencies of a growth-dependent economy.

**Post-growth** is a response to this convergence. As Katherine Trebeck, co-founder of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, puts it, the key question is how to make the economy “an enabler of the sort of lives that people want to live” –and of the kind of planet we want to leave to future generations. This means shifting purpose: away from the endless expansion of material output and towards the sustained wellbeing of people and planet. Which a major recent study revealed has significant public

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2 PBSscience (2025). *Planetary Health Check 2025*, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), Potsdam, Germany.

3 Oxfam, “EU’s richest 10% emit as much planet-heating emissions as half the EU’s poorest population”, press release, 20th November 2023 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/eus-richest-10-emit-much-planet-heating-emissions-half-eus-poorest-population>

support.<sup>4</sup> It means being deliberate about which economic activities need to expand (renewable energy cooperatives, community food systems, public services, care) and which need to be scaled back (fossil fuels, speculative real estate, industrial agriculture, advertising). Crucially, it insists that this transition must be just: previous eras of economic transformation have repeatedly concentrated the costs on those already most disadvantaged by the existing system, and post-growth refuses to repeat that pattern.

Several related frameworks circle the same terrain and were drawn upon throughout the course. **Degrowth** explicitly targets the most harmful sectors of the economy for reduction while investing in what is vital for human life –arguing that high-income countries must reduce their overall use of energy and materials as a precondition for justice, both within and across national borders.<sup>5</sup> **Wellbeing economy** places human and ecological wellbeing at the centre of economic measurement and policy, moving beyond GDP and asking instead whether people’s needs are being met within planetary limits.<sup>6</sup> **Doughnut economics** gives this a spatial and visual form, mapping how far a city or country simultaneously meets the social needs of its residents –the inner ring– and remains within planetary boundaries –the outer ring.<sup>7</sup> **Steady-state economics**, rooted in the ecological economics tradition, argues that the economy must stabilise its throughput of energy and materials within the regenerative and assimilative limits of ecosystems, achieving qualitative development without quantitative expansion.<sup>8</sup> These are not competing schools but complementary lenses –a point underscored by the fact that leading scholars associated with each of these traditions are co-authors of a landmark review of the post-growth field.<sup>9</sup> Different partners in the Cities Beyond Growth project drew on different combinations depending on their context. What they share is the conviction that growth is not a proxy for social progress, and that explicitly designing economies around human and ecological flourishing is both necessary and achievable.

**Why cities?** Cities are not neutral stages on which the growth economy plays out – they are among its primary engines: places of global capital accumulation, where wealth is realised, appropriated, and concentrated, and where the political and legal infrastructure of the global economy is maintained.<sup>10</sup> The 1,000 largest cities in the world account for more than 60% global GDP.<sup>11</sup> They also concentrate the harms: cities are responsible for approximately 70% of global CO2 emissions, and within them the externalities of growth-driven capitalism –pollution, inequality, spatial segregation, overwork and the amplified impacts of climate extremes such as heatwaves and flooding– are most

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4 Krpan, D., Basso, F., Hickel, J. E., Kallis, G. (2025) Assessing public support for degrowth: survey-based experimental and predictive studies. *The Lancet Planetary Health*. Volume 0, Issue 0, 101326. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(25\)00204-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(25)00204-9/fulltext)

5 Hickel, J. (2020). *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World*. Penguin Rand House. For a systematic introduction to the field of degrowth, see also: Nelson, A. (ed.) (2026). *Routledge Handbook of Degrowth*. Routledge, and Schmelzer, M., Vetter, A. & Vansintjan, A. (2022). *The Future is Degrowth: A Guide to a World Beyond Capitalism*. Verso.

6 Jackson, T. (2016). *Prosperity without Growth*. Routledge, 2<sup>o</sup> ed.; Trebeck, K. & Williams, J. (2019). *The Economics of Arrival*. Policy Press.

7 Raworth, K. (2017). *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*. Chelsea Green Publishing.

8 Dietz, R. & O'Neill, D.W. (2013). *Enough Is Enough: Building a Sustainable Economy in a World of Finite Resources*. Routledge; For the foundational theoretical framework, see also: Daly, H.E. & Farley, J. (2011). *Ecological Economics: Principles and Applications*. Island Press (2nd ed.).

9 Kallis, G., Hickel, J., O'Neill, D.W., Jackson, T., Victor, P.A., Raworth, K., Schor, J.B. & Steinberger, J.K. (2025). Post-growth: the science of wellbeing within planetary boundaries. *The Lancet Planetary Health*. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(24\)00310-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(24)00310-3)

10 Savini, F., Ferreira, A. & von Schönfeld, K.C. (2022). *Post-Growth Planning: Cities Beyond the Market Economy*. Routledge.

11 <https://www.oxfordeconomics.com/global-cities-index/>

densely and tangibly experienced.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, cities offer something irreplaceable: proximity. People live close to each other, close to local institutions, and close to political decision-making. This makes them unusually fertile ground for post-growth experimentation –for housing cooperatives, energy communities, community gardens, shared mobility schemes, participatory budgets, and the many other practices that can make an alternative economic logic tangible in everyday life.

## 1.2 The conceptual framework of the programme

The *Cities Beyond Growth* course was designed around a layered conceptual framework rather than a single theory. Four interconnected analytical lenses ran through the programme as a whole and provided the common vocabulary across its six thematic sessions.

### Capitalism's three fault lines: nature, care, and democracy

To highlight the systemic nature of this problem, the introductory session of the course drew on the work of political philosopher Nancy Fraser, who describes how the capitalist system profits by parasitizing on non-commodified areas of human life and nature, thus devouring the conditions that make social life possible.<sup>13</sup> It exploits the natural environment as a free resource and a sink for waste, without replenishing it. It profits from paid labour but also from the unpaid work, mainly care work, historically performed disproportionately by women that reproduces the workforce: feeding people, raising children, sustaining communities. It depends on public institutions and legal systems while simultaneously seeking to undermine them through lobbying, tax avoidance, and regulatory capture. These are structural tendencies built into how growth-dependent economies function.

What makes this framing particularly powerful for the course is Fraser's account of **time poverty** –the chronic exhaustion produced by an economy that demands ever more from workers while defunding the social infrastructure that once cushioned everyday life. The social crisis manifests, in her words, as a system that saps the energies needed to tend to families, maintain households, sustain communities, nourish friendships, build political networks, and forge solidarities. This is not merely a quality-of-life problem. It is a structural barrier to the commons, to democratic participation, and to any post-growth transition: energy cooperatives require volunteer time; participatory budgets require civic engagement; community gardens require collective maintenance. A society in which people are exhausted from overwork and financial precarity is one in which the commons cannot flourish.

This framework also helped reveal the connections between sessions that might otherwise appear as separate sectoral problems. The housing crisis, the food system crisis, the energy poverty crisis, the democratic deficit –these are related expressions of the same underlying dynamic: the subordination of human need and ecological integrity to the logic of capital accumulation.

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12 Seto, K.C., Churkina, G., Hsu, A., et al. (2022). Chapter 8: Urban Systems and Other Settlements. In: IPCC, *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157926.010>

13 Fraser, N. (2023). *Cannibal Capitalism: How our System is Devouring Democracy, Care, and the Planet and What We Can Do About It*. Verso.

## Beyond market-centred institutional frameworks

Considering goods and services can be mainly organised through three institutions –the **state** (public provision, democratic accountability, redistribution), the **market** (competition, price signals, private ownership), and the **commons** (collective self-organisation, shared governance, community ownership)–, contemporary capitalist cities are heavily skewed towards the market, with the state often acting more as a facilitator of private accumulation than as a guarantor of public welfare. The commons –historically suppressed through enclosure processes, legally marginalised, but persistently present– represents the third institutional sector that post-growth cities should actively cultivate –whether through autonomous community organising, through policies that redirect state action towards social wellbeing, or through both in combination.

Commons are self-managed, community-led processes to govern resources and relationships. Commoning –the ongoing practice of collective use, governance, and community building– offers a post-capitalist form of organising that moves away from linear thinking and individualism, towards ecosystems and relationships. The course's six sectoral examples –housing cooperatives, energy communities, food policy councils, participatory budgets, digital commons, cycling unions– can each be understood as experiments in rebuilding that institutional balance, and in demonstrating that basic needs can be met through governance forms that prioritise use value over exchange value.

What matters is that cities move away from the default assumption that markets will deliver basic needs efficiently and equitably –an assumption the evidence consistently refutes– and towards deliberate institutional design that draws on all three modes. This means not only cultivating the commons from below, but reorienting state action: redirecting public investment, regulation, and procurement away from market facilitation and towards the active support of collective and public provision. Central to this rebalancing is the practice of **decommodification**: removing basic needs from market logic and ensuring their provision through public or collective institutions. Decommodification counters the continuous expansion of the commodity form – the conversion of formerly free or non-profit entities (care, water, energy, housing, data) into market commodities. When the only aim of provision is profit, quality declines, access becomes unequal, and workers are exploited. In cities, decommodification can be led by many actors –cooperatives, communities, municipalities, non-profit organisations– and state action, when reoriented towards social wellbeing, is among its most powerful enablers. It is already happening, across all six domains examined in the course, and it constitutes one of the most direct practical expressions of post-growth thinking in urban life.

