



# THEME COMMONS

**SUB-THEME:**

***URBANISM AND HOUSING***

**TITLE OF WORKSHOP**

**Degrowth in Big Cities**

- **Planning Degrowth in cities**
- **Bridging environmental and social attention**



# **PROPONENT**

**Jin Xue, Petter Naess, Finn Arler, Denmark, Karl  
Georg Hoyer, Norway**

# **FACILITATOR**

**Alessandra Manzini**

**Valeria Chiappini**

# **STAFF:**

**Linguistic Mediator: Denis Costa**



# NAME OF PARTICIPANTS:

| N° | NAME      | SURNAME    | N° | NAME       | SURNAME    |
|----|-----------|------------|----|------------|------------|
| 1  | SUSAN     | BACA       | 16 | CARCO      | PATRIZI    |
| 2  | OLE       | BUSCK      | 17 | FERDINANDO | MANDARA    |
| 3  | GIORGIO   | CAPUANI    | 18 | VOLKER     | MAVERHOFER |
| 4  | STEFANO   | DENICOLA   | 19 | ORIANA     | CODISPOTI  |
| 5  | FERNANDA  | TOMASELLI  | 20 | SERENA     | RECAGNO    |
| 6  | NEM       | CASAJNAMA  | 21 | ALESSANDRA | RINALDI    |
| 7  | MARCO     | BACIARLINI | 22 | ALICE      | COVATTA    |
| 8  | VERONICA  | MESSINA    | 23 | MIGUEL     | VALENCIA   |
| 9  | ANDREAS   | SEEBACHER  | 24 | FEDERICO   | CINETTO    |
| 10 | VAVERARDA | AMADIO     | 25 | HALINA     | BROWN      |
| 11 | IAKOVOS   | ALAVANOS   | 26 | PHILIP     | VERGRAQT   |
| 12 | JOEL      | CRAWFORD   | 27 | LUCA       | CREMONINI  |
| 13 | GIORGOS   | KALLIS     | 28 | DOMENICO   | MAFFEO     |
| 14 | N'UNDO    |            | 29 | ALEXANDRA  | QUINT      |
| 15 | OLIVER    | PARODI     | 30 | J.H        | CRAWFORD   |



## **Towards a Sustainable Spatial Organization of the Energy System: Backcasting Experiences from Austria**

Petra Wächter , Michael Ornetzeder , Harald Rohrer, Anna Schreuer and Markus Knoflacher

**PAPER ABSTRACT:** The transition to a sustainable energy system faces more challenges than a simple replacement of fossil energy sources by renewable ones. Since current structures do not favor sustainable energy generation and use, it is indispensable to change the existing infrastructure. A fundamental change of the energy system also requires re-organizing spatial structures and their respective institutions and governance structures. Especially in Austria, urban sprawl and unsustainable settlement structures are regarded as one of the main developments leading to increased energy demand. One of the aims within the project E-Trans 2050 was to identify socio-economic constellations that are central to the further transformation of the energy system and to focus on actors and their socio-technical framework conditions. Based on a sustainable future vision for the year 2050 a backcasting workshop was conducted to identify necessary steps for the envisaged transition to a more sustainable energy system. The results shed light on the necessary changes for a transformation towards sustainability in the specific Austrian situation. Critical issues are region-specific production of energy and its use, settlement and regional structures and values and role models, which all have a determining influence on energy demand. Combining the knowledge of extensive energy use with available energy resources in spatial planning decisions is a main challenge towards a long term sustainable energy system.

**“Non-growth in the housing sector for sustainability”,**  
by Jin Xue (EN)

**PAPER ABSTRACT:** By thoroughly exploring the trends of the housing sector growth in Copenhagen (Denmark) and Hangzhou (China) metropolitan areas and its social, economic and environmental consequences, the paper argues for a non-growth and even degrowth in the housing sector in the global North and the wealthy cities in China. A simple thought experiment of a non-growing housing sector is made in order to identify what policies should be in place for a socially sustainable economic degrowth. A non-growing housing sector needs the facilitation



of urban planning. The implications of this shift from economic growth to economic degrowth on planning in relation to values, substances, process and spatial arrangements are briefly discussed.

