Growthism in Irish Spatial Planning in an Age of Limits:
Towards a Transformative Post-Growth Praxis

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Gavin Daly

Department of Environmental Sciences, Geography & Planning

Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place

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Abstract

Humanity today stands in an age of crisis. From economic shocks to global pandemics and the existential climate and ecological emergencies, the future has never looked more imperilled. Yet the planning profession, as future orientated praxis, seems powerless in mitigating this dangerous trajectory and in conceiving alternative spatial prospects beyond endless production and consumption growth, driving civilisation ever further towards collapse.

In a search for alternative possibilities, the aim of this thesis is to understand why planning is growth-orientated and how it could be theorised differently. Planning's purpose as a basic functionary in the reproduction of capital is first critically interrogated and how planning knowledge continuously evolved to install a growth imperative as its governing ideology. The heterodox concept of degrowth is then offered as a deliberately disruptive discourse to radically repoliticise planning and to advance the urgent institutional changes required in the face of the limits to growth.

Combining an original synthesis of spatial dialectics and post-structuralism, I develop a novel research praxis for spatialising degrowth as a transgressive epistemology and, through advancing an alternative understanding of planning's foremost concepts of 'balanced' and 'sustainable' development, I apply this to the Irish National Planning Framework as an empirical case study using documentary analysis and participant interviews, to deconstruct the hidden locus of planning's growth ideology and to identify opportunities for how it might be transcended.

Finally, as the original contribution of this thesis, I argue that it is from the very geographically uneven contradictions of capitalist spatialisation itself, manifesting in the grassroots planning practices of post-industrial shrinking cities, where the conditions for urban growth have already broken down, that the performative possibilities for enunciating a transformative post-growth planning paradigm might be apprehended.

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Prologue

On 28 April 2023, the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins delivered an explosive speech (Higgins, 2023). Its content reverberated through the body politic, was discussed at length on radio talk shows, prompted numerous opinion columns in national newspapers, triggered irreverent social media debates and even made international headlines. The President had said out loud what was impossible—he questioned our fixation with economic growth.

Less than a month later, thousands of delegates gathered in the Hemicycle of the European Parliament in Brussels to hear the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, open the 'Beyond Growth' conference[1]. The idea that such an event could be held in such a place had until recently been unthinkable. However, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of many of modernity's core myths and as the economic treadmill decelerated, repressed possibilities, desires and identities surfaced from the loss of meaning that were not thinkable before. In the teeth of our accelerating global socio-ecological polycrisis, more and more people are waking up to the dangerous contradiction between economic growth and the limits of nature, with mounting calls for far-reaching debates on, "fundamental changes to how society functions, including changes to underlying values, worldviews, ideologies, social structures, political and economic systems, and power relationships" (IPCC, 2022).

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to these debates within the field of spatial planning. How we produce our spatial environments will be critical in a transition to a world beyond growth. However, as presently conceived, planning praxis remains deeply implicated in a growth imperative. While an emergent body of literature has begun to focus on ideas for a post-

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[1] www.beyond-growth-2023.eu

growth planning, no study has yet attempted to theorise how planners might be equipped with the necessary agency to break free from the growth paradigm such that they can function within the conditions of no growth and become designers of post-growth futures. The aim of this thesis is to address this gap in the literature. In pursuit of this aim I will proceed with three objectives arranged over three parts, as follows:

Part I

The first objective is to deconstruct how institutional norms install economic growth as planning's governing ideology. In order to do this, I will commence from a Marxist urban political-economy interpretation and present a theoretical understanding of how praxis evolved to institute growth as its common sense purpose, putting us on a perilous collision course with planetary boundaries. Building on this analysis, I develop an original research strategy to deploy the counterhegemonic concept of 'degrowth' as a discourse-analytical method of critique through developing a novel synthesis with materialist and post-structuralist theory from the social and spatial sciences, particularly the work of Henri Lefebvre. In advancing this epistemology, I hypothesise that planning's foremost, harmonious discourses of 'balanced' and 'sustainable' development provide crucial, but largely overlooked, mediums to dissolve the endlessly unstable crisis tensions and contradictions of capitalist spatialisation, to preclude any loss of meaning and to ceaselessly stabilise planning praxis towards growth-orientated ends, inhibiting planners' capacity to imagine the possibility of alternatives.

Part II

Placing these two concepts at the centre of my analysis, I will apply this hypothesis to the preparation of the Irish National Planning Framework as my empirical case study, through answering four interrelated research questions by way of documentary analysis and participant interviews. I will demonstrate, in support of my hypothesis, how Irish spatial planning praxis

institutionalised the imperative of growth and how this is applied and pursued through the discourse of 'Balanced Regional Development', as a particular coherent and cohesive representation of space. In searching for openings for how this might be challenged and changed, using my epistemology for applying degrowth as a transgressive method, I will demonstrate how, through defamiliarizing planning's consonant harmonious imaginary of 'sustainable development', a residual openness to different planning possibilities can still be apprehended, offering theoretical cracks as to how planning's growth-imperative might be transcended.

Part III

The results of my empirical case study suggest that to equip planners with the conceptual agency for transformative change, new discourses will be required. My second objective is therefore to sketch a theoretical contribution to the development of an alternative post-growth planning paradigm. I will do this by interpenetrating Lefebvre's utopian urban philosophy with degrowth's radical principles and values as a novel theoretical basis for the production of genuinely different sociospatial futures. Leaning on the insight that counterhegemony is often portended from within the very cracks and contradictions of hegemony itself, I will examine how experimental grassroot planning knowledge emerging from the loss of meaning that ensues from the breakdown of urban growth conditions in shrinking cities prefigures something akin to an applied experience of post-growth planning, which has yet to be systematically explored in the literature.

In response to my third and final objective, I conclude with my proposals for two alternative discourses of 'differential' and 'regenerative' development for the transfer of this niche knowledge to wider regimes of action and to familiarise the possibility of post-growth planning alternatives, such that they might gain authority, become persuasive and ultimately performative as a contribution to the advancement of the tangible, tactical means of furthering a degrowth transition in real world institutional practice.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Where to?

The idea for this thesis arose from a simple question—how can spatial planning praxis function within the conditions of no growth? This reflection was very much first motivated within the turbulent aftermath of the collapse of the Irish 'Celtic Tiger' property bubble in 2008/2009. Following a period when managing spectacular levels of urban growth had been the foremost spatial challenge, planners were suddenly confronted with a new and very different reality. The global financial crisis triggered an abrupt economic reversal and a subsequent programme of severe austerity (Ó'Riain, 2014). When the bubble burst, Ireland was left with staggering levels of development oversupply, the most conspicuous manifestation of which was the phenomenon of so-called 'Ghost Estates'; abandoned or partially occupied and often incomplete housing developments; which for a brief time gained worldwide notoriety as the synoptic, iconic ruins of Ireland's precipitous economic downfall (O'Callaghan et al., 2014).

Throughout the Celtic Tiger period I worked as a planner in private practice. Redundancy and the deeply unsettling experience of the economic crash forced me to confront my own assumptions as to the role of planning in society. A succession of prominent reports all pointed to the key culpability of 'bad planning' in facilitating the irruptive, pell-mell property boom, with

disastrous consequences (Kitchin et al., 2010; An Taisce, 2012). In 2010, I subsequently took up a position with the Irish Green Party, then in national coalition government, advising on new planning policy reforms. My brief also extended into environmental and climate change policy, and it was here that the basic idea for this thesis fermented and was gradually formed. The question as to how planning could function within the conditions of no growth seemed not just to be a pragmatic consideration in response to the paralysis and disinvestment of the recession but also a deeper paradigmatic imperative in the face of the unfolding scale and urgency of the global ecological and climate crisis.

That was over ten years ago. In the intervening decade the destructive human-driven impact on our planet has accelerated to an unparalleled intensity, which needs little rehearsal here (IPCC, 2021; WWF, 2022). Suffice is to say that an ominous array of scientific evidence has repeatedly confirmed that the current explosive rates of world economic, population and urban-industrial growth are rapidly overshooting environmental limits that may well short-circuit the very future of human civilisation on Earth in the not too distant future unless there is a radical change in humanity's relationship with nature and urgent action is taken to downscale the human enterprise to a more benign equilibrium (Zovanyi, 2013). The chief takeaway from each and every major scientific report over the past decade, and more, has been that, "our current trajectories are fundamentally unsustainable; these trajectories are interconnected and linked to our main systems of production and consumption and time is running out to come up with credible responses to bend this trend" (EEA, 2019, p.3).

As a future-orientated discipline, intuitively planning ought to be a critical source of ideas for steering the transformative changes needed in the face of impending planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009). Indeed, in the immediate wake of the global financial crisis a succession of scholars beseeched planning practitioners to grasp the opportunity of the recession to

explore new concepts and discourses that radically questioned their mental models and key beliefs in a search for alternatives (Albrechts, 2010, 2015; Raco, 2012). Yet, far from the moment of economic collapse representing 'the end of planning as we have known it' (Lovering, 2009) and an important inflexion point for a thoroughgoing self-critical analysis to fundamentally question it's very purpose; and the economic and political processes of which it is part; the 21st Century human predicament has remained largely an accessory in mainstream planning policy debates which has continued to steadfastly adhere to the primacy of the growth agenda. True to form, as the recession receded, planning's inveterate growth imperative made an unremarkably swift recrudescence, hastily foreclosing meaningful opportunities for debates on alternative pathways and leaving many unanswered questions for both theory and practice (Kunzmann, 2016). The nagging sense from this historical moment was one of crisis postponed and of a myopic praxis muddling through, incapable of offering progressive solutions for an age of crisis. Should we just continue to be resigned to the possibility that planning may be irrelevant in responding to humanity's planetary conjuncture, or worse, part of the problem?

In searching for possibilities, planning theory did not appear to offer very many promising avenues which have not been tried and failed. While academics have, over decades, repeatedly challenged planning's position as a key functionary in the iniquities of capitalism, its essential growth rationality has remained by-and large-untouched. This is perhaps unsurprising as urban growth management is very much the *raison d'être* of planning and, as such, it has typically not been the wont of theorists to question this basic purpose (Rieniets, 2009). To the extent that planning theory and practice account for the possibility of no growth, they usually do so only for short periods until it has been reversed. Hence, the idea that continuous growth might be an impossible, but also highly undesirable, goal for planning has been engaged

with only to a very limited extent in the literature[2]. In the absence of growth, spatial policy would have to be determined by some other means, but planning as a body of knowledge provides few clues as to how this could be made possible. We thus seemed to be thrust sharply up against the chief intellectual weakness of contemporary planning theory (Reade, 1987). In order to account for the 'impossibility' of planning different spatial futures beyond growth, other ways of knowing will be needed that are capable of redefining the boundary between the possible and the impossible (Monno, 2010). Exploring this frontier and unearthing what sort of knowledge might be appropriate to this task would therefore have to become the focus of my enquiry (Friedmann, 2011).

A chance encounter with the work of Frank and Deborah Popper and their evocative metaphor of the 'Buffalo Commons' for exploring ecological and economic restorative possibilities in the Great Plains region of the USA, first alerted my attention to discourses and practices that are reimagining radically divergent post-growth prospects for planning (Popper and Popper, 1987, 2008). In many North American post-industrial cities; famously emblematic places such as Detroit, but also other 'Rust Belt' cities like Youngstown and Flint; the inexorable prevalence, severity and persistence of urban decline has compelled planners, politicians, and community groups to relinquish normative expectations of 'one-way' growth futures and to embrace, rather than deny, adaptive methods for downsizing the future of their cities in response to the practical difficulties they face.

Within these abandoned interstices, where the economy has subsided and the state has so often retreated, a groundswell of experimental practices

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[2] In the aftermath of the 2008/2009 global financial crisis, a number of writers did briefly turn their attention to the limitations of a planning praxis represented by a, "growth agenda without growth" (Raco, 2012, p.154). Rydin (2013), for example, usefully sketched some proposals for planning beyond growth-dependence, but does not argue that planning's growth paradigm should be abandoned altogether. Instead, she contends that reliance on growth alone, particularly in peripheral regions and cities, is insufficient and planning will increasingly become a question of negotiating growth and decline rather than achieving growth in every place.

are organically emerging under the conceptual banners of 'smart decline', or 'planned shrinkage', as real-life laboratories for 'planning for less' and as proving grounds for autonomous, grassroots attempts aimed at institutional change for rethinking and reorganising space, relocalising economies, rightsizing infrastructure and reimagining more equitable, ecologically sound and, crucially, smaller places (Popper and Popper 2010). Could these discourse-challenging experiments from outside the firmament of professionalised planning knowledge offer some theoretical guideposts for how to build a planning praxis consistent with the imperative of a transition to a post-growth world?

The increasing phenomenon of urban abandonment in many post-industrial cities has also resulted in a nascent intellectual field concerned with exploring this very conceptual and theoretical possibility (Blanco et al., 2009; Großmann et al., 2013). Pallagst and Wiechmann (2005), for example, have hypothesised that planning for shrinking cities is impossible under the precepts of orthodox planning cultures, but requires a radical shift to a different paradigm. In the absence of a growth milieu, planning's conventional discourses, values and ideologies fall away, confounding much of how we think about praxis and the reality upon which it is built (Hollander and Németh, 2011). The challenge of shrinking cities has therefore been theorised as presenting a possible counterpoint for challenging growth as the key doctrine of planning, liberating physical and discursive spaces that could conceivably be exploited to articulate fundamental questioning of received planning wisdom and which instead, "stress neighbourhood use values, spatial and social justice, or environmental preservation rather than the land-for-profit vision of the growth machine" (Purcell, 2000, p.97). According to Pallagst et al. (2021), the comparative international evidence on the influence of shrinking cities in adapting growth-centred planning cultures towards envisioning alternative praxes in response to changed circumstances is increasingly evident. The literature to date, however, has not yet turned its

attention to how this knowledge could potentially be transferred beyond specific local contexts to help elicit broader theoretical understandings of a possible post-growth planning cultural turn across wider scales and strategies of action.

Given their obvious resonances, it is somewhat surprising that, as of yet, there has not been any serious attempt to interpenetrate the commonality that exists between the literature on urban shrinkage and the increasing academic interest in the analogous heterodox concept of degrowth. Situated at the junction of ecological and cultural critiques of economic growth, degrowth is a radical rejection of the dominant ideology that society must be organised around endless accumulation, as fundamentally at odds with a finite biosphere (Banerjee et al., 2020). Instead, degrowth advocates a profound societal transition through a planned, democratic and equitable shrinking of production and consumption as the only means to achieve social justice, human wellbeing and ecological sustainability within planetary boundaries (Demaria et al., 2013; D'Alisa et al., 2014). Scholars, in particular, heavily dispute ecomodernist notions that accelerating forces of technological advancement can decouple economic growth from the environmentally exploitative and destructive corollaries of capitalist economies (Kallis and Bliss, 2019). However, to be clear, and as is often misrepresented, degrowth is not in any way equivalent to recession or austerity which happen when capitalist growth-dependent economies stop growing. Instead, it is a call for an entirely different world of common abundance which does not require growth in the first place, and where recessions and austerity simply cannot happen (Hickel, 2020b).