## Urban metabolism

Running through most of the sessions was the concept of **urban metabolism**: the understanding that cities function as systems embedded in flows of energy, food, water, materials, and waste that extend far beyond city boundaries. If cities are viewed as living organisms, their metabolism involves biophysical exchanges with nature –primarily with rural areas that provide essential materials and energy and absorb their waste. These flows are not merely technical: they are political. Who controls them, how they are governed, who benefits and who bears the costs –including in the Global South– are questions of power as much as planning. A post-growth approach to urban metabolism asks not just how to make these flows more efficient, but how to make them more just, more local, more democratic, and more contained within ecological limits.

## Sufficiency

Closely related is the principle of **sufficiency**—the idea that the goal of policy is not to maximise production and consumption but to ensure *enough*: enough energy to keep warm, enough food to eat well, enough housing to live with dignity, enough time to care for one another. The energy session made a key distinction here: energy efficiency focuses on reducing individual demand, while energy sufficiency focuses on system-wide demand reduction, asking whether the overall volume of energy the economy requires is compatible with planetary limits. This distinction applies across sectors: a sufficiency lens asks the prior question of how much is enough, and for whom.

Sufficiency does not mean austerity or privation. For the majority of people in European cities, a sufficiency economy would mean more—more security, more time, more connection—not less. It is the upper strata of consumption that needs to contract. In this sense, a **technical definition** of a post-growth intervention is one that slows down, downscales, and reconstitutes the material flows of urbanisation; a **political definition** focuses on the anti-capitalist or post-capitalist politics required to achieve that goal. Both dimensions are necessary, and the course deliberately engaged with both throughout.

## 1.3 The six thematic axes

One of the central pedagogical decisions of the *Cities Beyond Growth* course was to organise its content around six basic human needs and/or critical sectors—democracy and care, energy, housing, food, mobility, and technology—rather than abstract economic theory. This sectoral structure was deliberate, and it proved effective in practice for several reasons.

First, it gave participants—whatever their background or primary area of work—an entry point through a domain they already knew and cared about before being invited to see its connections with the others. An activist working on housing cooperatives could recognise how the energy commons movement faced analogous challenges and had developed analogous solutions. A civil servant responsible for food procurement could see the relevance of participatory democracy mechanisms developed in the context of urban mobility. The course built systemic thinking incrementally, through the concrete and familiar rather than the abstract and general. Second, the sectoral approach avoided the self-selection that often limits post-growth education: rather than drawing only participants who already identify with the label, it brought in people through their specific concern—housing, food, mobility, digital rights—and expanded that concern into a wider framework.

Several **cross-cutting patterns** emerged across sessions that illuminate the coherence of the post-growth urban agenda as a whole:

- **The limits of techno-solutionism**

Multiple sessions converged on a critique of solutions that chase efficiency and technological substitution without questioning the underlying scale of demand. The energy session made this most explicit: the global expansion of renewables has largely served to power increasing energy consumption rather than replace fossil fuels, because the profit motive built into private energy markets removes the

incentive to reduce demand. The same logic – that building more (houses, roads,...) without addressing the distribution of access and the governance of provision – was challenged across housing and mobility sessions. Post-growth is not anti-technology, but it insists that the design, ownership, and governance of technology matters as much as the technology itself.

- **Bottom-up and top-down in productive interaction**

In every session, the most transformative examples were those in which grassroots initiatives and enabling policy frameworks had developed together, each making the other possible. For example, Italian social cooperatives emerged from community organising and were later legally recognised and supported by the state. Vienna's century-old social housing tradition originated in a period of radical municipal politics and has been sustained by institutional design. The Girona post-growth agreement formally connects civil society, academia, and the municipality around a shared agenda. Neither bottom-up experimentation nor top-down reform is sufficient alone: the post-growth city requires both, working in a deliberate and sustained relationship.

- **Cooperatives as a building block**

In every session –energy communities (e.g. REScoop, Carbon Coop), housing cooperatives (e.g. Miethäuser Syndikat, La Borda), food cooperatives (e.g. La Osa, La Louve), mobility cooperatives (e.g. Som Mobilitat), digital cooperatives and others –cooperatives appeared as a fundamental institutional form of the post-growth city. They are structurally democratic (e.g. one member, one vote), they prioritise use value over exchange value, they reinvest surpluses into the community rather than extracting them, and they build collective capacity and resilience. As Chris Vrettos of REScoop argued during the course – drawing on research into the degrowth transformative capacity of energy communities across Europe– five elements make any initiative genuinely post-growth aligned: education; skill-building; transforming resource flows towards sufficiency; democratic governance; and strategic networking for systemic change –a framework that resonated across all six domains.

- **Time redistribution as a transformative horizon**

Across sessions, the question of time emerged not merely as a barrier but as one of the course's most recurrent guiding principles: that a post-growth city requires, above all, people with time. Time to organise energy cooperatives and tenant unions, to cook and participate in community food governance, to attend cycling consultations, to care for others, to engage in democratic life. The redistribution of working time –reducing the hours the economy demands and returning them to people, communities, and the commons– was presented as one of the most direct policy levers available to cities. The four-day working week trial in Valencia (Spain), which reduced stress, improved health, increased time for care and civic life, and benefited children most of all, was offered not as a marginal experiment but as evidence that this redistribution is already underway and politically achievable. A post-growth city cannot be built by exhausted people –but more than that, it can only be built when people have the time and energy to build it together.

The table below summarises the six thematic axes of the programme and the partner organisations responsible for each session:

| Theme                 | Partner         |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Democracy & Care      | Oikos           |
| Energy                | TNI             |
| Housing               | NaZemi          |
| Food                  | FUHEM           |
| Urban Mobility        | IPE             |
| Democratic Technology | Commons Network |

Together, these six domains do not exhaust the post-growth agenda, but they cover the pivotal and materially significant flows of the urban economy and the dimensions of daily life most directly shaped by economic organisation. They are also deeply interconnected: a city that decarbonises its energy system while leaving food, housing, and mobility to market logic has not transformed its metabolism; a city that introduces participatory democracy while leaving the commodity form of its basic services intact has not transformed its politics. The ambition of post-growth urbanism is systemic, and the structure of this educational programme was designed to make that systemic character felt and understood, one domain at a time. Also, sectorial post-growth prefigurative examples for bottom-up and top-down sections of each webinar were chosen to express key post-growth values and principles, e.g. need for collective action or a principle of restricted or limited profit extraction.

Post-growth, as Federico Savini underlined in the introduction of the course (session 0) is not a minority project –it is a politics of more for the many and a politics of less for the few. The course was designed in that spirit, and this handbook documents what it produced.

# 2

## THE GENERAL MODULE

### Online course

### 2.1 Design and objectives of the module

The general module of the project educational programme was designed as a six-week online course, titled *Cities Beyond Growth*, and was open to participants across Europe and beyond. Its central ambition was to provide a shared conceptual vocabulary for understanding post-growth urban transitions, to introduce inspiring examples of alternatives from different European cities (although not only), and to foster sustained cross-border dialogue among people with diverse professional backgrounds and roles.

The course was coordinated jointly by the six Cities Beyond Growth partner organisations and hosted on Moodle, an open-source e-learning platform that served as the digital backbone of the programme. Each week, a different partner organisation took the lead –designing the content, selecting and briefing speakers, facilitating the live webinar, and moderating the Moodle forum in the days before and after the session. This rotating structure gave participants a window into the working culture and local expertise of six different civil society organisations and ensured that no single institutional perspective dominated the overall framing of the course, however all inputs by each organisation were peer-reviewed.

**Cities Beyond Growth:**  
**A Free Six-Week Online Course**

How can we design thriving cities that prioritise wellbeing and prosperity for all over economic growth for a few?

Every Wednesday from 8th October - 12th November | 3:30 - 5:00 PM CET

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Oikos NAZEMI

The live sessions took place weekly via Zoom, running for approximately ninety minutes, and were followed by multilingual breakout rooms where participants could continue discussion in smaller groups in their preferred language. All sessions included live interpretation into Spanish and Czech. Materials on the Moodle platform –core readings, additional resources, videos, and podcasts– were made available in multiple languages, mainly English, Spanish, Czech, and Dutch, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the participant base.

One of the most consequential design decisions was the choice of a **sectoral structure**: rather than organising the course around abstract economic theory or the concept of post-growth as such, each session was anchored in one critical need or sector –democracy and care, energy, housing, food, urban mobility, and democratic technology. This approach prevented the self-selection that often constrains post-growth education, where events attract primarily those who already identify with the label. By entering through a specific domain –housing for a tenant organiser, food for an urban agriculture practitioner, energy for a community cooperative member– participants encountered the broader framework through something already meaningful to them. From our point of view, the sectoral structure worked well precisely because it avoided an overly abstract introduction and allowed systemic connections to emerge organically over the weeks.

## 2.2 Reach, participant profile, and diversity

The course attracted over 1700 registered participants from over 100 countries. This scale was notable for a civil society-led educational programme and reflected both the growing interest in post-growth ideas and the organising capacity of the six partner organisations and their networks.

Participants came from a wide range of professional and civic backgrounds: NGO staff, academics, local government officers, community organisers, cooperative members, activists, educators, and policy advocates. This professional diversity was deliberately cultivated through the outreach strategy of each partner organisation, and it shaped the character of the discussions in ways that purely academic or purely activist settings rarely produce. A civil servant and a tenant organiser engaging the same question about housing decommodification bring different constraints, different knowledge, different geographical background and different stakes to the conversation, and the course was richer for having both in the room.