## **The future of bicycling given a world in degrowth: perspectives and lessons based on the Central European project, BICY**

Jason Meggs, Joerg Schweizer, University of Bologna, DICAM — Transportation Engineering Group

**PAPER ABSTRACT:** The bicycle offers much for a world correcting through degrowth. As a resource-light vehicle, and long the most energy-efficient form of ground transport, bicycling offers low-carbon, healthy travel with superior mobility characteristics over motor vehicles and public transport for a large share of urban trips. The cost to provide bicycle infrastructure is also quite low, and the economic benefits far outweigh the costs, in sharp contrast with private motor vehicles. However, in scenarios of degrowth, a variety of challenges to maintaining let alone increase the quantity and quality of bicycle use may emerge: critical infrastructure such as bridges, and quality of roads may decline; personal security and the threat of bicycle theft might improve or decline as well; these different potentialities can conceivably vary enormously. Socio-economic inequalities might also exacerbate, leading to more hostile conditions on roads. The BICY project ([www.bicy.it](http://www.bicy.it)) found a strong linear relationship ( $R^2=0.802$ ) correlating cycling rates to the length of bikeways per capita (even stronger when only big cities are examined,  $R^2=0.916$ ). This emphasizes the importance of providing appropriate infrastructure, to achieving cycling as a widespread transportation option. In the context of degrowth, cycling might flourish or perish depending on the vision pursued and the allocation of limited resources. It is important to consider the desired role of cycling and the path to achieve it, when planning for the various possible manifestations of degrowth (conscious or crisis; rapid or slow; resource driven or economic; etc.).

Given the general agreement that peak oil has already arrived, and industrial growth is in a plateau phase before inexorable contraction, and given that governments continue to dally in the face of potentially catastrophic climate change, it is likely that the scenario we face first will be rapid and

crisis-driven. Peak oil is already shown to promise major health and environmental burdens, the chaos of a system in rapid, unplanned contraction will only exacerbate this. Even if petroleum supplies remain adequate for the growth-dependent system to maintain some stability, other



indicators show infrastructure is poised to decline faster than it can be repaired or replaced; roads are already declining and the roadway network is contracting. What would be the best possible response in maintaining a healthy and long-term sustainable transport system in the long term, given that so many other major adjustments and challenges will be underway? Are there new paradigms of roadway, are there rapid adaptations in land use and goods/people movement which achieve the ideals of intentional and best-case degrowth?

### **Anti-spectacle- a discussion paper- Keio University, Tokyo, Japan;**

Radović Darko and Davisi Boontharm

**PAPER ABSTRACT** We want to open this discussion by repeating an earlier argument (Radovic 2008b) that there is a need to revisit World City Hypothesis (Friedmann, 1986). We see that as important in the context of the Conference on Degrowth, Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity, as the idea of “world city” implies a certain (kind of) quality, and the concept of degrowth and the idea(l) of sustainable development are both about a necessity to redefine the very criteria which frame our understanding of progress. Cities offer an important arena for all developments related to sustainable future.

The World City Hypothesis was formulated by John Friedmann, as - *a hypothesis* The economism of Friedman’s thought perfectly suited an emerging Thatcherite-Reaganist worldview. The research question posed by Friedmann had, first found strong support in particular academic circles, then to be elevated into a powerful tool for ordering urban development. Various tools for evaluation and, importantly, measuring urban quality were advised, and helping direct the vision of urban futures in a particular direction. That was the direction of a kind of globalisation which was promoted by the big capital and which, since then, became our global reality. That has led to all sorts of distortions in parallel aspects of development over the last several decades, including a number of the caricatural ones. Cities were, and they still are, evaluated “in terms of the significant presence of major firms providing services in accountancy, advertising, banking/finance, and law” (Gugler, 2004) and various command functions and ranked according to the of their strength stock-markets, number of international flights and even (sic!) presence of the US dollar billionaires. The power behind the dogma of the “world class” made the consequences of the promotion of these criteria graphically obvious.



**Rebuilding relationships: from the competitiveness tree to the well-being tree;** Chiara Ortolani, Laboratory "Inhabiting the City", Sapienza University of Rome Department of Civil Engineering, Construction and Environmental (DICEA)

**PAPER ABSTRACT:** Since 1950 there has been a huge worldwide increase in the percentage of population living within cities. The trend shows no sign of stopping - for the next 20 years, the flow of people is predicted to continue soaring. It assumes also that in 2030 this percentage will exceed 60%. Furthermore the great contemporary global cities play, both in cross-border regions that in those sub-regional, the function of: a) point of power in the organization of economy, b) essential marketplaces for the leading industries of the current period, and the finance and the specialized services to the industries, and c) the most important area in which industries produce research and innovations tool. Therefore, great cities are both the places where a large numbers of people are concentrated and focal points for the growth at regional, national and international level.