Despite its negative sounding connotations; which, in itself, is an indication of the omnipotence of contemporary growth imaginaries; degrowth's negation is therefore proposed very much in a positive sense as an attempt to overcome depatterned cultural fears of a future without growth. This, it is argued, must be confronted if a progressive discussion on genuine

alternatives is to open up and, "thus, an easy way to state that growth is not the solution but a part of the problem" (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010, p.1742). Accordingly, degrowth is advanced, first and foremost, not in a literal sense but as a symbolic weapon, or 'missile concept', for the transdisciplinary sparking and sharing of ideas that puncture hegemonic rationalities that justify growth as an end in itself (Fournier, 2008). As described by Kallis (2011):

> "The 'de' in degrowth is therefore not only a 'de' for throughput decline, but also a 'de' for cultural and institutional decolonization from economism and the religion of growth." (p.878)

This provocation is exceptionally revolutionary, becoming a confluence point for a heterogeneous ensemble of critical countercurrents concerned with the exigencies of a paradigmatic reordering of contemporary human values, especially a reaffirmation of the primacy of social and ecological values, and for reimagining an altogether qualitatively different world built around sufficiency, conviviality and reciprocity, emancipated from normative economic expectations (Kallis and March, 2015; Schmelzer et al., 2022).

A persistent criticism of degrowth thinking, however, is its highly idealised nature and the sizable gap that exists between its utopian promise and the very challenging task of how to bridge these ideas from outside the Overton window into conventional thinking; the ways in which degrowth societies would differ from current institutional orders; and how degrowth change can be realised in concrete practice (Joutsenvirta, 2016). The concept has therefore been heavily censured as abstract, lacking empirical rigour and has thus far gained very little traction beyond select activist and academic circles as a convincing alternative in the realm of real world policymaking (van den Bergh, 2011; Buch-Hansen, 2018). As a result, in most countries, including Ireland, it is simply dismissed as unworldly and not taken seriously as a means for advancing credible possibilities in mainstream policy conversations, frustrating those seeking answers that could enable a degrowth transition in practice (Parrique, 2019). As Porter (2015) bluntly concedes:

"Whatever the ethical merits of the case, the proposition of no growth has absolutely no chance to succeed." (quoted in Rees and Mandipour, 2017, p.149)

Degrowth scholarship is also very conscious of the practical challenges it faces and wary of limiting critique and alternatives to just a few dissident, peripheral groups, recognising that to be effective it needs to be articulated beyond abstruse theorising to offer a popular mandate for change (Kallis and March, 2015). Critics, however, repeatedly counter that the concept conjures *prima facie* unhelpful sentiments, frightening people, and will never achieve widespread political acceptance, continuously repelling its radical potential (Drews and Antal, 2016; see also Raworth, 2018). Nonetheless, for degrowth proponents, it is precisely this polemical character, which cannot be incorporated within sedimented growth cultures, which allows it to retain its far-reaching promise, resisting recuperation from within capitalist logics which has so often been the downfall of other radical concepts. As Brown (2015) describes, the moment one discourse is able to fully incorporate the perspective of the other, it ceases to be antagonistic, defusing its potential as a means of critique.

Consequently, degrowth's iconoclasm is simultaneously both an advantage and a disadvantage of the term. From the perspective of academic research, however, while the conditions may not yet currently exist for degrowth to become part of the policy mainstream, it can help in providing a thoroughgoing critical standpoint for a genuinely repoliticised reflection and analysis, and for presaging real alternative visions for human development, such that a degrowth mindset, or new post-growth subjectivity, might gradually become more feasible where, in the context of humanity's unfolding 21st Century ecosystemic polycrisis, the politically impossible inexorably yields to the politically inevitable (Romano, 2012; Weiss and Cattaneo, 2017).

Efforts to articulate theoretical and practical proposals for what degrowth might mean for planning, and how praxis might be applied through

intervening in urban-spatial development to advance degrowth, has recently started to receive some academic attention (Krähmer, 2022; Savini et al., 2022; Kaika et al., 2023)[3]. As explained by Lloveras et al. (2018), "[t]he spatial agenda of degrowth does not attempt to reinvent the city as a 'decarbonised' or 'smart' place", but in the Henri Lefebvre tradition, "to infuse urban life with non-capitalist processes and logics" (p.188). Xue (2021), a prominent emerging author in this intersection, therefore argues that degrowth's values and principles offer the ideal counterhegemonic thoughtware for planning to radically rethink its role and function, and to instigate a paradigm shift such that planners can transition from being system-maintainers to the vanguard of a social transformation.

Similar to other streams of political-ecology scholarship, a key weakness identified in degrowth thought is its proclivity for small-scale, bottom-up experiments as the prime vehicle for transformational change, alongside a general antipathy towards top-down centralised planning and urbanisation more generally, which is perceived as inescapably tied to the pursuit of a pro-growth capitalist agenda (Mocca, 2020). Consequently, it has so far failed to seriously engage at the strategic dimension of spatial planning or to provide any convincing arguments as to its scalability to confront dominant epistemes. Moreover, while Xue (2021) develops a compelling case that the 'inside' position of planners makes them ideally placed to act as signifying counteragents for the production of new post-growth meanings which differ dramatically from those defended by the mainstream, they remain members of a professionalised elite who are at once, "constructed by as constructor of the process" (Harvey, 2000, p.237). This 'doubleness' severely limits planners' conceptual autonomy to recognise, reflect and eventually to

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[3] More latterly, academic discussion on the topic has been on the rise and there has been a number of international academic initiatives aimed at examining post-growth planning, including the establishment of a '*Post-Growth Planning Collective*' (Lamker and Schulze Dieckhoff, 2020). A podcast series, '*Becoming a Post-Growth Planner: Obstacles and Challenges to Changing Roles and Practices*', has also been established which includes interviews with academics and practitioners thinking in this space, including this author (www.postgrowthplanning.com).

subvert the preanalytic growth rationalities governing their praxis as a prerequisite for radical, systematic change (Roy, 2006).

Thus, while scholarship has started to theorise the potential for planning to advance degrowth, and *vice versa*, at the level of principle, the net question remains unresolved. That is to say, how can planners be equipped with the necessary agency to break free from the growth paradigm and to become designers of alternative post-growth futures, constrained, as they are, within the heavily restrictive political, cultural and institutional ideologies of the broader structural forces of capitalist urbanisation, such that they do not have the means to resist? "For that, planning requires a repertoire of new practices that can invoke imaginations of a radically different pathway to our collective future and which compel us towards new opportunities for such imagining" (Miraftab, 2016, p.9).

The aim of this thesis is to address this question. Of key interest is the practical knowledge emanating from the urban crisis conditions of shrinking cities; as actualised grassroots attempts at a spatial form of post-growth planning in practice; and how it might be leveraged to this task. These practices typically do not draw explicitly from degrowth, but they share many similar values and principles advocated by it. However, while such niche experimentation can provide small but instructive contributions to prefiguring possible planning prototypes that significantly depart from the material and discursive content of growthism, they are destined to remain obscurely on the sidelines unless significant inroads can be made in linking this bottom-up knowledge to top-down action that can challenge the governing regime (Cosme et al., 2017; Mocca, 2020; Xue, 2021).

This niche–regime gap and the current thin theorisation of opportunities for a wider politico-institutional embedding is recognised within degrowth literature as a critical weakness for operationalising a post-growth transition in practice and an important, urgent focus for academic research (Kallis et al., 2012; Khmara and Kronenberg, 2020). In this sense, my

thesis seeks, "to shed light on a question raised by previous researchers, namely the institutional conditions that would allow degrowth ideas to be integrated into real world policy and planning" (Buhr et al., 2018, p.13). I certainly do not claim that I will be able to provide all the answers, but I am convinced that this interpenetration is worthy of further exploration as a means of theorising how planning can function within the conditions of no growth, and for enlarging the terrain of the possible.

Situating

As an applied institutional praxis, planning is a discipline situated within specific socio-political and territorially bounded fields of power relations. Hence, a problem-driven research enquiry into the complex interdependence between its growth imperative, its challenges and the possibility of a countervailing praxis for subverting and transforming it, points to the utility of a case study analysis. As described by Flyvbjerg (2006b), praxis is never derived from theory alone but is always contingent upon context dependent judgement and situational ethics.

Accordingly, this thesis adopts a case study methodology which generally corresponds to a phronetic epistemology, as also advocated by Flyvbjerg (2004), whereby the principal objective is to radically problematise planning's taken for granted progressive and rational purpose through a "thick description" of a specific case (Geertz 1973, p.6). This was considered to offer the most propitious means to generate in-depth, empirically grounded knowledge of the ways power and values work through planning, which is not achievable via other modes of enquiry, as a precursor for theorising a possible alternative praxis.

I have therefore chosen to study national spatial planning in Ireland as the case study for this thesis, for several reasons. Firstly, as outlined in my introductory remarks, it is my home country where I have considerable knowledge and personal experience working as a planning practitioner,

policymaker, activist and researcher. Hence, it is the country that I feel most comfortable writing about and where I have many contacts on all sides of the argumentative exchange in planning policy debates. In my professional life, I currently work for the European Union (EU) funded programme, ESPON[4], researching comparative national and regional spatial dynamics and policies across Europe. As a result, I am primarily interested in studying the praxis of spatial planning, and its role in maintaining the existing social order, at a strategic national and regional scale (see Daly, 2023). This professional biography was very much formative in how I identified, conceptualised and approached the research problem for this thesis.

Secondly, like many countries, spatial planning praxis in Ireland has been in considerable flux in recent decades. I have previously reviewed elsewhere the literature chronicling and critiquing the general trends in this evolution and written on how the National Spatial Strategy (NSS), published in 2002 as the strategic spatial policy blueprint for Ireland to 2020, was instrumental in the roll-out of neoliberal growth-orientated orthodoxies within institutional planning norms (Daly, 2016). In contrast to standard accounts, my analysis offered an alternative understanding for how planning became embroiled in the Irish Celtic Tiger property bubble, which did not occur in spite of the NSS but very often because of it, through the dissemination of an oblique set of highly influential pro-growth, pro-development discourses[5]. This thesis takes up the story and responds to a research gap that I myself identified of the need for an ethical inquiry into an alternative future-orientated planning praxis, underpinned by a more progressive re-ordering of socio-ecological values and principles, through an examination of the case of the successor strategy to the NSS—Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework (NPF).

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[4] European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (www.espon.eu).
[5] See Rydin's *'Theory in Planning Research'* (2021, pp.157–158) for useful engagement with this research.

The NPF was developed between 2014 and 2018, including the establishment of an advisory expert group and two rounds of extensive public consultations attracting 1,612 submissions from public bodies, non-governmental organisations and members of the public (see Figure 1). The heightened level of engagement and dialogue amongst key actors throughout this period; particularly against the backdrop of a rapid recovery from the economic crash, intensifying sociospatial imbalances and coterminous public policy tensions associated with the growing prominence of global ecological concerns; presented me with an accessible, good-quality data field and a fruitful context to undertake this research. As will be further developed in Chapter 3, problematising these 'tension points' to make them useful for reflection and analysis, was very much central to the research hypothesis developed for this thesis, as also advocated by Flyvbjerg et al. (2012) for phronetic case study research.

Finally, following on from the eventual adoption of the NPF, Friends of the Irish Environment, an environmental non-governmental organisation, launched a legal challenge against the NPF. In keeping with the value-rational positionality guiding this research (discussed below), as an active member of Friends of the Irish Environment I involved myself directly in developing the substantive arguments for this challenge. This afforded me with a further opportunity to engage with the "clashing rhetorics" (Howe, 1995, p.138) inherent within the NPF and to participate actively amongst interested subjects to enrich the analysis in ways useful for the production of alternative planning knowledge (Hale, 2008). At the time of writing, these legal proceedings have been rejected by both the Irish High Court and the Court of Appeal but have been accepted into the Supreme Court and subsequently referred to the Court of Justice of the EU as raising matters of fundamental public concern (Healy, 2022; O'Riordan, 2022).

October 2014	Government approval to commence the preparation of the NPF
December 2015	Publication of the NPF Roadmap
April 2016	Econometric & Demographic Steering Group meeting
July 2016	Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) Briefing
October 2016	Infrastructure, Environment & Climate Action Cabinet Sub-Committee Meeting
December 2016	Expert Advisory Group meeting
February 2017	Pre-draft public consultation (Issues & Choices Briefing Paper)
March 2017	Expert advisory group meeting/Econometric & Demographic Steering Group meeting
July 2017	Government decision to align NPF with 10-year National Development Plan for capital infrastructure ('Project Ireland 2040')
August 2017	Cross-Departmental Steering Group meeting
September 2017	Launch of public consultation on Draft NPF
February 2018	Finalisation and government approval of the NPF

Figure 1: Key milestones in the preparation of the NPF (Source: www.npf.ie)

Positioning

Questioning growth, in a search for alternatives, is controversial. In undertaking this research, I became all too aware of how growth presentism dominates institutional and professional planning norms. Growth is the ideological bedrock of capitalism and the core tenet of its cultural hegemony (Hickel, 2020b). For most cities and regions, it is the only yardstick that matters and there is self-evidently no such thing as bad growth or too much of it (Leo and Brown, 2000).

It is therefore currently very hard to imagine how it would be possible to produce transformed planning cultures necessary for a transition to a post-growth world. However, ecological breakdown is already upon us and all the evidence suggests that this century is likely to be marked by a very significant

deterioration in humanity's physical, social and economic environment, and for most of the planet's population life will become increasingly precarious (Laybourn-Langton et al., 2019). Mitigating this parlous trajectory is acknowledged to require rapid, deep greenhouse gas emissions reductions and a profound societal adaptation (IPCC, 2021). This is no time to be apathetic.

I have therefore written this thesis from the standpoint of a critically engaged activist scholar borne out of what I believe to be a moral responsibility for advancing the possibility of a more ecologically and socially just society (Martinez-Alier et al., 2014). Per Friedmann (2008), the task of planning theorists cannot merely be to passively observe the world but to respond to its utopian mission to intervene, given the reality of what is happening and with what tools at hand. Hence, while research must firstly explain practice, so as to advance an understanding that justifies changing it, it also offers an opportunity to contribute to reformed conditions of possibility (Miraftab, 2009). As Gibson-Graham and Roelvink (2010) advocate:

> "Theory has taken on a new relation to action—to understand the world is to change it. As a performative practice, academic research is activism; it participates in bringing new realities into being. Our role as academics has thus dramatically changed. We are less required to function as critics who excavate and assess what has already occurred, and more and more pushed to adopt the stance of experimental researchers, opening to what can be learned from what is happening on the ground." (p.342)

This positionality requires a different type of academic subjectivity which, rather than being limited to critique, is reflexively open to unorthodox thinking as a means to unsettle our own dispositions towards theorising and to creatively open the floor to new possibilities with the conscious intentionality of making scholarship more relevant beyond exclusively academic circles (Gibson-Graham, 2008). Such a standpoint also corresponds with Flyvbjerg's phronetic approach to planning research, mentioned above,

which has the goal of adding to society's possibilities for value-rational deliberation and action, and where researchers see no neutral ground for their work. I am convinced that the implication of our times demands such an action-orientated, ethical research vocation.

I am also keenly aware that the environmental policy and academic community remains deeply divided over where we go from here (Buscher and Fletcher, 2020; Kallis, 2021). Without needing to wade into these long-standing disagreements, I take the view that 'the environmental problem' is, at its root, the *problematique* of economic growth as both a logic and a system (Meadows et al., 1974). Reflecting on these debates, I am not persuaded, as many are, that growth can be decoupled from ecological destruction. In fact, there is compelling empirical and theoretical evidence to the contrary, and as to the irreconcilable conflict between the contemporary mode of capitalist production and consumption, and a finite environment (Ibrahim, 2012; Hickel and Kallis, 2019; Haberl et al., 2020)[6]. Or to put it more directly, growth *is* the crisis.