Participants were mainly distributed across many European countries (at least 70 % of participants), with notable representation from Spain, Czechia, Netherlands and Belgium, but included also an important representation of participants from both South and North America (around 4% in each case), and other parts of the world as evidenced by discussions that drew on examples from Indonesia, Mexico, Greece, and Australia. This geographic spread required deliberate accommodation: the Moodle platform offered materials in multiple languages for each session, and the post-webinar breakout rooms were organised by language –English, Spanish, Czech, French, German, and Dutch– to ensure that participants less comfortable in English could engage fully. Live interpretation was provided throughout the webinars.

Prior knowledge of post-growth concepts varied considerably across participants as we verified through questionnaires before the course itself. While some arrived with deep familiarity with the frameworks, others were engaging for the first time, making it genuinely difficult to calibrate the depth of content to all levels simultaneously. This heterogeneity was addressed through a deliberately layered approach to

materials: core readings accessible to newcomers alongside additional resources for those wanting to go deeper, spanning different formats –articles, videos, podcasts– and multiple languages. Also, a glossary with key terms was published in the course Moodle platform to establish common vocabulary understanding for all participants. The aim was to provide **multiple entry points** so that participants could engage according to their own background and interest, rather than being left behind or insufficiently challenged.

## 2.3 Session contents

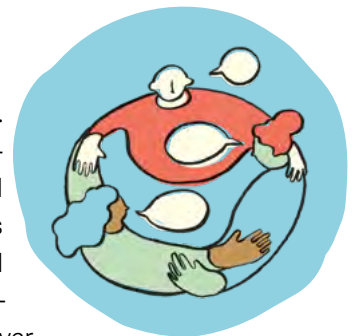
### Session 0: Introduction to Post-Growth Cities

Before the six thematic sessions began, participants were invited to engage with an introductory session designed to establish the conceptual foundations of the course. Unlike the weekly webinars, Session 0 was delivered entirely through a pre-recorded video and a Glossary hosted on Moodle, allowing participants to arrive at the first live session with a shared baseline of understanding.

The centrepiece was a short video structured around interviews with three scholars whose work underpins the post-growth urban agenda. Katherine Trebeck, co-founder of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, introduced the core argument for reorienting economies around human flourishing rather than material expansion. Federico Savini, Associate Professor in Environmental Planning at the University of Amsterdam and founder of the Post-Growth Cities Coalition, explained why cities are not neutral stages for the growth economy but among its primary engines –and why they are also the most promising sites for transformation. Imogen Hamilton-Jones, Policy Fellow at LSE Cities, offered a critical perspective on GDP as a measure of progress and on the proximity and civic density that make cities uniquely fertile ground for post-growth experimentation. Together, the three interviews addressed two foundational questions that the rest of the course would explore in sectoral depth: what does post-growth mean, and why does it matter at the urban scale? A companion Glossary introduced the key concepts –ecosocial crisis, sufficiency, decommodification, commons...– that would recur across all six sessions.

### Session 1: Democracy & Care

The opening session, hosted by **Oikos**, set the conceptual tone for the entire course. The session introduced the structural relationship between capitalism and the crises of nature, care, and democracy –establishing the connective tissue that would run through all subsequent sessions. Two guest speakers deepened specific aspects of this framework. Professor Vera Zamagni from the University of Bologna presented the Italian social cooperative model as an example of care organised collectively, including through the legally recognised form in which beneficiaries participate in governance. Éric Piolle, mayor of Grenoble, described the city's participatory democracy infrastructure: a system of six mechanisms including participatory budgets, citizen questioning rights, independent citizen councils, neighbourhood resident houses, and a long-term visioning process (Grenoble 2040). The session also introduced the four-day working week trial in Valencia (Spain) as a policy lever for addressing time poverty and making space for care and civic life.



The discussion that followed explored the tension between citizen initiative and institutional responsibility –how much can be asked of volunteers, and what must the state guarantee– as well as how progressive cities can work with less aligned national governments, a question particularly resonant for participants from countries with rigid national administrations.

## Session 2: Energy

Hosted by **Transnational Institute**, the energy session situated the course within the global energy transition debate while challenging its dominant framing. The session opened by arguing that the expansion of renewables has largely served to power increasing consumption rather than displace fossil fuels, because profit-driven energy markets remove the incentive to reduce demand –a critique that directly applied the sufficiency logic introduced in the previous session. Two practitioners then grounded the argument in concrete examples. Ellie Radcliffe from Carbon Coop described their work in Manchester, where collaboration between municipal actors and community members has sought to democratise energy transitions and improve household energy efficiency. Chris Vrettos from REScoop presented the European energy cooperative movement, arguing that energy communities –through their democratic governance, sufficiency orientation, and strategic networking– constitute genuine vehicles for post-growth transformation.



The discussion afterwards engaged a debate that proved persistent throughout the course: is the priority to expand renewable energy production, or to reduce energy demand altogether? Participants from contexts with poor grid infrastructure or extreme energy poverty brought important perspectives on the global inequity of sufficiency arguments that assume a baseline of adequate access. This led to a wider debate about equity within energy transitions and the complexities of ensuring energy access whilst simultaneously reducing demand.

## Session 3: Housing

The housing session, hosted by **NaZemi**, confronted one of the most politically charged topics in the course: the global housing crisis and the widespread belief that building more is the solution. Petr Kodenko Kubala from Institute of Sociology at the Czech Academy of Sciences introduced the environmental and social critique of the dominant approach, arguing that the housing crisis is fundamentally a crisis of commodification and financialisation, not of supply. Two guest speakers illustrated alternative pathways. Steph Collins from CATU (the Irish Tenants Union) described the work of grass-roots tenant organising as a means of building political power among those most affected by housing precarity. Gerlinde Gutheil-Knopp-Kirchwald from the Austrian Federation of Limited-Profit Housing Associations presented a century-old institutional model that manages one million dwellings and reinvests surpluses into its mission rather than distributing them to shareholders –a working example of large-scale decommodification.



The session resonated strongly with participants across different national contexts, reflecting a shared experience of housing becoming increasingly unaffordable and inaccessible. The most prominent thread in the discussion was the cost and difficulty of renting in contexts with weak regulation, and how

stronger public ownership and regulatory frameworks could address this –a concern that proved broadly shared. Socio-demographic differences among participants –those renting privately, those in subsidised housing, those navigating post-socialist housing markets– shaped the specific angles from which people engaged, but the overall dynamic was one of collective recognition of a systemic problem rather than polarisation over solutions. The most effective pedagogical move proved to be providing concrete historical and contemporary examples –Red Vienna, the Miethäuser Syndikat in Germany, housing co-operatives in Switzerland– rather than relying on structural arguments alone.

Breakout rooms surfaced a particularly striking observation: the same system simultaneously produces both homeless people and vast stocks of vacant housing –a contradiction that crystallised the structural nature of the crisis for many participants.

## Session 4: Food

The food session, hosted by **FUHEM**, provided a systemic overview of the agro-industrial food model and its ecosocial impacts, positioning agroecology as the organising alternative framework. Two guest speakers complemented this with several examples. Andrea Calori explored the role of municipal food policies, drawing on lessons from the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact cities and the broader evidence base on integrated urban food governance. Nerea Morán mapped the landscape of community-based alternatives across the agri-food chain –from urban gardens and school canteens to solidarity food banks, gleaning networks, and consumer cooperatives– drawing primarily on examples from Spanish cities while connecting them to broader European patterns.



Participant engagement was very high throughout the session, with a lively chat and more questions than could be addressed in the available time (something that also happened in other sessions though). The most resonant discussion concerned how to scale up bottom-up initiatives: participants were drawn not to the question of whether alternatives exist –the session made clear they do, in abundance– but to what combination of civic organising and municipal policy is required to move from isolated initiatives to a transformed food system. In any case, the key insight participants took away was that many post-growth food initiatives are already underway in their cities but remain insufficiently visible and insufficiently connected to one another.

## Session 5: Urban Mobility

Hosted by IPE, the mobility session presented three cases at different scales and starting points, all illustrating how cities can transform their transport systems by redistributing street space and political attention away from private cars. Herbert Tiemens described Utrecht's 25-year transformation: a gradual, cumulative process of cycling infrastructure investment, car traffic displacement to outer ring roads, and new residential development built from the outset with minimal car parking –culminating in a vision of a 10-minute city for 2040. Tena Šarić Rukavina of Zagreb's Sindikat biciklista showed how sustained civil society advocacy –combining technical policy work, public mobilisation, electoral campaigning, and entry into official planning processes– can shift political will and institutional practice even in cities starting from unfavourable conditions. Sergi Cot Cantalosella from Girona



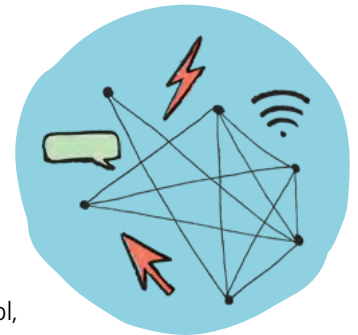
presented the city's pioneering post-growth agreement with the University of Girona, Research & De-growth and Dark Matter Labs described how participatory processes around the city's new low-emission zone had converted potential resistance into broad public ownership of the reform.