Perhaps, besides the number of people living in the cities, one should consider the urban planning model chosen. Indeed, the contemporary city has been realised by considering private cars as a key element for internal and external mobility. This has led to a radical change both in lifestyle of people and policies and, in any case, to the increase of resource's consumption (soil, water, time, material property) and services. In fact, today urban services are considered to be as supporting of the consumption's policy because "they destroy the autonomy of men forcing - through changes of laws, environment and social structures - to become external assistances users"

The western metropolitan cities were an important model for civil development, which was based on consumerism. However, it did not give rise to a widespread welfare, but instead, gave rise to numerous and increasingly large sacks of poverty and social exclusion. Under these conditions, the new deal of the economic degrowth means to rely on "energies" different from those upon which is based the contemporary city.

Energy, in this case, means renewable energy, which, however, has much lower EROEI than fossil fuels. Therefore, it must be accompanied by a change of habits of people, by a return to the use of individual physical and intellectual energies for purposes that affect the well-being of both communities and individuals but also the synergy among individuals. Either the western metropolitan cities or those of developing countries can escape from poverty (material and



immaterial) coming back to a local production and consuming what is needed for their lives and well-being.

Poverty is growing in a world where basic necessities are increasing and induced by industrial products, generating a gap between the riches and the poor.

As a consequence, it is necessary to reconstruct the social equity, environmental sustainability, economic resilience and renewable energies for the metropolitan cities and their neighbourhoods. It is necessary to rebuild their ability to absorb changes without collapsing and to reorganize them in a qualitatively different state from the present by controlling different structural and functional processes.

The extreme specialization of several parts of a metropolitan city carries out to the corrosion of functional relationships which are essential for the restoration of environmental sustainability and social equity, based on sharing of territory throughout people's relationships. The dissolution of these relationships brings to the progressive dismantling of the local economies and to low attention for the consequences of deleterious anthropogenic activities occurring inside the urban system.

Through systems thinking and choosing the neighbourhood as preferred scale of action and observation, you can turn the vision bringing to the fore the local dimension and the needs and possibilities of people groped for a rebalancing of the global dimension that now is predominant.





## TACKLED ISSUES:

- Policies for a sustainable living future in the big cities. Decoupling: breaking the link between environmental bads and economic goods. Degrowth in terms of social and environmental capital.
- Facilitation of community based living. Sustainable settlement based on renewable energy sources and structured in a multifunctional way ( not just settlement purposes)
- How to increase and improve cycling in the big cities. The quality of the cycling environment has major implications Comfort, respect affect cycling Smoothness, connectivity, convenience Freedom from noise, air pollution, and of course freedom from traffic danger. What to expect in slow collapse scenario?
- (Rakivich) Anti-spectacle need to promote the uniqueness of each city need to reframe and redefine local resources. There is a need to reframe and redefine local resources. Sprawl services: support the consumption's policy, while the people are forced to become external assistance users.

How to rebuild neighbourhood resilient relationships?

(Petra Waechter)

- No empirical results of the relationship between GDP and energy use • energy is not adequately reflected. Current energy demand is not feasible with renewable energy resources that should meet standards of sustainability criteria
- Limitation of unlimited energy use leads to a pressure of production and consumption that will unavoidably lead to lower levels of economic activity
- Crucial role of spatial planning institutions: Long term energy security must take place in line of sustainable land use

Degrowth of non-renewable but also of renewable energy resources

## ANSWERED QUESTIONS

Degrowth can be another kind of growth in the sense of limited growth, an ethical one.

Global cities are all the same because of imported images and values;

Need to find local institutions willing to back degrowth related initiatives

Need to regain the capacity of living in small spaces



Car free cities are also good for the mobility of old and disadvantage people (no traffic, no dangerous curbs);

Does participation to more open spaces lead to less urban sprawl?

How to couple architectural experiments/best practice with cultural empowering?

## UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

*Which are the effective restriction or strategies to counteract urban sprawl in Europe?*

*If we want to campaign for more compact cities who are our best allies on either the institutional or legislative level?*

*Densifying cities has been proposed as a way to reduce urban sprawl, but how does a denser housing affect the quality of life?*

*Considering the long life of houses and infrastructures the most important thing is to tackle the existing cities.*

*How to apply demolition policies in cities characterized by high artistic and historical value of old houses?*

*How to couple architectural experiments/best practices with cultural empowering? How to explain the value of urban planning to people who will live it?*

*The government of big cities is, most of the times, strictly lined to national parties (and lobbies). Most of the decisions needed for sustainable changes have to be taken at a government level. How this process can be done in practice?*

*(Chiara Ortolani)*

*Which are the steps you think that should be followed in order to improve relationships in a big city like Rome?*