Regardless, even if I am wrong on that, numerous authors have attested that economic slowdown and secular stagnation is likely to become an inevitable part of our 21st Century reality (Jackson, 2019; Dorling, 2020). Indeed, within the present-day uneven geographies of capitalism, regional decline is already a widespread and intensifying phenomenon, and sociospatial adaption to build community resilience within these shrinking conditions is increasingly recognised as requiring altogether different ways of planning (Daly and Kitchin, 2013; Tietjen and Jørgensen, 2016). Therefore, and despite its persistent critics and current shortcomings, I have selected

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[6] For reasons of space, I do not journey into the corresponding cache of literature which focuses on energy descent, particularly the peaking of world oil production and its civilisational implications for urban-industrial capitalist societies (see, Gates et al., 2005; Hirsch et al., 2006; Bardi, 2009; Brown and Ulgiati, 2011).

degrowth as what I believe to be an auspicious activist research programme to help contribute theoretically to a transformed post-growth planning praxis:

> "One may agree or disagree with the diagnosis and prognosis of degrowth, but it cannot be denied that this exciting research agenda asks vital—and sometimes inconvenient—questions that can no longer be ignored." (Kallis et al., 2018, p.309)

Undoubtedly, I do not contend that a voluntary degrowth transition is currently likely, only that, as similarly reasoned by Alexander and Gleeson (2019), it is the most intellectually coherent response to help guide academic research in mitigating the existential socio-ecological discontinuity that humanity now faces.

None of this, of course, is to overdetermine the influence that spatial planning has on advancing system change, which will require a revolutionary transformation at an overall macro-societal level. Nevertheless, given planning's particular responsibility to the future and, as will be further expounded in this thesis, its crucial role in the dynamics of reproducing economic growth, I would concur with Rees (2017) that it is inconceivable that there would not be an active role for planning theory in consciously developing alternatives as a contribution to the tangible realisation of societal change. In fact, per Harvey (1982), a core premise of this thesis is that socio-ecological transformation cannot be conceived in non-spatial terms and, as such, developing post-growth possibilities for planning is currently the upmost priority facing the planning research agenda. Or as Merrifield (2006) reminds:

> "To change life is to change space; to change space is to change life. Neither can be avoided." (p.108)

Inevitably, I am engaging with this topic from the relatively privileged position of a white, European and educated scholar. I mention this only in passing to acknowledge the Pavlovian critiques habitually levelled at degrowth (see, for example, Phillips, 2015). To paraphrase Karl Marx, those of

us who seek to change the world never do so from the conditions of our own choosing. While my research invariably has a Western-centric bias, this fits well with the overall proposition of degrowth that it is the wealthier industrialised countries of the Global North that must rapidly decelerate their material footprints if we are to ameliorate our ever-worsening civilisational crises, and that change must first start at home (Kallis et al., 2020).

In so far as the above comprise value judgments, I stand by them, and the research strategy and methodological choices selected for this thesis necessarily reflect this unavoidable political-ethical position.

Contributing

> "And yet, this is where we start: from the cracks, the fissures, the rents, the spaces of rebellious negation-and-creation. We start from the particular, not from the totality. We start from the world of misfitting, from the multiplicity of particular rebellions, dignities, cracks, not from the great unified Struggle that simply does not exist, nor from the system of domination. We start from being angry and lost and trying to create something else, because that is where we live, that is where we are. Perhaps it is a strange place to start, but we are looking for a strange thing. We are looking for hope in a dark night. We are trying to theorise hope-against-hope. This is surely the only subject matter of theory that is left." (Holloway, 2010, p.20)

Planning needs a rebellion—an insurgency of ideas and understandings as a prelude to systemic change. This is the only way it can contribute to the "rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society" that the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has determined are necessary to avert the most destructive effects of human-forced environmental breakdown (IPCC, 2018). We're told we have, at best, a decade or two to dramatically transform the global political economy to achieve, "a fundamental system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values" (IPBES, 2019). "We had our chance to make incremental changes," warned Inger

Andersen, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, "but that time is over. Only a root-and-branch transformation of our economies and societies can save us from accelerating climate disaster" (UNEP, 2022).

Faced with what seems like cultural complacency, some prominent activists and scholars have already concluded that it is too little too late and are instead engaged in exploring adaptive possibilities for a managed retreat, which takes as a starting point the inevitability of societal collapse (Kingsnorth and Hine, 2009; Ehrlich and Ehrlich, 2013; Bendell, 2018). Regardless, finding as many exit points as possible from our currently failing civilisation is still, hopefully, far from a redundant exercise (Fournier, 2008). Certainly, reacting to the future now seems much more problematic than actively intervening to shape it. "This may feel overwhelming at first", the IPCC (2022) note, "but the world is changing anyway and will continue to change". However, there is currently a theoretical vacuum to guide action.

One of the privileges of undertaking a PhD was a deep-dive literature review of the voluminous history of planning theorising and its luminaries. I have seen how both critical and normative theories have continuously vacillated in response to shifting socio-political and economic zeitgeists, often in response to crises. This imbricated diversity can be considered a key strength of the field, promoting a lively dialogue in the constant pursuit of new knowledge (Ferreira et al., 2009). Others caution that planning theory has become so fissiparous, lacking a central concern, that its real purpose is now in doubt (Faludi, 2017). It might be expected that the epochal scale of our planetary emergency would unleash a new tumult of theorising appropriate for the self-endangerment that humanity now faces. Nevertheless, despite two decades of compelling critique, mainstream communicative planning theory remains ascendant with little prospect on the horizon of any serious competitor (Holgersen, 2020). In the interregnum, many authors have attested to the emergence of a great variety of regressive neoliberalised planning

symptoms, maintaining the dominant ontology of growth-fuelled social alienation and ecological destruction (Campbell et al., 2014).

While there have been persistent calls within academia for a progressive retheorising of planning's role and purpose for both people and planet, few concrete suggestions have yet materialised (Barry et al., 2018; Eraydin, 2021). Given this impasse, and the apparent difficulties in establishing new ways of knowing, the idea that my research could advance matters and sketch the bounds of some form of foundational post-growth planning theory as a contribution to developing transformative knowledge suitable for our times did seem like a daunting, even naïve, prospect. Yet, this is precisely what is required—but how?

The pioneering writings of the late John Friedmann provided a great source of solace and guidance for this trepidation. For Friedmann (1987), transformative planning theory cannot be arbitrarily invented but must always arise from linking knowledge to action. Accordingly, practice must be constantly open to absorbing new ideas from outside the channels of orthodox planning knowledge as part of a recursive process of social learning. The task of theorists is the persistent sifting in this universe of knowledge seeking out concepts that may be of interest to advancing planning's relevance for addressing wider societal challenges, appropriate to the changing course of human events:

> "Their specific contribution to theory is to return from these expeditions to home base and translate their discoveries into the language of planning where they will either take root or be unceremoniously forgotten." (Friedmann, 2011, p.223)

Applying this broader conceptualisation, Friedmann's knowledge/action nexus conceives planning as a continuum that extends from system maintenance (conventional planning), at one end, to societal transformation (radical planning), at the other. Expanding the sphere of enquiry in such a manner, and decentring planning as the object of research, justifies the

inclusion of, "community organizers, activists, and everyday citizens as 'planners' working either in collaboration with, opposition to, or completely beyond the purview of state-sanctioned, formal planning processes" (Beard 2003, p.15). On this point, Friedmann is insistent. Researchers in the process of theory formation must make common cause with, and give serious attention to, the counter-practices of extended peer communities of 'extra-planners' on the frontlines of direct action that fundamentally dissent from the 'rules of the game' and stand in necessary opposition to established powers and the state, systematically marginalised within 'normal' planning debates.

Sandercock (1998b), apropos Castells (1983) and in the Gibson-Graham (1996) tradition, similarly counsels that radical planning does not begin with grand, overt acts but with smaller, diffuse actions—'a thousand tiny empowerments'—mobilised in the myriad of insurgent social movements engaged in 'non-reformist reforms' and often situated in place-bound, intimate spaces of the city struggling for collective self-empowerment and participation (Gorz, 1967; Miraftab, 2017). The inclusion of such subaltern 'organic intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1971) and repositioning them as co-constructers of knowledge is particularly apposite for what Funtowicz and Ravetz (1993) term 'post-normal' societal challenges of such vast temporal and spatial scale; characterised by uncertainty, value contestation, high decision stakes and urgency; which necessarily call for the demystification of the neutrality of bureaucratic expertise (Mitlin, 2008; Cattaneo et al., 2012).

Because these ideas have no agency of their own, the role of activist scholarship is to take initiative to this process and bring them to the 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 2010) so as, "to ensure that thinking about transformative practice breaks through the traditional boundaries of hierarchy, academic discipline, parochial viewpoint, and the theory/practice dichotomy, as they weave together a single plot of theory and practice that is continuously tested for fitness and durability in use" (Friedmann, 2011, p.70). In doing so, researchers can neither escape the political arena nor take refuge

in a value-neutral field of scientific truth. Instead, they must participate in a (re)politicised research praxis that is purposefully transgressive and imaginative through consciously constructing agonistic encounters between practice and reflection, ethically positioned precisely at the point where practice intersects theory and attuned to the task of transacting concepts from grassroots practice into theory, and *vice versa* (Miraftab, 2009). In this process, a dialectical relationship is established between theory and practice.

Activist research, however, also has to navigate what Schmid (2019) terms a 'double utopia'. While it is clearly untenable that humanity can continue on its present ecocidal course, fundamental change seems equally implausible. Moreover, our present quandary affords us neither the time nor the wisdom to start from a blank slate. Instead, our existing institutions must be reformed from the inside rather than abolished outright, imposing a certain gradualism (Daly and Farley, 2004). Friedmann (1987), echoing Kuhn (1970), suggests that opportunities for such paradigm shifts can only arise when, in the course of the loss of meaning emerging from a severe cultural or physical shock or crisis, new knowledge that was hitherto unthinkable can be more readily accepted, which is not possible through incremental change (Jessop, 2012). Crises at various levels of abstraction or generality are therefore considered rich sources of new knowledge within radical planning research as they, "open up a stage of suspension—a liminal stage—in which the rise of new social practices can facilitate the emergence of new social imaginary significations and institutions" (Varvarousis, 2019, p.493).

The creeping normalcy and 'slow violence' of the planetary emergency, which is never fully present to our senses, alongside the absence of generalised, visible crisis conditions to refract planning knowledge therefore represents a considerable dilemma (Morton, 2013). For Graeber (2004), the task must therefore be to seek out those who are developing alternatives from the peripheries of the world system through disruptive action from below and to try to figure out what might be the largest

implications of what they are. These ideas can then be offered back to praxis, not as prescriptions, but as possibilities to reveal what Schofield (2002) refers to as 'leading edges of change', generating cracks through which new theoretical understandings might emerge (Campbell et al., 2014; Kallis et al., 2018). In doing so, research can help interlace 'chains of equivalence' between different sites and scales of activism and, in the context of the unfolding global macro-crisis, act as a vital multiplying force for lending legitimacy to the boundaries of enlarged planning action (Demaria et al., 2013; see also Laclau and Mouffe, 2001; Purcell, 2009). Or as Lefebvre (1976) synopsizes:

> "The peripheries may be powerless, isolated and destined for only local and episodic revolts, but it is nonetheless possible for them to outflank the centres, once the latter has been shaken." (p.36)

The actual crisis conditions of urban abandonment within shrinking cities presage one such opportunity to reconnoitre offstage, sub-political practices of niche experimentalism, or "scalable microcosms of hope" (Leggett in Hopkins, 2008, p.134), through which growth-orientated planning praxis might be escaped (Zanoni et al., 2017; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). During this 'watching stage' (Andres, 2011) these disconnected spaces are different as their desired future can neither be accomplished nor ordered by conventional planning paradigms, allowing them to be potentially reappropriated by activist scholarship to prefigure alternative post-growth planning realities (Friedmann 1987). Indeed, Wiechmann and Pallagst (2012) go as far as to call this break from the growth paradigm within shrinking cities as "almost revolutionary" (p.275), representing, "a challenge to the principles upon which urban policy has traditionally been based" (ibid., p.264). Engaging in, and giving voice to, such divergent discourses set the stage for planning to potentially reach beyond itself and to investigate unheard-of, unthought-of possibilities as a chrysalis staging post for new spatial becomings which refute the governing fundaments of growth-orientated, profit-driven praxis and is instead radically open to different ways of organising urban space.

Radical planning scholarship has, of course, long valued the power of such experiential learning from small-scale, local activism, where knowledge becomes action, as the basis for conceptualising creative alternatives (Miraftab, 2009; Vasudevan and Novoa, 2021). To this end, scholars have frequently turned for inspiration to post-development studies in the Global South to decolonise the philosophical predispositions underpinning mainstream planning knowledge and the struggles of indigenous movements in resisting Euro-American development conventions. However, until recently, the potential for degrowth to extend theory building has generally been overlooked. This is somewhat surprising, as Escobar (2015), possibly most prominent amongst post-development thinkers, has been to the fore in calling for such a synthesis to displace our contemporary nature/culture epistemological dualism, or "hegemony of modernity's one-world ontology" (Escobar, 2018, p.4), emphasising instead the profound pluriversality of life. Bridging this intellectual divide is also a central motif of the Anthropocene literature which has emerged as a lively intellectual trope to facilitate fundamental questioning of globalised industrial modernity within present-day human–ecosphere relations, and for the ethical and ecologically just production of knowledge that transcends natural and social science frontiers (Hamilton et al., 2015; Bai et al., 2016).

Such a rejection of formalised divisions of disciplinary knowledge has also similarly had a long familiarity within human geography scholarship, perhaps most famously articulated in Lefebvre's iconic 'right to the city', which can be best understood as a radical opposition to homogenising capitalist growth rationalities, giving voice to the possibility of difference (Lefebvre, 1996). This rich lineage underscores the conspicuous absence of a systematic engagement between the spatial sciences and degrowth as a key deficit in the literature (Lange et al., 2021). Perhaps scholarship has not yet significantly ventured into degrowth as it has deemed it to be 'unfamiliar territory' and of little relevance to planning theory (Roy, 2009). Here Gibson-

Graham (2008) advises that as researchers we face a choice. We can either continue to ignore and marginalise it or, alternatively, put it at the centre of our enquiry to make it more real as an object of policy and activism, such that it may yet turn out to be 'strangely familiar'.

To the extent that my research contributes to the development of a new post-growth theory of planning, I must at the outset caution expectations. Explaining the world 'out there' that stands in the way of fundamental change is a much more straightforward proposition than theorising an experimental praxis that could advance the way it might be. Numerous authors have testified to this very difficulty and as to why so much contemporary theorising is tainted with negativity and scepticism (Gibson-Graham, 2008). However, if planning is, per Friedmann (2004), the hopeful art of probing the future to make more intelligent decisions in the present, my modest hypothesis for an emancipatory post-growth planning is that the answer lies in performativity (Butler, 1988). That is to say, changes in discourse are the precise means by which praxis can be changed (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Just as growth-orientated planning discourse produces certain kinds of space, it is simultaneously reproduced by it, so much so that from the perspective of praxis abandoning growth seems unimaginable (Soja, 1980). It is this unimaginableness that undergirds the performative power of planning's procrustean growth ideology, reiterating the ways in which norms are reproduced, creating the effects it names, while simultaneously prohibiting other imaginaries from emerging and gaining hegemonic influence (Law and Urry, 2004).