The session reinforced a cross-cutting lesson: the analogy between housing and mobility holds precisely. Building more car lanes does not solve congestion, just as building more housing does not solve the housing crisis. Both require sufficiency-oriented redistribution rather than supply expansion.

Breakout rooms produced a rich discussion about subjective safety –the fact that streets feeling safer for cyclists and pedestrians depends as much on social density and community presence as on infrastructure– and about the counterintuitive finding that low-traffic neighbourhoods are typically feared before the introduction of traffic restrictions and embraced once residents have experienced them.

## Session 6: Democratic Technology

The final session addressed a dimension of the post-growth transition that often goes unexamined: the digital infrastructure underlying the contemporary economy. Its host, **Commons Network**, introduced the concept of digital commons and the argument that technology is not neutral –its design, ownership, and governance structure either supports or undermines democratic and sufficiency-oriented economic practices. Sujith Nair, co-creator of the Beckn Protocol, presented a case of open interoperable digital infrastructure designed from the outset for public benefit rather than platform monopoly. This interoperability was presented as a way to counter the extractivist logic of dominant platforms, where network effects concentrate value and power. Anna Julià Verdaguer from Som Mobilitat described a technology cooperative in Catalonia that combines democratic governance with practical mobility services, demonstrating that the community economy and digital innovation are not in tension.



The session served as an effective closing frame for the course: it brought the digital dimension into the post-growth conversation and connected technology governance explicitly to the other domains covered in previous weeks. The cooperative form appeared here, as in every session, as the central institutional vehicle –applied in this case to the digital platforms and data systems on which all of those sectors increasingly depend.

## 2.4 Teaching methodology: what worked and what did not

Across the six sessions, a consistent methodological format was established (with small adjustments during the course): a framing lecture or presentation from the hosting partner organisation, followed by two or three guest speakers presenting bottom-up and top-down examples, followed by a moderated Q&A drawing on participant questions submitted in the chat, and closed with multilingual breakout rooms for peer discussion. This structure proved effective at combining conceptual grounding with concrete evidence, and at making space for participant voice without sacrificing content depth. Across all six sessions, facilitation was provided by the same person –Shaun Matsheza, from TNI– a continuity that proved essential in connecting the weekly themes and giving the course as a whole a coherent through-line.

Several **specific practices** proved particularly effective across sessions:

- Briefing external speakers in advance –with a clear session structure, a shared running order, and an explicit framing of their role within the broader course– was consistently one of the most valuable organisational investments, translating directly into session quality and coherence.
- Uploading concise explanatory summaries alongside materials on Moodle, rather than simply depositing readings, significantly increased the accessibility of preparatory content.
- The use of breakout rooms with open-ended questions –rather than pre-set discussion prompts or structured tasks– allowed discussions to follow the concerns that participants brought rather than those the organisers anticipated, which was particularly valuable for surfacing the socio-political differences among participants that more structured formats tended to smooth over.
- Real-time emoji and reaction tools during presentations gave facilitators immediate feedback about which points resonated and which generated confusion, enabling immediate adjustments.

Several **challenges** were also shared across sessions:

- On the technical side, merging facilitator and speaker presentation slides into a single deck created unnecessary coordination difficulties; maintaining separate decks is a simple improvement worth implementing consistently.
- Also, one session included guest speakers who presented verbally without visual support, which proved challenging for participants –particularly given that both speakers were presenting in a second language. Slides provide cognitive scaffolding that matters especially in multilingual settings, and ensuring all speakers use visual materials is a straightforward improvement with significant impact on accessibility.

## 2.5 Participation, engagement, and the transnational classroom

One of the most striking features of the course was the breadth and quality of participant engagement. Over 1,000 people followed the programme; live webinars attracted active participation in chat and Q&A throughout; and the Moodle forums generated continued discussion between sessions, including participant-initiated threads and contributions from people who could not attend the live sessions.

The topics that generated the most sustained engagement shifted across sessions but clustered around a few recurring themes. In the energy and food sessions, the central question was scalability: participants were not sceptical of the alternatives presented but pressed hard on what it would take to move from community-scale experiments to city-wide or national transformation. In the housing session, the debate about ownership was an important discussion, precisely because it surfaced assumptions that the course framework was challenging rather than reinforcing. In the mobility session, the question of political will dominated: the evidence that change is possible even in unfavourable conditions left participants wanting to understand what had shifted to make it happen.

The multilingual breakout rooms consistently produced observations that did not surface in the plenary discussions. The food session's breakout groups developed the theme of connecting bottom-up initiatives to sympathetic politicians –a relational and strategic question that the formal presentations had not addressed. The energy session's breakout groups raised the challenge of organising in deeply divided

or conservative communities, and the difficulty of democratic approaches in contexts with low civic trust. The housing breakout groups returned to the structural contradiction of simultaneous homelessness and vacancy. The mobility breakout groups explored subjective safety, light pollution, and the habituation process through which low-traffic neighbourhoods shift from feared to embraced once residents experience the change in their streets.

These conversations illustrate something that is difficult to replicate in single-context or single-sector educational settings: the transnational classroom produces a kind of comparative knowledge that participants cannot generate individually. A participant from Greece learning about energy cooperatives in Belgium, a participant from Indonesia sharing community grain storage practices in the food forum, a participant from Croatia drawing on Vienna's housing model –these cross-pollinations were among the most valued elements of the course. The course did not just teach post-growth content; it enacted a small version of the transnational solidarity network that post-growth cities will need to build.

# 3

## SKILLS ACQUIRED AND PEER LEARNING

### 3.1 Competences developed through the programme

Educational programmes about post-growth face a particular challenge: the knowledge they seek to transmit is not primarily technical or procedural, but transformative. It asks participants to question assumptions they may have held for years, to see connections between problems they had understood as separate, and to recognise alternatives they may have dismissed as marginal or too utopian however necessary for the needed transformation. The competences developed through Cities Beyond Growth were of this qualitative kind –less about mastering a body of content and more about acquiring frameworks, confidence, and connections that change how participants engage with their professional and civic environments.

Four overlapping dimensions of learning emerged across the six sessions.

#### Conceptual competences: reading the city through a post-growth lens

The most fundamental shift the course sought to produce was analytical: the ability to understand urban problems –housing unaffordability, energy poverty, food insecurity, car-dominated streets, democratic disengagement, platform monopolies– not as isolated policy failures but as related expressions of a growth-dependent economic model. By the end of the course, participants had encountered a shared vocabulary –decommodification, commons, sufficiency, urban metabolism, democratic governance, ecosocial crisis– and had seen each concept grounded in concrete examples across multiple domains. This cross-sectoral literacy is genuinely rare: most policy and advocacy work is organised sectorally, and the connections between housing, food, energy, and digital governance are seldom made explicit. The course made them visible and, for many participants, irreversible.

A related conceptual gain was greater confidence in engaging critically with mainstream framings. Several sessions directly challenged widely held assumptions: that building more housing solves the housing crisis, that renewable energy expansion is sufficient for a just energy transition, that smart technology makes cities more democratic. Participants who arrived accepting these framings as common sense left the course with the analytical tools to interrogate them – not to dismiss them reflexively, but to ask whose interests they serve, what they leave out, and what alternatives exist. The session on democratic technology made this critical literacy particularly explicit: participants learned not only that alternatives to dominant platforms exist, but why dominant digital technologies are structurally aligned with the logic of accumulation –how their design, ownership models, and governance reproduce the extractivist dynamics that post-growth seeks to overcome.

## Analytical competences: assessing alternatives

A second level of learning concerned the capacity to evaluate post-growth alternatives critically. The course deliberately presented both bottom-up and top-down examples in every session, and invited participants to consider their conditions of possibility, their limitations, and the political and organisational work required to sustain and scale them. The five dimensions of post-growth transformation identified in the energy session –education and skill-building, transforming resource flows towards sufficiency, democratic governance, strategic networking, and systemic change orientation–provided a practical framework that participants could apply across sectors: not just “does this cooperative exist?” but “does it have the governance, the strategic capacity, and the external support to contribute to genuine transformation?”

This analytical depth was partly a product of the course’s transnational scope. Encountering the same institutional form –say, housing cooperatives– in different national contexts made visible both their common logic and their local specificity. Participants developed a more nuanced sense of what travels between contexts and what is deeply rooted in particular legal, political, or cultural conditions.

## Action competences: connecting knowledge to practice

Perhaps the most practically significant dimension of learning was the one hardest to document: the ways in which the course changed what participants did. Reflections from partner organisations on participant feedback suggested a range of action-oriented outcomes: some participants were motivated to become more active in cooperatives –joining an energy community, contributing to a food cooperative, participating in a tenant union– after the course gave them a conceptual framework for understanding these activities as part of a larger project. Others used the course materials and the speakers’ examples in their own advocacy work, public communications, or policy submissions. Civil servants gained familiarity with models –limited-profit housing associations, participatory democracy mechanisms, agroecological procurement criteria– that they could investigate for relevance to their own institutional contexts.

The course also developed a specific action competence that is often overlooked in post-growth education: the ability to work across differences. Bringing together NGO activists, local government officials, academics, and cooperative members in the same learning space requires a kind of discursive flexibility –the capacity to translate between registers, to acknowledge conflicting interests without abandoning shared goals, and to find common ground on policy questions among people with different stakes. These are not just political skills; they are post-growth skills, because the transitions the course described can only happen through exactly this kind of multi-stakeholder engagement.

