

De-growth, pro what? – Backcasting a sustainable society without economic growth

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The positive vision of green growth and the negative outlook of a recession are the prevailing images of future for a growth-centred society. They are challenged by various alternative views of a post-growth society. The purpose of this paper is to specify and elaborate the desired future end-states and scenarios put forward in contemporary growth critique. A literature review of the following variants of post-growth visions is conducted: degrowth, steady-state, transition movement, buen vivir and sufficiency economy philosophy. The backcasting approach is utilised in order to sketch scenario pathways backwards from a preferred future image to the present. The backcasting approach is effective in exploring radical solutions that entail discontinuities in current dominant trends and conventional wisdom. The paper is divided into two sections. First, the images of future extracted from the literature are presented in the form of a futures table. Main similarities and differences between the images are described. A question is raised whether it is possible or advantageous to establish a common core for all -growth visions. The matter of operationalising preferred future end-states is also examined briefly. Second, scenarios are sketched based on the strategies and means of implementation described in the literature. The roles that different actors of the society play in the transition towards a sustainable post-growth society are scrutinised. The paper contributes to shifting the emphasis of post-growth debate from what is opposed to what is favoured and, in this way, it enhances the robustness of post-growth sustainability visions.

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