Nevertheless, in accepting the inevitable performativity of language, no discourse is ever a closed entity but is constantly being transformed through semiotic struggle with other discourses. Therefore, for institutional planning to acquire the intellectual capacities to be a vanguard of societal transformation, new discourses will be required that can challenge and eventually subvert dominant growth imaginaries. It follows that in order to

broach the possibility of alternatives we must open up a new discursive front that fundamentally calls into question our theoretical categories and concepts, as well as the discourses and knowledge that ground them, which can potentially influence praxis in different theoretical directions. Discursive struggle thus becomes the locus for theory (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002).

As such, and as has also been highlighted in my introductory remarks, it is the very impossibility of degrowth to be signified within the realm of currently possible social relations that provides its epistemological utility, offering a potentially opportune means to confront the paralysing meta-cultural frames of conventional planning praxis that forestall the appearance of legitimate sources of real change (Monno, 2010). Within a Gibson-Graham (2008) perspective, degrowth performs 'other worlds' generating oppositional, experimental discourses and practices which are profoundly disruptive of growth-centric capitalist representations. The critical task of activist scholarship is to intercede and bring this insurgent thinking from beyond the peripheries into the mainstream worldview so as to, at least, begin the process of defamiliarizing the dominant regime and to render its contingent objectivity vulnerable (Roy, 2009). Or in Lefebvre's (1976) words:

> "If there is a dominant category, a dominant opposition, it is that of *the possible and the impossible*, which the transgressions disclose: i.e. in order to extend the possible, it is necessary to proclaim and desire the impossible. Action and strategy consist in making possible tomorrow what is impossible today." (p.36, italics in original)

As Harvey (1972) reminds, however, such revolutions in thinking never happen in the realm of ideas and theories alone. In order to progress degrowth beyond the level of principle, activist research must demonstrate the effects of practices rather than starting from theoretical assumptions as to their possible ends, so as to arrive at viable alternatives (see also Randolph and Frey, 2018). The proposition explored in this thesis is that, through transacting the practical knowledge garnered from the 'concrete utopias' of post-growth planning

experimentation in shrinking cities, research can begin to put degrowth's radical potentiality as a conceptual weapon to the test and, in doing so, help bring what it discovers into being as a contribution to reformed discourses of planning difference (Law and Urry, 2004). Within the urban crisis conditions of shrinking cities, planners must overcome their deep aversion, induced by wider growth-oriented cultures, to the reality of a post-growth world and, admittedly by necessity rather than design, are compelled to reframe decline in a positive sense and as an opportunity to explore unconventional planning praxes that reimagine more liveable, equitable spaces (Blanco et al., 2009). However, as of yet these niche ideas remain largely invisible within mainstream academic and policy discourses and, indeed, within degrowth literature itself.

The task then becomes where can we locate the arena for this discursive struggle? Here Gibson-Graham (2014) advocates ethnographic 'thick descriptions', when conducted with some reflexive self-awareness, as a potential way forward in making these excluded possibilities visible and as method to resist the gravitational pull of unidirectional growth-orientated future change. My thesis is therefore performative on two counts; Firstly, it acknowledges the ethical, experimental activism inherent in research and, secondly, in the social constructionist idea that discourse (de/re)constructs the social world. As Gibson-Graham (2008) advises:

> "Our goal as academics was still to understand the world in order to change it, but with a poststructuralist twist—to change our understanding is to change the world, in small and sometimes major ways." (p.615)

Invariably, the outcome of this thesis will result in a 'thick description' with 'weak theory' which, untethered from the obligation to simply confirm what we already know, seeks to observe, interpret and yield to inchoate knowledge (Gibson-Graham, 2014). Such a provisional foray into generating experimental planning discourses within an undecidable terrain of irreducible uncertainty may, of course, be validly critiqued as incomplete. Nevertheless, given the

scale and urgency of our current planetary emergency, I believe we cannot postpone our analyses until they are fully formed as, to do so, simply reaffirms the pathological essentialism of the *status quo*. "The crucial part", as Holgersen (2020) recommends, "is to articulate a political direction and concrete strategies beyond muddling through and utopianism, and points to how spatial planning on various geographical scales could contribute in making a radical transformation" (p.817).

It is hoped that the contribution of this thesis can make some progress in this direction which may be taken up, refined and redefined so as to have an impact on a wider body of knowledge as to how post-growth planning might be achieved in practice. In doing so, it is recognised that these ideas may not be initially validated by academe or there may be a long incubation period before tentatively emerging as possibilities (Martinez-Alier et al., 2014). Alternatively, they may be unceremoniously forgotten! At the very least, it is hoped that the contribution of this thesis might be to respond to calls for unsettling the usefulness of contemporary planning theories in our current times through tracing novel connections between degrowth and real-life post-growth planning experimentation such that we might continue learning as to how a different world might be made possible beyond the stultifying impasse of growthism, albeit in full knowledge that we can never find the ultimate answers (Barry et al., 2018).

Objectives

In the context of the prolegomenon offered above, my research objectives for this thesis are threefold, as follows:

(i)   Using the Irish NPF as an exploratory account, and degrowth as a theoretical weapon of critique, to deconstruct the objectivity of growth-orientated discourses performatively shaping institutional planning praxis to identify possible openings for how it might be changed;

(ii)   Examine how planning knowledge emerging from the urban crisis conditions of shrinking cities prefigures something akin to an applied experience of degrowth planning in practice and to theorise the possibilities for the performative transfer of this knowledge to wider scales and strategies of action via new planning discourses as a contribution to advancing a possible post-growth planning praxis; and,

(iii)   Contribute to the advancement of the tangible, tactical means of furthering a degrowth transition in real world institutional practice through engaging in, and giving meaning to, post-growth planning discourses so as to make them more viable and visible as objects of policy and activism.

These three objectives broadly follow the three tasks that Friedmann (2011) has identified as central to doing radical planning theory i.e. "the philosophical task of evolving a humanist philosophy to guide planners in their work, the task of adapting planning practices to the continually changing course of human events, and the task of translating knowledges and concepts from fields other than planning into our own language" (p.224).

While my research is primarily aimed at planning theory it is also hoped that, as an auxiliary objective, it can also make a wider contribution to (spatialising) degrowth theory and to furthering understandings for how degrowth institutional change might be realised in practice through exploring how (degrowing) planning praxis might be employed to this end (Xue, 2021).

Questioning

Through an examination of the Irish NPF case study, this thesis seeks to answer four interrelated research questions to facilitate an in-depth response to my objectives and, ultimately, to the principal aim of this research, as follows:

(i)   By what means has Irish spatial planning policy institutionalised the imperative of growth?

(ii)   How has this growth imperative been applied and pursued in practice?

(iii)   What are the limitations and contradictions of planning's growth imperative?

(iv)   How might an alternative post-growth institutional planning praxis be advanced?

As a prerequisite for critical analysis, responding to the first three questions is intended to disarticulate and explain the discursive origins of the peremptory growth-orientated planning rationalities shaping Irish spatial planning praxis so as to confront understandings that stand in the way of the possibility of the emergence of post-growth planning alternatives, which shall be offered through answering the latter question[7].

Orientating

While the aim of this thesis is primarily theoretical, it may be useful at the outset to sketch out a very brief practical overview of the Irish spatial planning policy context, as the case study through which the research was conducted, particularly for unfamiliar readers.

Spatial policy in Ireland operates within a three-tier hierarchy of national, regional and local spatial governance, as established by the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended) (see Figure 2). At the top of the hierarchy sits the NPF which is developed by national government (Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage) and reviewed every

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[7] Coincidentally, as will be further discussed in Chapter 3, these four research questions broadly mirror Flyvbjerg's value-rational questions for phronetic planning research, albeit unwittingly so, as they were written before I had become familiar with his writings.

six years, subject to approval by the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament). The NPF has three general objectives namely:

(i)   To establish a broad national strategic plan for the sustainable development of urban and rural areas;

(ii)   To secure balanced regional development by maximising the potential of the regions; and

(iii)   To coordinate lower-level Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and City/County Development Plans prepared at regional and local scale.

The central policy matter which the NPF is required to address is future population change alongside the associated necessary housing, infrastructure and employment provision, together with measures to protect the environment, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change.
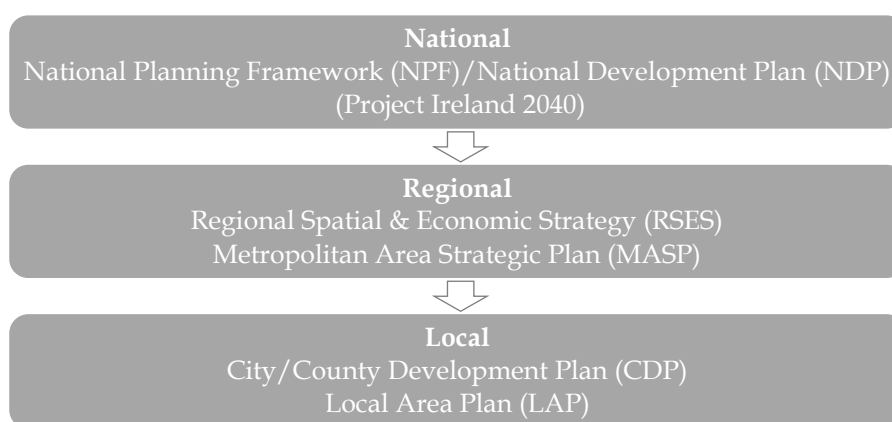
Figure 2: General spatial planning policy hierarchy in Ireland

As illustrated in Figure 1 (p.14) above, the first NPF was published in 2018; superseding the former NSS published in 2002 which was widely considered to have failed; and targets an overall national population growth of approximately one million by 2040 of which approximately half is to be directed to the existing built-up areas of the five largest Irish cities of Dublin,

Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford (see Chapter 4). The NPF is also required to have a transnational focus and take into account the European Spatial Development Perspective (CEC, 1999), published by the European Commission, and any corresponding regional spatial plan prepared for Northern Ireland. The first iteration of the NPF was also published alongside a new National Development Plan 2018-2027 (updated in 2021) as a ten-year strategy for public capital investment, the intention of which was to create a unified and coherent national spatial investment strategy, jointly known as Project Ireland 2040.

Sitting immediately below the NPF are the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) prepared for each of the three Regional Assembly areas (see Figure 3). The Regional Assemblies were constituted in 2015, replacing eight former Regional Authority areas, and each comprise NUTS 2 regions for the purposes of EU statistical reporting and funding. The chief function of each RSES is to provide a twelve-year strategy to translate the overall high-level national approach of the NPF into policies at a regional scale and to provide a greater level of focus around the policy objectives and outcomes of the NPF. In tandem with the RSESs, the Regional Assemblies have also been tasked with the responsibility to prepare new Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) for each of the aforementioned five cities as strategic planning and coordinated investment frameworks for their wider functional areas. However, at the time of writing, none of the MASPs have yet been finalised.

At a local level, there are thirty-one local planning authorities; including twenty-six county councils, three city councils and two joint city and county councils; who have the responsibility for preparing County/City Development Plans every six-years. These plans provide the basic local spatial planning policies which the general populace would be most familiar with, including detailed zoning maps and development control criteria. In addition, councils are required to produce Local Area Plans (LAPs) for all designated

settlements above 5,000 population and have wider discretion to prepare localised planning strategies for other specific geographic areas, as required.

Since 2010, in response to the general failure of spatial policy coordination during the Celtic Tiger period, discussed above, the spatial governance hierarchy is now subject to much more rigorous, centralised regulatory oversight. As part of the preparation of local development plans, for example, each planning authority is required to formulate a 'Core Strategy' specifying precisely how the quantity and distribution of projected population growth is consistent with the NPF and apposite RSES, subject to direct oversight by the relevant Regional Assembly. In addition, arising from a recommendation of the Mahon Tribunal on planning and zoning corruption (Mahon, 2012), in 2019 an independent national Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) was established to monitor and ensure implementation of national spatial policy, including the power to enforce compliance by recommending the responsible government Minister intervenes to direct local councils to amend their development plans if they diverge from national policy.

The upshot of this new regulatory dispensation is a much more 'planning by numbers' approach to spatial policy where zoning for new development is, at least in principle, tightly controlled by quantitative national population projections and more closely aligned to a national settlement hierarchy.

Figure 3: Configuration of regional assembly and local planning authority areas in Ireland, showing the major urban settlements (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.31)

Thesis Structure

In addition to this introduction chapter, which is intended to acquaint the reader with the background and motivation for this research together with the principal aim, objectives, contribution and research questions, this thesis consists of seven further chapters divided into three parts, as follows:

Part I: Problematising

Following Friedmann's (1987) basic prescription for the development of transformative planning theory, the first task is to problematise the present situation in order to justify changing it. Accordingly, the purpose of Chapter 2 is, by way of a critical literature review, to present a theoretical understanding of the origin of planning's growth imperative, how praxis evolved to install growth as its primary purpose, and its limits. As a foundation for my analysis, beginning from a Marxist urban political economy interpretation of the crucial role of urbanisation in the reproduction of capital, I first expound a basic materialist understanding of planning's provenance as an essential functionary in mediating capitalism's endemic sociospatial contradictions and dialectical crisis tendencies in a persistent attempt to achieve coherent and cohesive conditions for the reproduction of capital.

To further elucidate this proposition, I next trace the evolution of contemporary planning knowledge to demonstrate how theory and practice diachronically evolved to continuously install a growth imperative as planning's governing rationality. I then interpose the major problematic of this thesis—the global ecological and climate crisis—and the direct correlation between economic growth and ecological collapse, posing major ontological challenges for conventional growth-orientated planning norms. In a search for alternatives, degrowth literature is subsequently reviewed as offering a thoroughgoing activist agenda to repoliticise dominant planning imaginaries and to inaugurate real, far-reaching democratic possibilities for transformed planning cultures beyond growth. Finally, leaning on the Lefebvrian insight

that counterhegemony is often portended from within the very cracks and contradictions of hegemony itself, this chapter closes by presenting the literature emerging from the urban collapse and crisis conditions of shrinking cities where, from the loss of growth-orientated meanings, actors are compelled to experiment with alternative planning practices for envisioning what a city can become in the absence of growth, and their potential as possible markers for theorising a wider post-growth planning praxis.

The research strategy and method developed for this thesis is presented in Chapter 3. While there has been a significant upsurge in degrowth theorising in recent years, the question of how to translate its revolutionary agenda into an applied research praxis has remained largely uncharted. The construction of a novel research strategy was therefore necessitated, which is offered as a further contribution of this thesis, including potentially beyond planning research. Continuing from my theoretical exegesis developed in Chapter 2, I start with Lefebvre's inimitable synthesis of materialism and post-structuralism, and particularly his utopian concern with producing 'other' worlds beyond capitalism, as offering a rich, yet largely untapped counterpart for spatialising degrowth. Discourse analysis is then introduced as a homologous diagnostic from the social sciences to methodologise degrowth as a transgressive weapon of critique and to open up a discursive front to deconstruct the legitimacy of common sense growth-orientated planning rationalities. This is subsequently translated into an abductive research methodology and empirically applied to the Irish NPF case study via a multi-method qualitative examination i.e. documentary analysis and semi-structured participant interviews.