## Intercultural competences: contextualising the global in the local

A fourth competence emerged from the course’s deliberately transnational character. Over the six weeks, participants encountered examples from Vienna, Barcelona, Grenoble, Utrecht, Zagreb, Girona, Manchester, Bologna, Dublin, and beyond –as well as contributions from participants in Brazil, Mexico, Canada, Australia, India and elsewhere. This exposure did not produce a false universalism; if anything, it deepened participants’ sensitivity to context. The housing session’s debate about public ownership was

inflected very differently by participants with memories of socialist-era housing provision than by those from countries with strong social democratic traditions. The energy session's discussion of sufficiency raised questions of global equity from participants in regions where energy access remains genuinely inadequate. The mobility session's examples assumed urban densities and civic infrastructures that are not universal.

Learning to hold this tension –between the universality of the post-growth challenge and the irreducible specificity of local conditions– is itself a competence. It guards against the mechanical application of models across contexts, and it builds the kind of reflexive solidarity that transnational movements need: not the imposition of a single template, but the patient comparison of experiments from which each context can draw selectively and critically.

## 3.2 Peer learning: the value of the transnational classroom

One of the most consistently valued dimensions of the course, across all six sessions and all participant feedback, was the experience of learning from and with peers from different countries, sectors, and roles. This peer learning was not a secondary benefit of the course –it was central to its design and its impact. At the end of each session there was a dedicated time for breakout rooms for up to 5 people to discuss the proposed topic. Rooms were labelled for participants to choose not just on language preferences, but later also for dedicated time they want to devote to the discussed topic. Some people then could discuss even longer than the originally promised time-length for a lecture.

The transnational classroom produces a specific kind of knowledge that neither expert presentations nor national-level educational settings can replicate: comparative knowledge assembled in real time by people with direct experience of different contexts, accompanied with shared reflection on learnt content.

Several specific forms of peer learning were visible across the course. In the breakout rooms, participants shared examples from their own cities and regions that had not appeared in the formal presentations –local cooperatives, municipal experiments, civil society campaigns– effectively extending the course's evidence base through their own knowledge. In the Moodle forums, participants asked questions of each other as well as of the speakers, and the threads that developed around the most contested questions –the pros, cons, or even own feelings of squatting, the legal frameworks for agroecological policy, the appropriate role of trade unions in post-growth transitions– were substantively richer for having multiple national perspectives in dialogue. The Signal group set up after the course closed reflected a desire by participants to continue these conversations beyond the formal programme.

It is worth noting that peer learning of this quality does not happen automatically in online settings. It requires deliberate facilitation: breakout rooms organised by language so that participants can speak freely; open-ended questions that invite experience-sharing rather than performance; a culture of the learning space in which participants feel their knowledge is valued alongside that of the invited speakers. The course invested in these conditions, and the quality of peer exchange reflected that investment.

The peer learning dimension of the course also points to something larger. Post-growth transitions in European cities cannot succeed in isolation. A tenant union in Zagreb can learn from a housing cooperative in Zurich; a food policy council in Bilbao can learn from one in Milan; an energy community in

Manchester can learn from REScoop networks in Belgium. The course, by bringing these actors into the same learning space over six weeks, was not just transmitting knowledge about post-growth –it was beginning to build the **transnational infrastructure of solidarity and mutual learning** that these transitions will require. The connections formed between participants, the examples that crossed national contexts, the sense of a shared project across difference – these are not soft outcomes. They are among the most durable contributions of the Cities Beyond Growth educational programme.

### 3.3 Applicability beyond the classroom

A post-growth education programme that changes how participants think but not how they act has only done half its work. The Cities Beyond Growth course was explicit about this from the outset: the closing email to participants framed the course as a beginning rather than an end, and invited participants to stay connected, share what they had learned, and apply it in their contexts.

One of the distinctive features of the course was the range of bottom-up initiatives it presented across all six sessions –energy communities, tenant unions, food cooperatives, cycling advocacy organisations, housing cooperatives, digital commons. Participants were explicitly encouraged to explore and connect with similar initiatives in their own localities, using the course as a map of what exists and a starting point for engagement. The course also gave participants a shared language and framework for conversations they may already have been having: the ability to situate a local housing struggle within a broader analysis of financialisation, or to connect a community garden to a food sovereignty framework, changes the political weight of these activities and the confidence with which their practitioners can advocate for them.

For participants working within institutions –local government officers, civil servants, policy advisors– the course offered something particularly valuable: concrete, documented examples of policies that work, drawn from comparable contexts. The limited-profit housing model, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, the Girona post-growth agreement, the participatory democracy mechanisms of Grenoble –these are implemented programmes with track records.

The course also produced a set of resources –recorded sessions, Moodle materials, reading lists across multiple languages– that participants could share with colleagues, use in their own educational activities, or return to as reference. Also, all participants were encouraged to fill their on-line profile in the Moodle platform so they could find potential colleagues in their regions, which also proved to be a good point for further cooperation between participants. Several participants indicated plans to share the course content with their organisations, to use specific examples in policy submissions, or to design local workshops drawing on the course materials. In this sense, the educational impact of the course extends well beyond those who attended it directly.

# 4 LESSONS LEARNED AND CRITICAL REFLECTION

## 4.1 On the design of the programme

**The sectoral structure: strengths and limits.** The decision to organise the course around six basic needs rather than a single overarching framework proved to be one of its greatest assets. As noted in Part II, it attracted participants through specific, concrete concerns and built systemic thinking incrementally. It also avoided positioning the course as ideologically exclusive: someone engaged in housing cooperatives or urban food policy could engage with the material without needing to identify with the post-growth label and often came away with a broader framework than they had arrived with. The sectoral approach also worked well for multi-stakeholder audiences: by addressing different sectors in different sessions, it prevented policy-makers from disengaging when they felt a session was “not their area,” and encouraged cross-sectoral dialogue that participants found genuinely generative.

The limitation of the sectoral structure was the inverse of its strength: the breadth of six domains in six weeks left limited time for depth in any one of them. Each session could introduce concepts, present two or three examples, and open a discussion, but could not go far into the technical, legal, or organisational complexity of any specific alternative. This is appropriate for a general module designed to build shared vocabulary and motivation, but it does mean that the course sits at an introductory level on any given topic. The tailored local modules, documented in Part V, were precisely designed to address this limitation by going deeper in specific domains with specific stakeholder groups. In the beginning, we planned to have longer sessions to allow us to go deeper with topics, however according to preferences of participants expressed in the first international questionnaire we published, we decided to adjust this format more to the possibilities of participants.

**Online format: what is gained and what is lost.** Delivering the course online made possible a scale and geographic reach that would have been unachievable in person: over 1,000 participants from dozens of countries engaging in the same programme simultaneously. It also made the course free, removing a significant barrier to participation. Multilingual breakout rooms and Moodle materials in at least four languages extended accessibility further. These are not small achievements for a civil society-led programme.

There were also some costs of using an online format. The quality of peer connection in breakout rooms, though genuine, is different from what emerges in shared physical space over a residential programme or even a full-day workshop. Informal exchanges –the conversation over coffee, the connection made in the corridor– do not happen in the same way online, and they are often where the most durable relationships and collaborations form. Several partner organisations noted that participants who had connected in breakout rooms expressed a desire to meet in person, and the Signal group set up after the

course represented an attempt to sustain connections that the online format had formed but not fully consolidated.

**The Moodle platform: untapped potential.** The platform served its core function well as a repository for materials and a space for post-session discussion. However, the open Q&A forum format proved less generative than hoped: most activity was concentrated in the 48 hours immediately following each webinar, and sustained peer-to-peer exchange was limited. Redesigning forum engagement –with online comments beneath specific materials, structured prompts that invite experience-sharing rather than question-asking, or discussion threads seeded with participant-generated content –would likely produce richer and more durable interaction in future iterations.

## 4.2 On the pedagogy of post-growth

**The challenge of heterogeneity.** A course that is free, open, and promoted across many different networks will attract participants with very different levels of prior knowledge, different professional contexts, and different degrees of proximity to the post-growth framework. This is a feature, not a bug –the diversity of the participant base was one of the course’s greatest assets. But it creates a genuine pedagogical challenge: how do you calibrate content that is accessible to a newcomer without boring someone who has been working in post-growth policy for a decade?

The most effective response to this challenge was the layered materials strategy: core readings accessible to all, additional resources for those wanting to go deeper, across multiple formats and languages, so that participants could engage at their own level. This did not fully resolve the tension –the live webinar, by definition, addresses everyone at once– but it distributed the challenge across the asynchronous elements of the course, where individual pacing is possible. Future iterations might consider more explicit segmentation: a brief pre-course survey to identify participant backgrounds, followed by tailored suggestions for preparation, could help participants arrive at a more calibrated starting point without reducing the richness of a mixed audience. A complementary strategy, particularly effective for sessions dealing with concepts that were unfamiliar to most participants –such as digital commons and open interoperability– was to keep explanations as simple and accessible as possible and to repeat core ideas in different registers across the session. Where the layered materials approach addresses heterogeneity through depth and format differentiation, this approach addresses it through clarity and redundancy in live delivery: ensuring that key concepts land for newcomers without patronising those with more background.

**Handling resistance and contested assumptions.** Several sessions encountered participants whose starting assumptions were directly challenged by the course content. The housing session’s critique of the “build more” consensus from both environmental and economic perspective provoked pushback from participants who owned investment properties or who approached housing access through a meritocratic lens. The energy session’s argument for sufficiency –reducing total energy demand rather than just substituting renewables– was contested by participants who prioritised energy access in contexts where the baseline of adequate provision had not been met. These are not obstacles to learning; they are productive tensions that, handled well, deepen understanding. The consistent lesson across sessions was that concrete examples are more persuasive than structural arguments: showing that Vienna’s non-profit housing model has managed a million dwellings for a century is more effective than arguing in the abstract for decommodification.

**Working with political imagination.** One of the most consistent reflections across partner organisations was that participants came hungry for examples –not just evidence that the current system is failing, but evidence that alternatives exist, work, and can be built on. The course was designed around this insight, and the evidence suggests it was right. Participants who arrived sceptical of post-growth ideas did not become converts through conceptual argument alone; they engaged when they encountered a mayor describing his city’s participatory democracy in practice, or a tenant organiser explaining how their union had shifted political will in a city previously unresponsive to housing demands. Historical imagination –Red Vienna, the Mondragon cooperatives, the Italian social cooperative movement– was equally valuable for expanding the horizon of what is institutionally possible beyond the narrow range of what currently exists.

## 4.3 On the diversity of European contexts

One of the most important and underappreciated dimensions of a transnational European course on post-growth is the degree to which apparently shared concepts carry very different political and historical resonances in different national contexts. The course surfaced several of these divergences, and they are worth naming explicitly for anyone seeking to replicate the programme.

**East–West differences on public ownership and the state.** Participants from post-socialist countries – particularly from the Czechia, Poland, and other Central and Eastern European contexts– brought significantly different attitudes towards public ownership, collective provision, and the role of the state than participants from Western European social democracies. For some, the recent historical experience of state socialism made proposals for public housing, public energy, or community governance feel less like radical alternatives and more like unwelcome returns. The meritocratic framing of housing –the idea that people should earn their way into good housing rather than be entitled to it– was more pronounced in these contexts. This is not a reason to avoid the post-growth agenda; it is a reason to be attentive to the specific historical reasons why certain proposals resonate differently, and to invest in the examples and arguments that travel better across this divide: tenant organising, which does not require a positive attitude towards the state; limited-profit housing associations, which are private organisations with a public mission; community cooperatives, which emphasise autonomy and collective self-determination rather than state provision.

**Diverging institutional capacities.** Not all cities start from the same institutional conditions, and the course occasionally created frustration for participants from contexts where the examples presented seemed unreachable. A city without a tradition of civic participation, with a weak cooperative sector, with a municipal government actively hostile to post-growth ideas, or with a national legal framework that does not recognise many of the institutional forms discussed –such a city cannot simply transplant the Grenoble model or the Utrecht cycling strategy. The course was most useful for these participants when it offered not just the end-state examples but the trajectory: the 25-year arc of Utrecht’s transformation, the decade of incremental advocacy by Zagreb’s cycling union before political conditions shifted, the slow patient work of building organisational capacity before institutional change becomes possible.

**The role of the national context.** Several discussions illustrated the tension between what is achievable at the municipal level and what is blocked by national policy frameworks. A progressive city government can introduce participatory budgets, agroecological procurement, and cycling infrastructure; it cannot

unilaterally decommodify its housing market, introduce energy sufficiency regulation, or establish national cooperative law. Participants working in cities with sympathetic local governments but hostile national contexts—a pattern that recurred across multiple countries—found the course useful for identifying what is possible at the local level, and for building a case for national policy change. The transnational dimension was valuable here too: evidence that a policy exists and works somewhere within the EU carries different political weight than a theoretical proposal.

# 5

## THE LOCALLY ADAPTED (TAILORED) MODULES

### 5.1 Rationale and design of the tailored modules

The general online module was designed to reach a broad and diverse audience across Europe –to build shared vocabulary, introduce inspiring examples, and foster transnational dialogue among people who might not otherwise encounter one another. It succeeded on those terms. But a course that reaches hundreds of stakeholders at once, delivered online in weekly sessions of ninety minutes, cannot do everything. It cannot go deep into the specific challenges of a particular city. It cannot create the conditions for sustained, face-to-face deliberation among people who share a neighbourhood, a municipality, or a local political landscape. And it cannot translate general concepts into the concrete strategies and alliances that local post-growth transitions actually require.

This is the gap that the six locally adapted –or tailored– modules were designed to fill. Where the general module moved horizontally across Europe and across six thematic domains, the tailored modules moved vertically: into specific cities, specific communities, and specific problems. Each partner organisation designed and delivered its own local module, drawing on the conceptual framework introduced in the general course but adapting content, format, and methodology to the needs of its particular context.

The rationale for this two-module structure reflects a core conviction of the *Cities Beyond Growth* project: that post-growth transitions cannot be imported from elsewhere. The examples from Vienna, Utrecht, or Grenoble that proved so generative in the general module are not templates to be copied but evidence that alternatives are possible and worth imagining –evidence that needs to be translated, contextualised, and connected to the specific institutional landscapes, political cultures, and community capacities of each city. The tailored modules were the space for that translation.

Despite the diversity of contexts, all six modules were designed around a set of **shared principles**.

The first was **multi-stakeholder composition**. Each module deliberately brought together participants from different sectors –local government officers, civil society organisations, cooperatives, community representatives, social entrepreneurs and/or trade unionists (depending on each case)– who would not typically share a learning space. This was not merely an inclusion exercise. The project's founding premise is that post-growth transitions require democratic legitimacy, and democratic legitimacy requires the active participation of those most affected by current economic arrangements –including communities from marginalised neighbourhoods, which were an explicit priority for participant recruitment across all six cities. Bringing diverse actors into the same room also created the conditions for the kind of multi-stakeholder dialogue that post-growth policy-making will eventually need to sustain at a larger scale.

The second shared principle was **action orientation**. Unlike the general module, which was structured primarily around knowledge-building, the tailored modules were designed to move participants towards practical engagement: identifying local strategies, mapping existing initiatives, building connections between people working on related problems, and developing the confidence and language to advocate for post-growth approaches in their specific institutional environments.

A third principle was **trust-building**. Bringing together actors with different interests, different relationships to institutional power, and different prior knowledge of post-growth ideas requires more than a well-designed agenda. It requires facilitation that makes space for disagreement without letting it foreclose dialogue, that takes seriously the concerns of those who are most sceptical, and that builds over time the kind of relational foundation on which genuine collaboration can develop. The tailored modules ranged from 15 to 36 hours of instruction across multiple sessions, precisely because this kind of trust cannot be built in a single day.

## 5.2 The six local modules

### Transnational Institute (TNI) – Transforming Energy (Online)

- **Participants:** The module brought together 46 international participants, capturing a diverse array of sectors including NGOs, policy advocates, students, local government officers, campaigners, academics, trade unionists, and teachers.
- **Methodology:** Delivered in an online format, the module combined 8 hours of live sessions with 16 hours of asynchronous interaction via Padlet and preparatory readings. The design leveraged peer-to-peer exchange using a mixture of 1-1 discussions, small breakout rooms, participant discussions with expert speakers and dedicated spaces for reflection. Crucially, facilitators consciously avoided joining the breakout rooms to eliminate power dynamics and encourage free expression among participants.
- **Key Insights:** Participants advanced their understanding of a systems approach to the energy sector, concluding that there is no single pathway to an energy transition. The sessions underscored the importance of deprivatisation, public ownership, and democratisation for post-growth futures. Furthermore, it highlighted how a decolonial approach requires demand reduction metrics (e.g., reducing car battery sizes to diminish global lithium extraction) to accelerate just transitions.
- **Lessons Learned:** Building trust early on is critical; dedicating time in the first session for participants to introduce themselves in pairs significantly enhanced engagement. Utilizing interactive, continuous tools like Padlet before and after live sessions successfully sustained collective peer learning.

### Oikos – The Next Step: From Sustainability to Sufficiency (Ghent & Leuven)

- **Participants:** In each of the two Belgian cities, the module gathered 25 people representing a wide intergenerational and professional mix. The cohorts included students, architects, and workers from social organisations, alongside an “experienced expert” (a person with lived experience of poverty trained to share their perspective).

- **Methodology:** The program consisted of an 18-hour in-person itinerary distributed across three evening sessions of 3 hours per city. Shunning over-reliance on extensive expert lectures, the methodology focused on concise inputs followed immediately by structured dialogues. Participants were challenged with concrete, guiding questions on how to radically transform local urban systems.
- **Key Insights:** A fundamental takeaway was that constructing hopeful, post-growth alternatives requires a conscious expansion of collective imagination. Participants noted the deep material interconnection between housing, energy, and food provisioning. Additionally, a clear consensus emerged around the critical lack of local common places that enable communities to gather and tackle concrete neighbourhood needs.
- **Lessons Learned:** Co-creation thrives producing inspiring and coherent proposals when guided effectively with brief and actionable expert inputs; keeping group numbers around 25 created a safe, equalizing environment for diverse civic profiles.