The outcome of this syncretic epistemology leads me to my central research hypothesis as to how planning's growth imperative is reproduced, performatively concealed within its foremost discourses of 'balanced' and 'sustainable' development. Although habitually taken for granted as self-evidently benign and progressive, within my reading these hegemonic

discourses can instead be revealed as crucial stratagems to furtively stabilise the endlessly unstable contradictions and tensions of capitalist spatialisation to ensure there is no loss of growth-orientated meanings. From a degrowth perspective, however, it is precisely such loss of meaning which is a fundamental prerequisite for transformative change. Applying this novel hypothesis, these harmonious representations of space can therefore be disarticulated as important, but heretofore typically overlooked, loci for investigating how planning's growth imperative is ideologically maintained and, more importantly, for situating a discursive struggle such that it might be challenged and opened up to different possibilities.

Part II: Case Study

To connect the research strategy to empirical materials and to put it into motion, as has been discussed, the process of preparing the Irish NPF was selected as the case study for this thesis. This enabled a detailed investigation to test my hypothesis as to how planning's discourses of 'balanced' and 'sustainable' development stabilise growth-orientated meanings, and to identify possible theoretical openings for how they might be destabilised to become different.

To set the scene, the purpose of Chapter 4 is to answer the first research question through presenting a contextual introduction to the NPF and the unique, fractious backdrop of divisive sociospatial tensions which pervade Irish planning policy debates. These grievances principally emerge from perceptions of an increasingly imbalanced core/periphery (urban/rural) geographic divide and routinely articulated through evocative metaphorical significations as a consequence of Ireland's particular sociocultural history of mass emigration and population decline. This pre-emptively positioned extremely sanguine and uncritical developmentalist propensities amongst policy communities towards the very considerable population and associated development growth targets included in the NPF—absent of any published

evidence to support them—inaugurating tacit imaginations of expected growth futures whilst eliminating others. Unpacking the authenticity of these targets, however, reveals how they are wholly contingent upon the international immigration that would arise from an assumed future of smooth, endless economic expansion, which was entirely taken for granted as self-evident in NPF policy debates. This leads to my alternative conclusion that, quite apart from being a strategy to accommodate inevitable natural demographic trends, the real rationality of the NPF is an implicit spatial-economic strategy for institutionalising the imperative of high national economic growth, appropriating particular sociohistorical sensibilities to reflexively maintain normative growth-orientated meanings amongst policy communities, moderating political tensions and *a priori* establishing the basic terms for analyses and debates.

Building on this analysis, Chapter 5 responds to the second research question and explores how this growth imperative is applied and pursued in practice through problematising the habituated storyline of 'Balanced Regional Development' (BRD). I start with describing the persistent failure of BRD as a policy goal which, rather than provoking its fundamental questioning and reappraisal, only served to mechanistically rehabilitate it. This curiously begs the question as to why BRD continued to retain such ritualised salience as the unquestioned chief policy goal in the NPF despite its chronic past failures to reduce geographic imbalances. In accordance with my research hypothesis, it is argued that the primary utility of BRD is, not as a realisable policy goal, but as a fictional expectation of an imagined future of harmonious growth in a ceaseless attempt to displace the political tensions associated with the unavoidably uneven core-periphery geographies of the wider national growth agenda, where there are always necessarily 'winners' and 'losers'.

However, to maintain BRD's hegemonic legitimacy as a fantasy storyline in the face of these inescapable failures, the NPF needed to

continuously evolve its meaning through disseminating new ensembles of spatial and scalar representations as part of a wider political management of discontent. Through this process, diverse coalitions of actors with widely differing, and often oppositional, perspectives were socialised into accepting the fundamental promise of future growth. A key finding from this analysis is the power of academe in rationalising this depoliticised consensus through disseminating specific socio-technical representations of (balanced) space to ceaselessly marshal actors' routinised imaginaries and to ensure there is no dissolution of growth-orientated meanings, delimiting the possibilities for alternative action (e.g. 'place-based development', 'second tier cities', 'functional urban areas' etc.). This is demonstrative of how much academia frames what counts as planning knowledge but also its potential counterpower to generate alternative knowledge through adopting a radically different disposition towards theory, which is the aim of this thesis.

Having provided an empirical account in support of my research hypothesis for how planning's growth imperative is discursively maintained and reproduced, the purpose of Chapter 6 is to address my third research question and to begin to search for openings for how this situation might be changed. Using my research strategy and method developed in Chapter 3 to deploy degrowth as a conceptual weapon of critique, and with the conscious aim of constructing agonistic encounters between practice and reflection, the results of an interdiscursive analysis are presented through introducing the contradictions and limitations of planning's growth imperative within a series of active interviews with selected policy actors. The objective was to expose the growth-environment policy tension within planning praxis in an attempt to destabilise the fixity of meaning within hegemonic discourses and to make visible what is excluded. This inevitably precipitated the intervention of the concept of 'sustainable' development, as planning's chief empty signifier, to cohesively and coherently stand in for this failure of signification in ways that are decisively non-threatening to the *status quo*. Nevertheless, the result of my

exploratory analysis also reveals that, through attentively puncturing the limits of the signifying system, a residual recognition of the irreconcilable conflict between growth and the environment can still be detected.

Furthering the analysis presented in Chapter 5, one means of precipitating such loss of meanings was in confronting actors with the inevitability of imbalanced development and consequent regional decline. This stimulated openings amongst interviewees for a fundamental reconceptualization of future spatial development pathways and for post-growth planning reimagining to emerge, but which continue to remain inadmissible within official policy discourses. This suggests that to equip planners with the conceptual resources to enable them to transition from system maintainers to a vanguard of transformative change, new performative discourses will be required which are capable of filling these storylines and signifiers with new meanings so as to embed alternative practices that might shift the impossible into the realm of the possible.

Part III: Possibilities

Whereas transformative socio-political research must always begin with diagnosis and prognosis, the second task is to develop a coherent, credible theory of change (Wright, 2010). Therefore, while unmasking and puncturing a political field, such as planning, can represent a significant research outcome in its own right, in keeping with the activist-scholarship disposition of this thesis, critique is of no use unless it helps solve problems in reality (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). Accordingly, as the major contribution of this thesis, the penultimate Chapter 7 responds to the final research question, together with the second and third objectives of this thesis, through adumbrating the bounds of a possible alternative post-growth planning discourse that could help performatively embed a radically repoliticised, emancipatory planning culture. Returning to Lefebvre's utopian philosophy of the (im)possible as a spatial-theoretical accompaniment, alongside the actually existing grassroots

praxes emerging from the urban crisis conditions of shrinking cities, I propose two counter-discourses of 'differential' and 'regenerative' development (in opposition to 'balanced' and 'sustainable' development) as a contribution towards the possibility of institutionalising a post-growth planning paradigm based on degrowth values and principles of ecological and social justice, democracy, civic empowerment, social solidarity and human flourishing within planetary boundaries.

Chapter 8 is the final chapter of this thesis and provides a brief synopsis of my findings and a discussion of the research contribution. What I hope to show throughout these eight chapters is that degrowth provides an exciting way to confront orthodox planning knowledge and for advancing a radically retheorised post-growth planning praxis for an age of limits.

Part I: Problematising

Chapter 2: Planning, Growth & Limits

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of the academic literature in respect of planning, growth and its limits. It thus provides a theoretical standpoint from which the research strategy and method, alongside my hypothesis, are developed in Chapter 3 and through which the substantive research questions for this thesis are framed and addressed in the subsequent chapters of Part II.

Commencing from a Marxist political economy critique, the first three sections offer an interpretation of how contemporary planning praxis evolved from its early origins to continuously install a growth imperative as its predominant purpose. This is achieved through situating it as an essential intermediary in resolving the chronically uneven and dialectically contradictory sociospatial dynamics of capital accumulation in a persistent effort to produce harmonious conditions for the reproduction of capital. As a prerequisite for critical problematisation, my aim here is to offer an understanding of how planning is, in essence, performative praxis through engaging in the chronology of broader political, economic and cultural currents that periodically transfigured its institutionalisation in both discourse and praxis to continuously install the primacy of economic growth as its governing ideology.

The final three sections introduce the central problematic of this thesis—the environmental limits to growth and the intensifying risk of ecosystemic collapse—and the urgent necessity to rethink planning's purpose beyond growth-orientated ends. The heterodox concept of degrowth, with its burgeoning cache of critical and prefigurative literature, is next presented as offering a thoroughgoing counterhegemonic agenda for academic research to radically repoliticise mainstream planning knowledge, deconstruct its rationalities and reimagine real democratic alternative possibilities for transformed post-growth planning cultures.

The chapter concludes with a brief survey of the academic scholarship exploring practical planning experiments from within the urban crisis circumstances of shrinking cities—emerging from the very contradictions of capitalist spatialisation where the conditions for growth have already broken down—and their potential for signifying alternative post-growth planning meanings that have yet to be systematically explored in the literature.

Capitalism, Urbanisation & Growth

As the spatial arm of government policies, planning connects in diverse and changing ways to the state (Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000). Accordingly, the relationship between planning and the political, economic and social contexts within which it is practiced, and govern its operation and effectiveness, has long been the subject of sustained academic enquiry. Planning's distinctive position *vis-à-vis* the state and the public sphere presents numerous conceptual difficulties in staking out its precise scope and purpose, obscuring the delineation of an autonomous field of planning theory (Reade, 1987). Indeed, many of the fundamental questions concerning planning belong to a much broader firmament of intellectual enquiry, with the profession borrowing much of its theoretical corpus from domains beyond its disciplinary frontiers. For some authors, planning is simply ideology, or persuasive storytelling, facilitating the spatial governance objectives of the dominant political-

economic belief system of the day, which continues to be defined by an evolving capitalist market (see also Throgmorton, 2003; Gunder, 2010b). Thus, as Scott and Roweis (1977) conclude:

> "Planning does not, and cannot, transcend the social and property relations of capitalist society, but is contained within and is a reflection of those same relations." (p.1118)

It has typically not been the prerogative of practitioners to dwell on this deeper ideological nature which has resulted in some degree of professional denial as to planning's purpose (Schön, 1983; Reade, 1987). As Allmendinger and Haughton (2012) observe, given the apparent neutral and routine relationship between planning and governance, vocational practice largely legitimises itself as pursuing a progressive, problem-solving and rational agenda tied to normative notions of the public interest and the common good. This has prompted Kiernan (1983) to reflect that, "the view that planners' work is primarily technical, professional and apolitical has been cherished and persistent throughout the relatively brief history of the planning profession" (p.72). Other authors insist, however, that planning has entered into a quiescent corporatist bargain with state capitalism and that the illusion of neutrality is essential for fulfilling its truer purpose, namely the reproduction of the spatial preconditions for capital accumulation (Goodman, 1972).

Perhaps because of mainstream uneasiness with critique and ambivalence towards politics, much of the critical scholarship relevant to planning has developed in the analogous field of human geography (Gleeson 2014). The perspicacious insights of radical geographers, such as David Harvey and other Marxist-inspired urban political economy scholars, is distinguishable in rejecting a transhistorical, deterministic interpretation of urbanisation as the straightforward consequence of sociospatial organisation, bureaucratic rationality or economic efficiency. Instead Harvey conceives urbanisation, and the role of planning therein, as an essential pillar in the overall dynamics of capital accumulation and its ineradicable structural

dependence on economic growth (Harvey, 1985, 2001b). Harvey's basic thesis is that capitalism's primary circuit of industrial commodity production has a perpetual tendency towards overaccumulation. If a crisis of devaluation is to be avoided, profitable ways must ceaselessly be found to absorb surplus value. A key means to resolve this inner crisis tendency is through a 'spatial fix' and the 'switching' of capital into a secondary circuit of built environment formation so as to continually reproduce favourable conditions for economic expansion. Within Harvey's theorisation urbanisation plays a critical dual fix. Firstly, it provides a supportive spatial landscape of centralised physical infrastructure with tight geographical coordination as a precondition for the reproduction of the primary circuit. Secondly, urban development itself absorbs very large volumes of surplus capital, both directly through new construction activity and indirectly through the boon associated with the attendant demand for ancillary consumer goods and services (Harvey, 2001a). Scarcely surprisingly, Harvey (2013) reasons, and reflecting the consonant writings of Lefebvre, that the growth curves of economic output of the capitalist world economy throughout the last century have broadly mirrored the expansion in the urbanisation of the world's population as a critical motor force in its evolutionary survival:

> "Capitalism has found itself able to attenuate (if not resolve) its internal contradictions for a century; and consequently, in the hundred years since the writing of [Marx's] Capital, it has succeeded in achieving 'growth'. We cannot calculate at what price, but we do know the means: by occupying space, by producing space." (Lefebvre, 1976, p.21)

Since laying the groundwork for his seminal thesis, Harvey's prodigious texts have progressively refined and extended the basic argument in response to the growing financialisation of the world economy which, beginning in the 1970s, has characterised the so-called 'Neoliberal Turn' (Epstein, 2005; Reich, 2008). Neoliberalism has privileged the banking and financial nexus to such an extent that the amount of global debt-financed surplus liquidity requiring investment

opportunities has never been greater. Therefore, rather than a short-run temporary fix to fend off accumulation crises, in his later work Harvey (2014) theorises that the secondary circuit has largely supplanted the primary circuit as the arena of choice to generate profit and to become the primary contributor to the sustained reproduction of capital (see also Beauregard, 1994; Aalbers, 2007; Gotham, 2009).

In short, the parallax insights emerging from urban political economy scholarship, and which is foundational in how I comprehend and problematise planning in this thesis, is that urbanisation is less a product but an *independent driver* of economic growth as an end in itself and fundamental to the very existence of capitalism as both an economic and political system (Lefebvre, 1976). As a result, "it is not possible to understand and resist capitalism without understanding and reimagining the city" (Purcell, 2014, p.148).

The process of built environment formation, however, presents some very peculiar obstacles to capital flows. As described by Ambrose (1994), land development is qualitatively different from the general run of commodities in at least three major ways:

> "First, a piece of land is necessary, and this site forms part of the value of the finished product, mostly because it has a future redevelopment value. Second, the finished product cannot be moved to the market but remains where it was built. Finally, it has a 'semi-permanent' life—perhaps on average 80–150 years in the case of most buildings. All these special characteristics carry implications. The value of the underlying site outlives the building and forms an increasingly important element in the financial valuation as the possibility of redevelopment draws closer. The immobility means that the market value of the building will be related to local events which stand outside the production process itself, for example trends in employment or changes in communications facilities in the area where it was built." (p.38)

Uniquely, major problems surface at the urban scale as the nature of intra-capitalist property relations mean that the development of necessary shared infrastructure is only considered to the extent that it is favourable for the profitable realisation of private exchange value and not in terms of its collective use value. Since individual capitalists require to consume only part of these common resources, and varyingly, they are given to pursuing competing and contradictory urban investment strategies. Moreover, built infrastructure which is privately produced is developed and used in the context where social and environmental externalities can be strong. It is therefore impossible for the private market alone to reproduce a coherent, cohesive urban environment necessary for steady, sustained capital accumulation (Couch, 2016). Indeed Harvey (1978b) insists that, "individual capitalists, when left to their own devices, tend to underinvest in the built environment relative to their own individual and collective needs at the same time they tend to overaccumulate" (p.116). However, any disruption to the smooth functioning of the expanded reproduction of urban exchange values and an economic crisis invariably ensues.