## FUHEM – Workshops on Food, Mobility, Housing and Urban Post-growth (Madrid)

- **Participants:** Over 40 people attended the workshops, reflecting a multi-stakeholder blend of academia, organized civil society, trade unions, consumer associations, and local and regional councilors. Marginalised populations were integrated via representatives from different organisations.
- **Methodology:** Spanning 15 hours over three physical sessions, the module utilized expert “detonator” talks, rapid diagnostic rounds, and roadmap exercises. Strategic simulations (such as “What would you do if you had the power?”) were deployed to ground structural proposals into manageable municipal actions.
- **Key Insights:** The workshop on food exposed Madrid’s staggering logistical vulnerability, noting its near-total food import dependence. On housing, the cohort concluded that precarity stems from financialization and investment funds treating housing as a real asset rather than a lack of supply. Mobility was identified as trapped in a car-centric cultural imaginary rooted deeply in engineering schools. Although these thematic workshops were separated, these challenges were found inextricably linked, often requiring cross-sectoral solutions.
- **Lessons Learned:** Using territorial, data-driven diagnostics is vital to translate abstract post-growth concepts into immediate material necessities. Framing structural changes around “social justice” rather than the technical term “post-growth” helps bypass ideological resistance and build common ground.

## Commons Network – The Community Economy (Amsterdam)

- **Participants:** The module was custom-designed for local community initiatives, active neighbourhood actors, and municipal leaders working within vulnerable urban areas, specifically targeting the Amsterdam North and South-East districts.
- **Methodology:** Structured around a sequence of 6 in-person sessions, the curriculum paired critical reflection with tactical skill-building. The pedagogical core rested on network and conflict mapping, Asset-Based Community Development, and a “Mutual Gains Approach” focused on equipping local actors with strategic negotiation skills.

- **Key Insights:** The module directly confronted the prevailing “neighbourhood fatigue” stemming from historical, extractive collaborations with the municipality. It provided tools to construct resilient local economic practices rooted in care, allowing actors to advance proposals outside of growth logics.
- **Lessons Learned:** Transition education in marginalized contexts requires linking overarching economic theories to direct, skill-based toolkits that empower communities to negotiate on an equal footing with public institutions.

## NaZemi – Community Resilience (Jablonec nad Nisou)

- **Participants:** The seminar was attended by 20 people deeply embedded in the local fabric: local government employees, elected officials, social entrepreneurs, nonprofit workers, educators, and members of active local associations and settlement committees. Notably, the module explicitly included active representatives from the Roma and Ukrainian ethnic minorities
- **Methodology:** This intensive 24-hour in-person workshop balanced brief theoretical inputs (2 hours per day) with participatory, facilitated activities. Participants actively mapped local socio-economic flows and practiced grassroots community organizing skills. To manage the emotional stress of public speaking, facilitators utilized nonviolent communication and other inclusive elements of transformative education.
- **Key Insights:** Participants gained a practical understanding of how to expand their communities through active organizing and how to trace and visualize local economic flows. The sessions built individual commitments toward collaborative economic resilience inspired by the Community Wealth Building framework.
- **Lessons Learned:** Educators must position themselves as partners rather than all-knowing experts, validating the participants as the ultimate experts on their local context. Working in small groups proved highly effective at tempering dominant voices and ensuring every opinion was shared.

## IPE – Beyond Growth Perspectives (Zagreb)

- **Participants:** The module gathered 20 people, with a focus on city councillors and members of the city administration, alongside representatives of NGOs and cooperatives, post-growth researchers, and topic experts.
- **Methodology:** Delivered in person across two 8-hour sessions. The first session took a holistic approach to the city’s challenges using the doughnut model: following introductory expert inputs, participants worked in three facilitated groups to identify issues for post-growth city planning, concluding with a plenary discussion. The second session addressed food, energy, housing, and mobility through a less formal structure, introducing each sector’s current situation by an expert, followed by semi-structured discussion.
- **Key Insights:** Participants deepened their understanding of the doughnut model as an urban planning tool, applying it across sectors to map their interdependence in building climate resilience. Long-term planning emerged as a critical instrument for shaping today’s policies while laying the ground for more radical interventions in future. Across sectoral discussions, participants identified recurring blind spots: existing practices to reduce environmental footprint and improve public services often remain isolated from one another, requiring more coordinated municipal effort to produce systemic change.

- **Lessons Learned:** A central lesson was that within a still growth-dependent financial and institutional system, the most viable pathway is “micro-level hacking”: using existing policy frameworks to introduce more radical practices from within –from ecologically produced food in public institutions to prioritising cycling and public transport over car use. These incremental interventions build public reception and demonstrate the benefits of post-growth approaches, but deeper systemic change requires inter-sectoral coordination that remains largely absent.

## 5.3 Multi-stakeholder dynamics: shared lessons

### Designing Inclusive Learning Spaces across Diverse Civic Profiles

The tailored modules demonstrated that a successful post-growth educational process requires bringing together a highly diverse and multi-sectoral cohort, ranging from local government employees, elected officials, and academics to trade unions, social entrepreneurs, and grassroots activists. Crucially, the workshops proved that incorporating vulnerable or marginalized groups –such as ethnic Roma and Ukrainian minorities in Brno, citizens with lived experience of poverty in Belgium, and neighbourhood collectives from vulnerable districts in Madrid and Amsterdam– is essential to ground the transition in lived realities.

The integration of these diverse actors surfaced varying baseline conditions of local trust. While some cities benefited from a naturally positive and popular relationship between citizens and their local government, other urban contexts explicitly had to confront “neighbourhood fatigue” resulting from historical, extractive collaborations with public institutions. Bringing these contrasting backgrounds into the same room required methodologies that acknowledged systemic disparities –such as the massive resource gap between social movements and large investment funds backed by central financial institutions– and actively worked to build a horizontal, shared network from the ground up.

### Pedagogical Strategies to Democratise Participation

A core shared lesson across the partnership is that traditional, long expert presentations fail to engage multi-stakeholder audiences; instead, the modules thrived when using concise inputs followed by structured, action-oriented dialogues. However, active participation can be mentally and emotionally challenging for stakeholders unaccustomed to sharing their opinions or speaking in front of a large group. To manage this strain, educators found success in using specific pedagogical frameworks that helped participants understand and navigate their feelings, alongside explicit reassurances that public speaking was entirely voluntary.

To further equalize the dialogue, the workshops deployed diverse practical tools:

- **Small-group configurations:** Working in pairs or reduced breakout teams proved highly effective at tempering dominant voices, ensuring that everyone’s opinions could be fully heard and shared.
- **Time-limited diagnostics and simulations:** Utilizing rapid diagnostic rounds and interactive roleplay simulations succeeded in grounding abstract debates into concrete proposals and practical examples.

- **Structured roadmaps vs. free debate:** Facilitators noted a constant balancing act between allowing experts the freedom to contribute from their experience and maintaining a strict structural flow to prevent the workshops from devolving into unstructured complaints or getting lost in the sheer complexity of the interconnected crises.

Moreover, managing power imbalances between institutional actors and local citizens required a conscious re-evaluation of the facilitators' own authority within the learning space. Educators learned that they must actively dismantle the idea of the instructor as an all-knowing expert, explicitly encouraging the cohort to recognize that the participants themselves are the true experts on their local context.

Furthermore, by using different methods (e.g. small breakout rooms of participants without facilitator presence) to ensure that participants could deliberate freely without feeling evaluated, facilitators managed to create safe, equalized environments where diverse civic profiles could challenge established ideas and challenge themselves with respect.

## Navigating Ideological Tensions and Aligning on Material Realities

The multi-stakeholder setting naturally sparked significant ideological debates regarding the mechanisms of a post-growth transition. The most prominent frictions emerged around the following axes:

- **Trust in the State and Public Ownership:** The concept of socialisation and public provision provoked intense debate due to the sharply different relationships and historical trust in the state present among international participants.
- **North-South Geopolitics of Sufficiency:** Discussions surfaced underlying tensions regarding whether low-demand or energy sufficiency approaches constitute a Global North imposition when applied to Global South contexts where baseline access remains inadequate.
- **Market Feasibility vs. Decommodification:** In sectors like housing, participants expressed deep resistance to the structural reality that building more supply fails to lower prices when left in the hands of a speculative market.

To handle these conflicts without foreclosing dialogue, facilitators allowed full freedom in the expression of doubts and utilized specialized strategic negotiation tools –such as the *Mutual Gains Approach*– to map diverging interests and align institutional proposals with actual neighbourhood needs.

Ultimately, the modules proved that the most effective way to bypass ideological friction or resistance to abstract terminology is to ground the curriculum in specific territorial, data-driven diagnostics. By framing these absolute material necessities around the shared axis of “social justice” and collective well-being rather than the technical or ideological terms of “post-growth,” multi-stakeholder groups successfully found common ground and co-created coherent, hopeful roadmaps for their cities. A final shared lesson concerned the indispensable role of political will within city administrations. Even in contexts where local government is broadly sympathetic to post-growth ideas, the absence of an explicit institutional commitment makes meaningful engagement difficult and progress dependent on identifying allies within the administration –a process that demands sustained trust-building, negotiation, and advocacy. Where political will was present, it acted as a multiplier for everything else the modules sought to achieve.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPLICATING THE PROGRAMME

The following recommendations are drawn from the reflections of partner organisations, participant feedback, and the patterns documented across the six sessions. They are intended for educators, civil society organisations, and local governments considering running a similar programme.

## On programme design

- 1 Use a sectoral structure anchored in basic needs rather than the post-growth label. It broadens reach, avoids self-selection, and builds systemic thinking through the familiar.
- 2 Combine a general module accessible to a wide audience with locally adapted modules that go deeper in specific domains. The two formats are complementary, not alternatives.
- 3 Plan for the online format's limitations from the outset. Build in deliberate peer connection moments, consider hybrid or in-person elements where resources allow, and invest in post-course connection infrastructure (chat groups, alumni networks).
- 4 Redesign forum engagement: replace open Q&A threads with inline comments on specific materials and structured prompts that invite experience-sharing.

## On content and speakers

- 5 Prioritise concrete examples over structural argument, especially for audiences new to post-growth. Historical examples expand political imagination; contemporary examples provide replicable models.
- 6 Present both bottom-up and top-down examples in every session, and make explicit the conditions under which they developed in interaction.
- 7 Brief all speakers thoroughly in advance: share the session structure, the running order, the participant profile, and the broader course framing. Keep facilitator and speaker slide decks separate.
- 8 Ensure all speakers use visual support materials. In multilingual settings, slides are a significant cognitive and linguistic aid.

#### On diversity and inclusion

- 9 Provide materials at differentiated levels of depth and in multiple formats (text, video, podcast) across several languages. Offer multiple entry points for participants with different backgrounds.
- 10 Design explicitly for socio-demographic heterogeneity in participant groups, particularly around topics – housing, energy, public ownership – where participants’ material interests diverge. Make space for this heterogeneity rather than flattening it.
- 11 Be attentive to East–West and North–South differences in the resonance of post-growth proposals. Invest in examples and arguments that travel across these divides, and choose speakers whose contexts represent the diversity of the participant base.

#### On peer learning and follow-up

- 12 Treat peer learning as a core deliverable, not a side effect. Invest in breakout room design, multilingual facilitation, and forum culture to make peer exchange as rich as possible.
- 13 Create explicit pathways from the course to action: connections to cooperatives, networks, local campaigns, and policy processes. The course changes how people think; the follow-up infrastructure shapes what they do.

# Annex A

## Glossary of key concepts



### Post-growth

Post-growth is a vision of a prosperous economy where basic human needs are met without exceeding planetary boundaries and where our economy is not dependent on endless growth. There are many post-growth approaches and ideas. They are often grouped under terms such as degrowth, wellbeing economy, or doughnut economics.

#### *Growth dependency*

In today's growth-driven economy, continuous economic expansion is seen as essential. Without growth, risks such as stagnation, unemployment, and business failures arise. Yet, growth itself generates inequality, depletes natural resources, and creates other harmful impacts. Transitioning to a post-growth economy that guarantees a good life for all means moving toward an economic system that is not dependent on growth.



### Ecosocial crisis

The ecosocial crisis describes the convergence of multiple crises —ecological, social, political, racial— originating from capitalism, highlighting how socioeconomic factors drive the transgression of planetary boundaries and exacerbate their consequences. This concept underscores how the structures, institutions, actors, and power relations that make up global capitalism simultaneously reinforce environmental degradation and inequalities.

#### *How Racism, Sexism, and Capitalism Intersect*

Capitalism relies on access to cheap labour and resources, which it secures in part through systemic inequalities. In this way, capitalism, racism, and sexism are intertwined: capitalist systems both depend on and reinforce racial and gender hierarchies. These hierarchies justify unequal resource distribution and marginalize certain populations. This intersectional perspective challenges the notion that simply diversifying the ruling class can combat racism or sexism, emphasizing instead the need to address the underlying system.



## Planetary Boundaries

Planetary boundaries are scientifically defined limits within which humanity can safely operate to avoid destabilizing the Earth system. Crossing these boundaries increases the risk of triggering large-scale, potentially irreversible environmental changes that could undermine the planet's capacity to support human well-being.



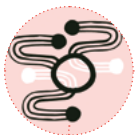
## Sufficiency

The concept of sufficiency refers to everyone having access to enough resources and services to meet their daily needs, while remaining within planetary boundaries. Sufficiency looks different in different contexts: in richer nations, sufficiency can mean rationalizing demand or consumption to enable global equity while sustaining prosperity and wellbeing for all. In poorer nations, it may require increasing consumption to meet the needs of the population.



## Decommodification

Decommodification is the process by which goods, services, ideas, or work are removed from market logic, shifting the goal from profit generation to the satisfaction of specific needs. This process counters commodification, central to a growth-based economic system, where formerly free or non-profit making entities like services, ideas, nature, or labour are constantly transformed into commodities for market exchange to allow the economy to grow.



## Commons & 'commoning'

Commons are self-managed, community-led processes to govern resources and relationships. 'Commoning' is the process of collective use, governance, and community building, offering a post-capitalist practice that fosters social relations beyond market logic. Commons have been a forgotten sector of our societies and our economy, and provide the space in which communities write their own rules. The commons presuppose activity, communication and democratic stewardship. They move us away from linear thinking and individualism, towards ecosystems and relationships.



## Community Economy

A community economy serves the community, through local anchoring, shared ownership and inclusive decision-making. Prosperity is no longer measured by Gross National Product but by collective well-being and welfare. Economic and social values are not extracted but remain in the community that produced it.

### *Community Wealth Building*

Community wealth building aims to democratize the local economy and strengthen local communities by giving cooperatives a greater role, and using large institutions in the city or neighbourhood as ‘anchors’ for major social and economic transformations.

#### *Cooperatives*

Cooperatives are the backbone of the community economy, generating both social and economic value, through shared ownership and collective governance. They come in many forms. For instance, there are consumer cooperatives, where people pool resources to buy goods or services together, and worker cooperatives, where workers collectively own the company and its profits. Cooperatives can also be alliances of organizations or neighbourhood coalitions. In recent years, cooperatives have seen a surge, especially in sectors like healthcare, energy, and housing. They empower people to tackle the pressing challenges of our time, bypassing the traditional market and government systems.



### **Agroecology**

Agroecology is an approach that combines science, practice, and social movement to transform the agrifood system in response to the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and social injustice. It integrates ecological agricultural practices with principles of ecosocial justice, challenging the logic of agribusiness and promoting food sovereignty and ecosystem care.

#### *Food sovereignty*

Food sovereignty advocates for both people’s right to decide how their food is produced and consumed and the promotion of agroecological models that prioritize social justice, sustainability, and local production over globalized profit. This vision entails a profound transformation of the agri-food system, guaranteeing labour rights, access to resources, and social participation, with agroecology as a guide for building fair, resilient, and sustainable food systems.



### **Digital Commons**

Digital commons refers to collectively owned and democratically governed digital resources and infrastructures. They promote democratic governance, digital autonomy, inclusive economic development, and a diverse and decentralised digital landscape. Digital commons offer inclusive and reusable infrastructure for sectors like media, education, and healthcare, and contribute to a diverse and resilient digital ecosystem that is less vulnerable to monopolies and single points of failure.

#### *Public Digital Infrastructure*

Digital infrastructure includes both physical infrastructure and digital components, much of which is privately owned. Essential digital technologies should be placed under public control in order to ensure their democratic governance and access.

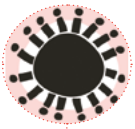


## Care

Care can be understood as a fundamental human activity encompassing everything we do to sustain, maintain, and repair the world we live in.

### *Care Economy*

Neoliberal capitalism, both institutionally and ideologically, undermines the role of care. This devaluation of care is tied to broader systems of gender, class, and racial exploitation, with women disproportionately bearing the burden. In contrast, a Care Economy centers care—not the market—as the foundation of our economic thinking. It recognizes the transformative power of care to challenge dominant capitalist norms. The relational and nurturing values at the heart of care hold transformational potential to disrupt and reimagine economic systems.



## Deliberative democracy

Deliberative democracy is grounded in an ideal in which people come together, on the basis of equal status and mutual respect, to discuss the political issues they face and decide on the policies that affect their lives. Deliberation itself is understood, at a minimum, as mutual communication in which participants weigh and reflect on their preferences, values, and interests concerning matters of common concern.



## Urban/rural metabolism

If cities were perceived as living beings, a city's metabolism involves biophysical exchanges with nature. The majority of these exchanges take place in urban areas and the rural environment, whether close by or in remote areas. Rural areas provide cities the essential materials and energy and also serve as sinks for their waste.

# Annex B

## Bibliography and resources by module

Organised by session, indicating format (article, video, podcast) and available language.

[https://www.tni.org/files/2026-08/CitiesBeyondGrowth\\_Ed.HandbookAnnexB.pdf](https://www.tni.org/files/2026-08/CitiesBeyondGrowth_Ed.HandbookAnnexB.pdf)

Cities are a vital driver of ecosocial transformation. They are the epicenters of emissions, inequalities, and political decisions that will determine the future of millions of people—but also the hubs of organized communities, cooperatives, and local governments capable of acting swiftly.

How can a city be transformed from within? This manual compiles the experience of the Cities Beyond Growth project: a transnational educational program driven by six European organizations with support from the European Union's Erasmus+ program. It documents the post-growth conceptual framework applied to the urban scale, the content and methodology of the general online course, the six modules tailored to each city, and the lessons learned from working with more than one thousand participants in Europe and around the world. It is designed for anyone who wants to understand, replicate, or adapt this educational experience to their own context.



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