Consequently, as succinctly précised by Dear and Scott (1981), when, "the dislocations, irrationalities and conflicts of the urban system begin to subvert social relationships, urban planning makes its historical appearance as a means of collectively re-adjusting the spatial and temporal development of urban land use" (p.12). Foglesong (1986) thus identifies the main thrust of contemporary planning as essentially a praxis for reconciling the conflict between the social character of land and its private ownership and control. The tensions between multiple, divergent private capitals over the production, management and appropriation of space begets planning in order to:

> "(1) cope with the externality problems that arise from the treating of land as a commodity; (2) create the housing and other environmental amenities needed for the reproduction of labour power; (3) provide for the building and maintenance of the bridges, harbours, streets and transit systems used

by capital as means of production; and (4) ensure the spatial coordination of these infrastructural facilities for purposes of efficient circulation." (p.104)

However, in seeking to resolve these tensions, planning simultaneously creates a whole series of new contradictions that metastasise at wider spatial scales. While urbanisation is crucial for the reproduction of capital, geographic centralisation intensifies core-periphery spatial imbalances and inequalities, not only causing pervasive democratic deficits and discontent at the peripheries but also perversely reproducing the conditions for overaccumulation at the centre. This, in turn, generates a contradictory dynamic towards decentralisation in a ceaseless attempt to re-/de-territorialize surplus capital and to secure new 'spatial fixes', triggering endlessly unstable, mutually contradictory and variegated dynamics of overdevelopment and underdevelopment which is both essential for the reproduction of capital while, at the same time, recurrently endangering it (Brenner, 1998a; Jessop, 2006). These insuperable dialectical tendencies towards equalisation and differentiation is the basic underlying contradiction at the heart of the chronically uneven geographic development patterns characteristic of contemporary capitalist societies, which can never be durably resolved (Soja, 1980).

In these circumstances, it is again rational that some assemblage of state planning agency intercedes through strategic spatial development policies and geographical restructuring in an attempt to modulate the otherwise chaotic and deleterious consequences of unregulated market development and to take charge "on a grand scale" (Brenner and Elden, 2009, p.372) and on a long-term basis the wholesale management of space in ways that seek to reduce locational contradictions, enhance coherency and foster social cohesion, as further described by Harvey (1978a):

> "The commitment to the ideology of harmony within the capitalist social order remains the still point upon which the gyrations of planning ideology turn." (p.231)

The development of Marxist-inspired political economy urban theory has precipitated the emergence of a longstanding and influential oeuvre of academic literature that has critically interrogated planning as a "child of capitalistic logic" (Kreichauf, 2014, p.1) with its theories and praxes inextricably shaped according to elite criteria, serving dominant profit- and rent-seeking class interests by orchestrating space for the principal benefit of reproducing economic growth (see, for example, Preteceille, 1976; Castells, 1977; Scott and Roweis, 1977; Kirk, 1980; Dear and Scott, 1981; Edel, 1981; Yiftachel, 1998; Fainstein, 2000). As further recounted by Harvey:

> "The planner's task is to contribute to the process of social reproduction…
> In so doing the planner is equipped with powers vis-à-vis the production,
> maintenance and management of the built environment which permit him
> or her to intervene in order to stabilize, to create the conditions for 'balanced
> growth', to contain civil strife and factional struggles by repression, cooption
> or integration." (Harvey, 1978a, p.223)

However, in as much as planning is essential for the social reproduction of capital, it is also restrained and encircled by its self-same structural limits, generating yet further contradictions. The impulse to socialise control of land-use risks popular democratic power over private property which is inimical to capitalist relations of production. In negotiating this dialectical knife-edge, the institutions of planning become the venue for intense political-ideological struggles over what is good for profit (exchange value) and what is good for people (use value). Recognising that planning is fully situated within the realm of politics and the duality between the market and society provides us with an understanding that capitalism is in perpetual search for a means to dominate the planning process and to secure its democratic legitimacy through forms of spatial governance that directly correspond with the collective needs of capital while simultaneously seeking to suppress democratic claims. As Friedmann (1987) notes:

"[Planning] must encourage and support the interests of capital, but it must also prevent those interests from eroding the foundation of a common life. When it opposes capital, the State typically can act with no more resolution than its political support allows. In the final analysis, its legitimacy depends on the political mobilisation of the people acting in defence of their collective interests." (p.29)

The logic of capitalist urbanisation therefore presupposes the ability of capital to dominate, not only bureaucratic planning praxis, but also whole populations, their cultural and political values as well as their mental conceptions and representations of the world. Consequently, we cannot understand planning without placing it within the context of power, as reflected by Wildavsky (1973):

"As soon as the prevalence of disagreement over social goals or policies is admitted into the discussion, it becomes clear that there can be no planning without the ability to cause other people to act differently than they otherwise would. Planning assumes power. Planning is politics." (p.132)

Praxis must therefore be critically investigated historically, not as impartial, technocratic governance, but something which is persistently constituted by conflict and a site of politics where power struggles are materially played out and reproduced (Miraftab, 2009). And, more significantly from the perspective of this thesis, something which is also continuously open to the possibility of being challenged, and changed (Holgersen, 2015).

Evolution of Modern Planning Praxis

Planning emerged as a discipline during the 20th Century from its early epistemological roots in urban reform movements, chiefly in response to the very poor living conditions that had become commonplace as a consequence of rapid urban-industrial growth. The provenance of planning's origin story has been well rehearsed in the literature and space does not warrant extended recital here. Nevertheless, as summarised by Yiftachel (1989), early planners perceived their activities as an act of civic reformism, the art and science of

ordering the use of land to the greatest measure of economy, convenience and beauty, and grounded in a utilitarian belief for rational decision-making in pursuit of social progress (see, for example, Geddes, 1915; Meyerson and Banfield, 1955; Keeble, 1969).

Although not without critical challenge, this carefully nurtured conviction of planning as codified, objective knowledge prevailed into the 'golden age' utopian heyday of the immediate postwar era (Taylor, 1998; Davoudi, 2012b). The modernist planning method was conceived as linear in which technical evidence produced by experts and imbued in Euclidean conceptions of space had an instrumental place, and the idealised future city and well-ordered regions could be produced through the application of empirical methods of scientific survey and analysis which, "would reveal the secrets of a natural and rational order with a degree of perfection that could discipline alike the baser instincts of common man and the exploitive impulses of the capitalist" (Boyer 1986, p.6).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, this rational-comprehensive, or synoptic, model of planning provided the undisputed metatheory for Keynesian embedded liberalism as a virtuous precondition for political stability and material development (Gleeson & Low, 2000; Taylor, 1998). Within this logic, the public interest was conceived as something static that existed 'out there' to be discovered rather than socially produced and historically contingent. Theoretically, a clear cleavage was maintained between procedure and substance, where ideological critique was considered to have relatively little to contribute (Faludi, 1973; Gunder, 2010b). This allowed planning to position itself without having to be labelled 'political' and to assume an independent, mediative role between capital and labour in the pursuit of balanced, harmonious spatial-economic expansion (Beauregard, 1989).

The multiple disruptive upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s following the expiration of the 'long boom', however, ushered in a breakdown

of the rationalist planning paradigm as the values of modernity came under sharp attack (Friedmann, 1987). Dear (1986) characterised this febrile transition from modernity to the multivalent conditions of postmodernity as one of particular ferment in planning thought. The association between scientific and moral judgements collapsed and collective values increasingly rejected in favour of pluralistic, consumptive interests. As a result, planning conflicts came to be seen more as dilemmas made up of disagreements between relative values, unresolvable by recourse to facts (Schön, 1983; Milroy-Moore, 1991; Taylor, 1999; De Roo and Silva, 2010). A catalogue of conceptual criticisms emerged from those highlighting the social construction of knowledge (Soja 1997; Sandercock 1998; Allmendinger 2001), the repressive relations of class power (Scott and Roweis 1977; Paris 1981), the burdensome effects on business (Ehrman, 1988; Evans, 1988, 1991), sheer impracticality (Lindblom, 1959; Altshuler, 1965; Wildavsky, 1973; Schuck, 1976) and even inhumanity for promoting spatial forms over social processes (Jacobs 1961; Davies 1972; Dunleavy 1981). As advanced by Harper and Stein (1995), the dwindling faith in positivistic legitimacy, "created a crisis in planning because it undermines and rejects modernist bases for planning, yet it provides no substitute rationale" (p.61). As a result, throughout this aporic period, planning experienced a, "centrifugal disintegration… with theorists having few clues as to how to (re)establish themselves on solid ground" (Beauregard, 1989, p.391). Planning appeared to have reached an impasse, bereft of progressive ideas (Levy, 1992).

Against the backdrop of these vicissitudes, the 1980s also saw a marked swing to a new post-welfare state zeitgeist of free-market privatisation and deregulation aimed at restoring favourable conditions for capital accumulation (Harvey, 2005). The upshot was a roll-back to new minimalist forms of state spatial regulation underpinned by an urban 'growth machine' political economy where developing spatial blueprints for resource redistribution across territories was considered futile (Molotch, 1976; Brenner,

2004). Instead, the emerging wisdom was that investment should be redirected to entrepreneurial growth poles as a source of place-based international competitiveness, accomplished through large 'boosterist' urban renewal projects and public-private partnerships divorced almost entirely from strategic planning considerations, and the spontaneous self-organising dynamics of the markets and a spatial version of 'trickle-down' would ensure societal wellbeing through competitive inter-regional catch-up (Pike et al., 2006; Holgersen and Baeten, 2017). The perceived inability of planning to conduct itself in an entrepreneurial manner set the stage for widespread ambivalence, even hostility, towards how planners' conceived and carried out their roles, with praxis becoming increasingly marginalised as prosaic, technical regulation in a manner similar to building control (Ambrose, 1986; Griffiths, 1986; Thornley, 1991).

From the diverse field of theoretical perspectives vying to reinstall a proactive new agenda for planning against the backdrop of what Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger (2002) termed the "neo-liberal, anti-planning morass of the 1980s" (p.214), agreement began to form in the 1990s around new participatory modes of planning to the extent that Innes (1995) declared the emergence of a new planning paradigm. Inspired by a wider post-structuralist intellectual cultural turn across the social sciences, this new wave, largely (but not exclusively) influenced by Habermasian communicative ethics, sought to escape the narrow constraints of instrumental rationality through embracing critical pragmatism and postmodern concerns with difference whilst still retaining the possibility for collective action (Healey, 1997a; Forester, 1999). For communicationalists, as structuring power relations are always in flux and continuously renegotiated through active agency, the possibility exists for distortions that weaken democratic praxis to be transcended through intersubjective reasoning which openly acknowledge inherent asymmetries of power. Accordingly, communicative (or collaborative) planning theory stresses the importance of an institutionalist perspective in providing the

normative criteria for an 'ideal speech situation' to transparently exchange ideas and develop the capacity to understand opposing viewpoints (Healey, 1992). This implies that the essential work of planners is discursive and with the skilful, empathetic brokering of the dialogic exchange and the right decision-making processes, consensus can be reached across diverse coalitions of actors such that planning can further its progressive promise and offer a positive contribution to democratic governance without domination or coercion (Graham and Healey, 1999; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012). In summary, as pithily summarised by Sandercock (1998b), the ideal of communicative planning is to replace the power of greater force with the power of the greater argument.

The rapid ascent of communicative planning to a solidified position within Western planning thought has precipitated a significant number of critical challenges (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998; Huxley, 2000; Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000; McGuirk, 2001; Bengs, 2005; Purcell, 2009). Chief amongst these is that, despite its normative intentions, communicative planning considerably underplays the theoretical and practical difficulties where discourse is rigged in advance by ineffaceable inequalities of power and knowledge which cannot be dissolved through rational argumentation. As Pløger (2004) observes:

> "… power has to be strategic before it can be democratic, it has to rely on a governmentality before a communicative ethic, and it has to eliminate unpredictable reasons." (p.228)

For Hillier (2003), the ideal of undistorted communication in such a heavily politicised arena as planning, where there are always 'winners' and 'losers', is illusory and it will never be possible for participants to act extra-ideologically and to abandon their predetermined political positions. Indeed, Flyvbjerg (1998c) rhetorically enquires: "Why use the force of the better argument when force alone will suffice?" (p.80). Purcell (2009) goes one step further, insisting that, communicative planning has principally been captured or intentionally

deployed by contemporary market forces to secure popular legitimacy for delivering growth by offering decision-making processes that are widely perceived as democratic but do not, and cannot, fundamentally challenge dominant relations of power. As a result, Allmendinger (2001) bluntly concludes that the communicative paradigm has principally proved useful for, "providing planners with the theoretical justification for their continued existence in the shadow of the deregulatory approaches of the 1980s" (p.123)[8].

Governance, Neoliberalism & Spatial Planning

Advocates of communicative planning of course refute this charge of naïve power-blindness and, while acknowledging the not insignificant practical impediments, insist that it offers the potential to at least blunt the discursive domination of power and to more equitably harnesses a plurality of knowledge claims (Healey, 2003; Innes, 2004). Despite, however, being unable to convincingly shake off its long-standing critics, the communicative planning paradigm has continued to maintain its hold over mainstream praxis. As such, its epistemological lineage cannot be seen as emerging in isolation but very much coeval to the late 20th Century shift from 'government' to 'governance' and the advent of new international modes of regulatory coordination characterised by a greater prevalence of stakeholder participation and other modes of consensus-seeking democracy which overlapped considerably with the rise of 'Third Way' pragmatic politics as a significant electoral force during the 1990s (Rhodes, 1996; Giddens, 1998).

While outwardly presented as a progressive shift, the governance turn has also been the subject of extensive analysis as symptomatic of a sophisticated roll-out of neoliberal governmentalities through which pro-growth, entrepreneurial polities have acquired unprecedented influence (see,

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[8] For a counterposing view, see Mattila (2019) who provides a comprehensive riposte to the very many academic critiques of communicative planning theory, arguing that much of the criticism has been imbalanced without providing any alternative solutions to the problems they highlight.

for example, Harvey, 1989a; Brenner, 2004; Jessop, 1998; Swyngedouw, 2005). This literature argues that, within the conditions of national welfare state retrenchment and the transition to an increasingly fragmented, hypercompetitive global economy, the loss of territorial synchrony severely weakened the capacity of liberal-capitalist states to govern from above, posing serious challenges to the efficacy and legitimacy of national scale policymaking and implementation (Dean, 2007). A dramatic reworking of state/civil society relationships was presented as the solution through relinquishing part of states' capacities for top-down hierarchical decision-making in exchange for greater heteronomous influence and the naturalisation of an array of market-centric disciplinary logics that facilitated the governing of individuals at a distance (Larner, 2000; Barnett, 2010).

At the supranational scale, first-order governance codified and mobilised the meta-discourses of the symbolic order to inaugurate a common perceptive field which carried epistemic privilege to secure generalised compliance with an entrepreneurial worldview, reflexively woven into subjects preferences and identities (Purcell, 2009). Once installed, this dominant strategic line infiltrated societal institutions of all sorts, reproducing itself as the dominant common sense and normalising (masking) its ideology as the ahistorical and politically neutral purpose of society. This was complemented with a corresponding de-ideologisation of collective provisioning and hierarchical state planning as costly, overburdened and inefficient. At the national and subnational scale, second order governance was the domain of actual policy implementation where new heterarchical networks of civil society actors were actively encouraged to enter the frame of governing, empowered with the autonomy (although, not necessarily the resources) to self-manage specific public policy matters which had hitherto been the domain of the state (Jessop et al., 2008).

While national governments became less dirigiste, this did not imply less state action. Instead, there was an important flanking role for

'government-beyond-the-state' in what Jessop (1998) refers to as the, "organisation of self-organisation" (p.42). This typically manifested in new 'glocalised' decentring and rescaling of state territorial administration and the increased importance of the transnational global scale, alongside the tacit insertion of 'New Public Management' style metrics as disciplinary technologies, marshalling compliant institutional mentalities and instinctive polity norms (Brenner, 1998b). This allowed institutions of all kinds, including planning, to operate relatively autonomously so long as their activities could be discretely (self-)policed at a distance for their adherence to entrepreneurial precepts through a variety of calculable benchmarking targets, without the need for overt political struggle or continuous ideological persuasion (Dean, 1999).

The steady advancement of the governance paradigm therefore ran in parallel to the rise of what a growing cache of critical scholarship variously identifies as a post-political, post-democratic or post-ideological condition (Crouch, 2000; Mouffe, 2005; Rancière, 2007; Žižek, 2009). This literature sharply criticises the 'tyranny of participation' which foregrounds pragmatic political compromise to pre-emptively interpellate neoliberal subjectivities within social cognitions, rewarding preferred behaviours and variously disrupting unwanted behaviours in ways that forestall all but a narrow debate around a pro-growth, pro-market agenda (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Key to governance is therefore 'noise reduction', implicitly valuing certain styles of discursive expression as "dispassionate, orderly, or articulate" (Young 2002, p. 6–7) whilst marginalising or excluding divergent voices, particularly those who might otherwise interrupt growth-orientated policy dictates (Swyngedouw, 2011). Consequently, there is no sense of real alternatives and subjects of all kinds, including planners, unthinkingly co-construct and internalise the sustained inevitability of a neoliberal society as the taken for granted foundational basis for regulatory action (Dikeç, 2007; Keil, 2009). In doing so the domain of 'politics' is reduced to 'policies' and questions of

technocratic expert knowledge and not political position, or what Rancière (1998) calls, "a political idyll of achieving the common good by an enlightened government of elites buoyed by the confidence of the masses" (p.93).

On the face of it, neoliberalism implied a massive challenge for planning. It is a cardinal precept of *laissez-faire* economics that individuals must be given freer rein to self-maximise their private economic interests, unfettered by state-directed intrusion (Goonewardena, 2003). However, as observed by Wadley and Smith (1998), if planning actually impeded economic growth it would have long since been jettisoned. For the essential reasons outlined at the outset of this chapter, neoliberalism did not signal the end of planning nor was there any significant planning retrenchment. On the contrary, many authors have observed how states who enthusiastically embraced neoliberalism vigorously applied entrepreneurial rationalities to their planning policies (Daly, 2016). As Allmendinger and Haughton (2013) put it:

> "Neoliberalism is not anti-planning. There is an important market supportive role for planning. Neoliberal planning involves the capture and reorientation of planning. In other words, planning is both the object and subject of neoliberalism." (p.9)

There has been considerable debate in the literature as to the value of neoliberalism as an object of academic critique (see Barnett, 2005; Castree, 2006). However, rather than conceiving it as a monolithic deregulatory project, for Peck et al. (2010), it is more usefully understood as an autopoietic process of 'neoliberalisation' through the continuous mobilisation of heterogenous forms of governance to secure capitalism's continued legitimacy and critical to its evolutionary capacity and resilience. This typically manifests in a ceaseless political desire for *aidez-faire* market-orientated institutional reforms and counter-reforms to continuously displace, and even capitalise upon, its own roiling contradictions and crises to prevent it irretrievably collapsing under its own weight. Moreover, as further suggested by Brenner et al.

(2010b), policy failure is central to neoliberalism's experimental and exploratory *modus operandi*, tending to respond in a protean, rascal-like fashion by morphing targeted features of locally inherited geoinstitutional structures, considerably influencing its 'actually existing' scope and path-dependency within variegated geographical contexts (Peck and Tickell, 2002; see also Brenner et al., 2010a; Peck and Theodore, 2015; see Figure 4).
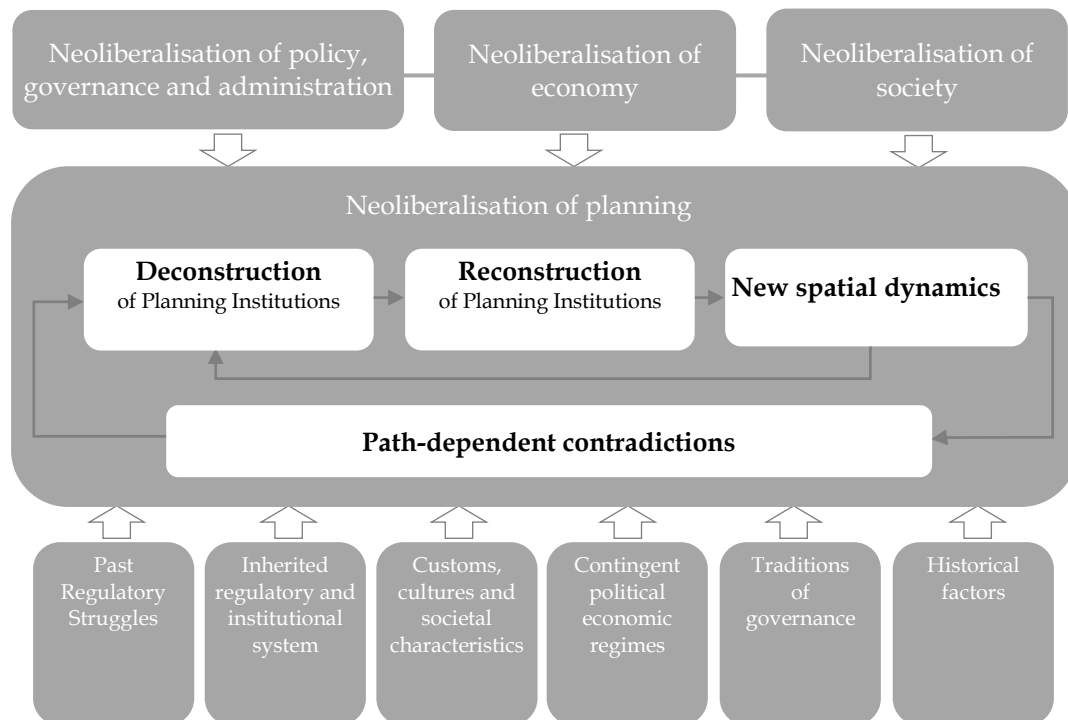
Figure 4: Path-dependent neoliberal restructuring of planning governance (as depicted by Taşan-Kok and Baeten (2012, p.13))

Since the beginning of the 1990s, for example, planning scholars and practitioners have increasingly supported the transformation of planning from a land-use focussed regulatory activity towards a more holistic 'spatial planning' (Vigar, 2009; Bafarasat, 2015). Associated with progressive modernisation and reform in the face of global shifts in economic reorganisation and the increasing complexity of urban and regional governance, the emergence of the practices and discourses of spatial planning offered a seductive new lexicon for planners to act as animateurs in city-regional competitiveness through territorially focussed strategic thinking and

joined-up policy coordination (Healey, 1997b; Albrechts et al., 2001, 2003). 'Development control' became 'development management' and planners were encouraged to acquire new skills, knowledge and cultures for a positive-sounding, forward-looking and business-friendly praxis aimed at balanced 'win–win' and '–win' policy outcomes against the triple bottom line of economic growth, social cohesion and sustainable development (Waterhout et al., 2013). As such, the rise of the practices and discourses of spatial planning was very much underpinned by academic planning's parallel communicative turn with the normative intention of creating sustainable places and increasing the general support for policies through integrative strategies and collaborative means:

> "The assumption is that spatial planning, if undertaken in an open, transparent, and collaborative way will lead to consensus and, ultimately, better development." (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009, p.2548)

The advent of spatial planning was also closely aligned with the search for new scales of policy articulation and state spatial restructuring. At the supranational scale, for example, the EU actively embraced the new praxis through highly influential initiatives, such as the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (CEC, 1999), which was very successfully mobilised to disseminate common assemblages of technical vocabularies and shared spatial logics (Morphet, 1997; Albrechts, 2004). The ESDP lexicon introduced new relational conceptions of space to sustainably balance competing economic, social and environmental policy objectives in their spatial manifestation which could be variously 'downloaded' by practitioners, carrying persuasive power, commanding attention and becoming central to how spatial planning continues to be framed and practiced throughout Europe today (Richardson and Jensen, 2003). As described by Albrechts et al. (2003):

> "The spatial expression of this direction was the concept of *balanced development*, which offered the promise of development foci across the regions of the EU, while at the same time promoting the dynamism of the

major growth zones on the continent. This general approach is developed through concepts of *polycentric development*, redefining urban-rural relationships, securing access to infrastructure and knowledge (including trans-European communications), and at the same time promoting more compact development and resource conservation. The ESDP also puts strong emphasis on encouraging partnership in governance forms." (p.115, italics in original)

Rather than accept this shift to spatial planning as intuitively progressive praxis, many authors have instead critically interrogated it as simply the latest transmogrification of planning as a legitimating apparatus for an entrepreneurial, market-supportive form of neoliberal spatial governance (Gunder, 2010b; Allmendinger, 2016). Within this reading, the inherent mutability of spatial planning's core concepts and discourses has left it extremely vulnerable to being hijacked and misused to the banner of neoliberalism (Olesen and Richardson, 2011; Olesen, 2014). For example, the unproblematic privileging of polysemic empty signifiers such as 'balanced' and 'sustainable' development, which can be variously filled with differing meanings, as fundamental tenets towards which planning should aspire, together with the widespread use of fluid spatial representations (e.g. networks, nodes, corridors, gateways, hubs etc.) and the amorphous visualisation of 'soft' or 'fuzzy' functional geographies, offered extremely convenient tactics to blur or camouflage the *realpolitik* of planning in carrying out its actual ideological work in support of economic growth (Gunder and Hillier, 2009; Nyseth, 2012; Olesen, 2012).

Common to these critical accounts is the centrality of language which has been credited as essential for allowing spatial planning to gain such rapid and widespread purchase, providing critical spaces of temporary consensus whereby seemingly irreconcilable political demands can be incorporated without serious conflict or compromise, and with the aim of short-circuiting democratic tensions around how to most expeditiously deliver economic growth whilst superficially taking into account other 'lower order' issues such

as, for example, climate change or social justice (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012). This resonates with Harvey's (1973) presage some decades earlier:

> "If it becomes explicit as to who will lose and who will benefit, and by how much, from a given allocation decision, then we must anticipate far greater difficulty in implementing the decision." (p.51)

The pervasive use of oblique representations of space offered a deliberate tactic of "useful uncertainty" (Haughton et al. 2009, p.159) in which policies remained more suggestive than prescriptive, providing a malleable charter of indeterminate spatial concepts from which planners can variously select and attach meanings in different spatial and temporal contexts (Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard, 2013). This, according to Bengs (2005), delivers an important means to pursue whatever one's interests might be and where implementation through local bargaining and interpretation dominate. At the same time, this elliptical lexis allowed planning policies to be presented as autonomous, neutral and technical, and the result of an impartial process of rational and informed expert-led decision-making (Baeten, 2012). Indeed, for some commentators, in seeking to defend their professional legitimacy, planners have all to easily embraced bureaucratic, techno-managerialist conceptions of their praxis by engaging in a complex set of discursive distortions designed to obscure and prevent a real understanding of their practice. This repeats Fainstein and Fainstein's (1979) earlier depiction:

> "Planners depoliticize, that is, cast in technical terms, the planning activities of the state. They further universalize the legitimating ideology by bolstering justification in the name of the public interest with arguments ostensibly based on scientific rationality. Thus, while the expanding role of the state deprivatizes all important issues, planners assist in limiting the arena of overt political conflict over benefit and distribution." (p.149)

Rather than understanding depoliticisation as 'without politics', for Olesen and Richardson (2011), the turn to spatial planning can be more properly viewed as part of an intense re-regulatory political project that has shifted

planning incrementally but perceptibly away from an arena where spatial policy is determined in the interests of the wider common good and social justice, to one which essentially legitimates and sustains the neoliberal growth agenda. Through a carefully stage-managed process, or what Brand and Gaffikin (2007) term "the craft of cosmetic conflict suspension" (p.304), it presents an outward appearance of enlightened inclusion but with subtly defined parameters of what is open for discussion (Diken and Laustsen, 2004; Marchart, 2007; MacLeod, 2011). This is what Lefebvre refers to as the ideology of participation which, "allows those in power to obtain, at a small price, the acquiescence of concerned citizens. After a show trial more or less devoid of information and social activity, citizens sink back into their tranquil passivity" (Lefebvre, 1968, p.105; translated in Purcell, 2014, p.150).

Within these conditions of consensual saturation, debate is still possible, even encouraged, so long as it remains fully circumscribed within the realm of possible social relations—a process which leads to the effective silencing of genuinely political questions (Swyngedouw, 2011). In contrast, dissenting voices articulating radically opposing visions and challenges are either co-opted and rewarded for working within mainstream parameters or repoliticised as 'noise' and given outsider status within planning debates (DeFilippis, 2004; Attuyer, 2015). This accord's with Luithlen's (1997) summation:

> "It seems to be one of the prime effects of ideology to depoliticise those aspects of policy which serve the immediate needs of the system and to politicise others which question the status quo. This has been no more obvious than in the evolution of town planning." (p.1414)

Allmendinger and Haughton (2012) therefore maintain that, in supporting the mainstream political project, planning has become inherently reactionary, deriving its validity from quickly adjusting to political priorities and shifting economic realities, undermining the ambitions of those who would see it as a far-seeing exercise in future thinking which can transcend the short-term time

horizons of governing ideologies. Because it seeks to bracket conflict, it risks becoming radically undemocratic, leading us away from a critical analysis of power and unwittingly cloaking its reproduction (Purcell, 2009). As neatly abridged by Allmendinger (2016):

> "Planning and planners have become 'part of the problem' in the sense of withdrawing into a managerialist worldview: planning has become about the management of growth and is no longer concerned with the distributional, ethical or political questions that underpin debates about the objectives and future of planning. In this sense planning is part of the new consensus politics, in that it has become depoliticized and deploys empty phrases such as 'urban renaissance', 'spatial planning' and 'sustainable growth' in order to appeal to a wide range of interests." (p.8)

Nevertheless, like much of the other apparatus of neoliberal governance, consensus can only ever be temporary and contingent (Rancière 1998). Whilst the turn to spatial planning has sought to close off contestation and surreptitiously create unanimity around an entrepreneurial growth agenda, in not resolving its internal contradictions it simply conceals and displaces its persistent underlying tensions. In the process, it generates its own pervasive policy failures which are, at best, only ever staved off by ideology (Lefebvre, 1976). Indeed, numerous studies have pointed to the yawning divergence between spatial planning's progressive promise in theory and practice (Albrechts, 2006, 2010; Newman, 2008)[9]. As will be explored in Part II of this thesis, these tensions represents both the deepening and frailty of the neoliberal project but also present openings through which those who seek to oppose the neoliberalisation of planning the opportunity to do so, and which makes the return of a proper politics of real alternatives always a permanent possibility (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

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[9] My own research on the operation of Irish spatial planning during the Celtic Tiger is a case in point and similarly concludes that the indeterminacy spatial planning core concepts resulted in a near total abandonment of basic planning principles and a loss of steering capacity, with disastrous outcomes (Daly, 2016).

Risk, Repoliticisation & Reimagination

The literature recounted in the previous section is probative of how many critical theorists conceive planning as permanently occupying the unstable, contradictory fault line between society and the market, with the latter deploying its considerable political power to ensure the continued supremacy of the growth agenda through the mobilisation of a covert, flexible array of discursive tactics as a form of neoliberal spatial governance. As a result, Kunzmann (2016) is pessimistically resigned that planning is now so enveloped within the urban 'growth machine' of contemporary capitalism that it is largely immune to radical reconceptualization—a position which seems to be further entrenched with each passing crisis—such that planners must now acknowledge that it is no longer within their gift to challenge market rationalities. Instead, all they can do is articulate their concerns about growing social and ecological injustices, and their underlying causes. However, for Grange (2014), neoliberalisation has normalised growth to such an extent that planners are by-and-large unconscious of their adherent commitment to legitimating the core ideology of the state where facilitating flows of capital has become the foremost and, at times, the only value in spatial policymaking. As Lefebvre (2003) describes:

> "Technocrats, unaware of what's going on in their own mind and in their working concepts, profoundly misjudging in their blind field what's going on (and what isn't), end up meticulously organizing a repressive space." (p.157)

Even if they were to demur, growth is such an inviolable societal axiom—an elixir that cures all ills which must never be jeopardised and without which would lead to economic collapse, shrinkage and death—that planners would find it almost impossible to voice opposition (Beauregard 1989). As a result, they do what they think all good planners should do, preferring to propose policy fixes within pre-established and accepted policy norms that promise to make growth more 'balanced' or 'sustainable' rather than think about the

unthinkable prospect of managing without it (Gunder and Hillier, 2004). As discussed in Chapter 1, however, there is now unequivocal empirical and theoretical evidence as to the direct correlation, as well as causation, between economic growth and ecological collapse putting us on a terminal collision course with planetary boundaries. "We thus seem confronted with a fateful dilemma." McLaughlin (1993) writes. "Either we pursue economic growth and ecological collapse, or we seek ecological sustainability and economic collapse. Neither horn of this dilemma seems comfortable. As with all dilemmas, one way out is to rethink the assumptions which lead into it" (p.ix).

Academic critics of planning, such as Hiller (2003), have long argued that for planning to recapture a true progressive purpose, a profound repoliticisation is required for, "a reorientation of planning theory from a normative to a political basis" (McGuirk, 2001, p.214). Miraftab (2017) equally makes the case that planning must firstly seek to decolonise consciousnesses through exploring agonistic counter-governmentalities which disrupt the tireless attempts by neoliberal spatial governance to stabilise repressive power relations and supress alternative meanings through neoliberal popularist projects of inclusion. This, as described by Mouffe (2000), requires a form of 'hyperpoliticizing' i.e. a mode of thinking and analysing that subverts pre-programmed rationalities to keep real democratic contestation alive. Giving voice to such divergent discourses, which are not professionally authorised from within the mainstream, creates openings for "the properly political sequence" (Swyngedouw 2009, p. 606) to begin through posing fundamental epistemological and ontological questions which defamiliarize the prevailing sociospatial order. Dissensus, apropos Rancière (2006), therefore, "creates a fissure in the sensible order, by confronting the established framework of perception, thought and action with the 'inadmissible' i.e. a political subject" (p.85).

However, outside of abstract theorising, few authors provide much guidance as to how such insurgent repoliticisation might actually occur. For

Beck (1997), it is the unfolding ecological crisis itself that offers potentially redemptive opportunities, delivering a, "providential gift for the universal self-reformation of a previously fatalistic industrial modernity" (p.61). Within Beck's 'risk society' theory, the further modern technological civilisation advances, the more its unwanted environmental risks accumulate and, continually threatened by the self-imperilled spectre of its own collapse, the more politics becomes the domain, not of distribution, but through which these risks are reflexively managed (Beck, 1992). Accordingly, for Beck (1998), "key to combating destruction of the environment is not found in the environment itself, nor in a different individual morality or in different research or business ethics; by nature it lies in the regulatory systems of the institutions that are historically questionable" (p.26). This risk cannot be averted by "more and better" science—"it is the *product* of more and better science" (Beck, 2009, p.115, italics in original).

To state the problem more directly, Berry (2008) says, our ignorant and arrogant use of science allows power to override questions of scale, causing great destruction. "One response to the manifest implication of science in certain kinds of destruction is to say that we need more science, or more and better science. I am inclined to honor this proposition, if I am allowed to add that we also need more than science" (p.44). Consequently, it is only through embracing the possibility of disaster, and the profound loss and insecurity of meaning that it generates, that the conditions for a renewed and radically self-aware political subject can be produced so as, "not to conduct cosmetic ecology on a grand scale but to actually assure viability in the future" (Beck, 1997, p.61). This necessarily requires the demystification of bureaucratic expert systems that control policymaking whereby, "exposure of scientific uncertainty is the liberation of politics, law and the public sphere from the patronization by technocracy"(Beck, 1992, p.109).

Beck's world risk society resonates with other academic accounts of past civilisation collapses and as to whether they provide salutary analogues

for contemporary debates over possible human futures (Middleton, 2017). As noted by Ehrlich and Ehrlich (2013):

> "Virtually every past human civilization has eventually undergone collapse, a loss of socio-political-economic complexity usually accompanied by a dramatic decline in population size." (p.1)

Tainter (1990) provides one of the most notable theorisations in which he argues that historic civilisation breakdowns were a consequence of diminishing marginal returns to complexity. Diamond (2004), on the other hand, writes in favour of an environmental limitation thesis reinforced by inappropriate cultural referents for change and slow-leak trends obscured by wide up-and-down fluctuations with weak feedback signals, or 'creeping normalcy', which prohibited timeous corrective action (see also Unruh, 2000). Unifying both these theses, Greer (2005) proposes that civilisation collapse is in fact a normal part of the oscillating spectrum in the evolution of complex societies arising from self-reinforcing, path-amplifying processes whereby capital reproduction necessitates the consumption of resources at rates significantly above their rate of replacement.

A central analytical difficulty in apprehending collapse dynamics, common to each of these accounts, is that it occurs at a timescale mismatched with human temporalities and generally discernible only in hindsight, whereby recovery from each partial breakdown induces reassuring stimuli that the problem can be durably resolved, delaying the necessary adaptive response such that an irreversible threshold is inevitably breached (Solomon et al., 2009; see also Turchin, 2016). Additional inertia arises when the recalcitrant interests of power elites clash with those of society as a whole, particularly when the former can insulate themselves from their immediate antisocial consequences (Raskin et al., 2002).

Previous societal collapses were, however, regional or local in scale. Today's humanity is globally interconnected with a planetary scope and threatened by a near perfect storm of severe socio-ecological challenges.

Intellectual concern over the possible collapse of modern-day globalised civilisation was, of course, popularised in the 1970s with the famous Club of Rome's Limits to Growth (LTG) study (Meadows et al., 1974). At first hailed as a great advance, the LTG projections of impending societal breakdown were irreverently received by mainstream economics and subsequently consigned to the 'dustbin of history' (Freeman, 1973; Nordhaus et al., 1992; Lomborg and Rubin, 2002). The prevailing riposte was that modernity's ineluctable technological advances would push back natural resource limits *ad infinitum* to vouchsafe long-term economic growth, development and progress (Blühdorn and Welsh, 2007). As a result, environmental limits quickly receded from the public consciousness and, in the aftermath of the Rio Earth Summit and the emergence of the ecological modernisation school of thought during the 1990s, economic growth, *in itself*, came to be increasingly viewed as a fundamental precondition for successfully addressing environmental concerns (United Nations, 1987, 1992).

Over the past two decades, however, there has been something of a revival in the awareness and understanding of the LTG thesis, and the prospects of the collapse of global urban-industrial civilisation (Motesharrei et al., 2014). Successive empirical studies have broadly validated the original LTG modelling, drawing on decades of observed data which confirms that the world is closely tracking a 'business as usual' scenario, which predicted a collapse in global social–ecological systems by mid-21st Century (Simmons, 2000; Bardi, 2011; Turner, 2012). Scientific evidence is mounting that human induced changes to the biosphere are pushing humanity beyond the civilisation-friendly 'safe operating space' of the Holocene into a new telluric, non-analogue state, and what is increasingly being labelled as the Anthropocene (Crutzen, 2002; Rockström et al., 2009; Oldfield et al., 2014). Ahmed (2017) similarly supports the conclusion that humanity today finds itself at the early stages of a systemic phase-shift which is already manifesting in peripheral subsystem failures in every region of the world. More recently,

scientists have begun to focus on the possibility of non-linear geophysical 'tipping points' that could, in contrast to a gradual disintegration, abruptly and irrevocably alter the Earth's climate into a permanent 'hothouse state' beyond humanity's capacity to adapt (Hughes et al., 2013; Brook et al., 2018; Steffen et al., 2018).

While the possibility of civilisation collapse remains controversial, and only quasi-predictable, the processes by which complex societies yield to simpler ones is often portrayed in eschatological, pseudo-realist terms, perhaps best epitomised by Lovelock's 'Revenge of Gaia' (Lovelock, 2007, 2010). Žižek (2011), for example, speaks of living in the 'end times' and his allegorical four horsemen of the coming apocalypse—the worldwide ecological crisis, financial breakdown, the biogenetic revolution and growing societal inequality. For Davis (1998), however, the invocation of such 'ecologies of fear' is a highly problematic and paralysing solastalgia devoid of any particular politics and histories, and simply serves to censor our sensemaking and trigger somatised defence mechanisms which inure against the active agency required to disorder such trajectories (see also Barry, 2012; Strunz et al., 2019). As Katz (1995) asserts:

> "Until the apocalyptic moment human action drives history, but history-become-apocalypse renders human agency moot." (p.277)

Swyngedouw (2010a) similarly holds that such dystopian 'doom-laden' representations of the human prospect sustains a depoliticised fatalism where the aetiology of the environmental crisis is radically disavowed as an epiphenomenon exterior to society's contingent political-ideological belief systems, rather than the innate outworking of present-day capitalist political economies.

For Greer (2005), analyses that portray humanity's future as an episodic spasm therefore obscure one of the most important features of past civilisation collapses i.e. the emergence of simpler and less socially stratified communities better adapted to their local conditions. Tainter (1990) similarly

confronts the notion of collapse as an axiomatic harbinger of primordial chaos, but rather a logical retreat to a new normal human condition of lower complexity and resource intensity. "Such societies have not failed to adapt", he contends, "[i]n an economic sense they have adapted well—perhaps not as those who value civilizations would wish, but appropriately under the circumstances" (p.198). This perspective stresses that collapse can be a positive response to systemic failure and essential for humanity's very evolutionary persistence (Schwartz and Nichols, 2010; cf. Nordhaus, 2022). Indeed, as proposed by Greer (2005), regression is a common pattern and reality of the human past, underscoring the adaptive resilience of human societies in the face of continuous environmental change (see also Costanza et al., 2007; Middleton, 2012; Motesharrei et al., 2014).

Gosling and Case (2013) therefore suggest that future socio-ecologic pathways in the Anthropocene will amount, first and foremost, to an ontological upheaval and a radical reorganisation of social life contrary to contemporary capitalist significations. Many long-standing assumptions will be invalidated, particularly hidebound preoccupations with economic growth and canonical cultural memes of utopic, hyperreal futures (Urry, 2010). As described by Hoggett (2011), collapse threatens the imagination with excess and reverses the hyperstition of techno-scientific progress associated with Enlightenment thought, making it difficult to think in realistic terms about something whose implications are unthinkable (see also Adams, 2014). This echoes Jameson's quip that in humanity's present psychosocial *gestalt* it is easier to imagine the end of the world rather than the end of capitalism (Jameson, 2003). Modernity will have to come to terms with radically different ways of being whereby there will no longer be the comforting conditions for ever-increasing material prosperity, posing major challenges for conventional ethical thinking (Yusoff and Gabrys, 2011; Gosling, 2017). Hence, according to Wright et al. (2013), faith that scientific reason alone will guide humanity out of its present predicament is severely misplaced but instead requires a

paradigmatic reimagination of social relations and, "to become engaged in struggles over society's meaning and significations" (p.6). Or as Yusoff (2010) bluntly puts it, the environmental crisis, "must force new images full of loss and rage that scream through our aesthetic orders" (p.94).

The importance of social imaginaries in mediating collective life has been famously expounded in the writings of Cornelius Castoriadis, especially in his influential book, *'The Imaginary Institution of Society'* (Castoriadis, 1997). For Castoriadis, social reality is the inauguration of fictional meanings, that is to say, a semiotic order of genres, discourses and symbolisms that organise and construct social ideologies as a necessarily selective and simplified mental map of a supercomplex reality that help shape material practices, operating as the glue that holds society together by being a representation of it (Varvarousis, 2019). The power of imagination in reproducing social relations is also shared by many other streams of critical thinkers, including Marxist political economy scholars (Davoudi, 2018). "What is represented in ideology," Althusser (1971) writes, "is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live" (p.695). To maintain itself, capitalist ideology requires a social imagination of progress that recognises no limits to growth whatsoever, no matter how counterintuitive that may be in the context of a finite planet (Prádanos, 2019).

As a result, while we fear ecological collapse, we have no way of translating this fear into action within a political-institutional imaginary regime that is exclusively devoted to preserving growth (Gleeson, 2010). Alternative imaginaries, such that they can be even envisaged, represent a threat to the established order, generating an uncategorical defence, denial and disabling anxiety (Blühdorn, 2007). This is why, as suggested by Swngedouw (2010b):

> "Those who deny the realities of a dangerous climate change are [portrayed as] blinded radicals that put themselves outside the legitimate social

(symbolic) order. The same 'fundamentalist' label is of course also put on those who argue that dealing with climate change requires a fundamental reorganisation of the hegemonic neo-liberal-capitalist order." (p.194)

This also explains the emergence of the prevailing techno-managerial ecomodernist discourses of 'sustainable development' which can only be interpreted as a simulative politics of societal self-delusion, or 'performance of seriousness', resulting in a certain normalisation of the environmental crisis and undeclared efforts to generate illusory imaginary meanings through the strategic use of deceptive symbols, myths and rituals to sustain what would otherwise be immediately recognised as unsustainable. This substitutes for the thoroughly possible, but from the perspective of power elites, entirely unimaginable alternative forms of policy (Blühdorn, 2011). Hence, as identified by Kingsnorth & Hine (2009), at the root of the ecological crisis lies, "the myth of progress, the myth of human centrality, and the myth of our separation from 'nature'. These myths are more dangerous for the fact that we have forgotten they are myths" (p.19). It is for this reason that Moore (2017, 2018) instead insists that, far from being the outcome of a generic and indistinct Anthropos, the term 'Capitalocene' is a much more apt lens to conceptualise the emergent frontiers of the post-Holocene political ecology, driven by a powerful predatory capitalist class repressively orienting realities through culturally produced ignorance, or 'agnotology', and the social organisation of denial to disregard capitalism's immanent eco-destructive contradictions (see also Norgaard, 2006; Zerubavel, 2006; Proctor and Schiebinger, 2008; Malm and Hornborg, 2014; Baskin, 2015)[10].

Castoriadis implores that, if growth is the foundational imaginary of the contemporary economy, we must call it into question, abolish it and move past it with alternative imaginaries—the Hegelian *Aufhebung* (Latouche, 2018).

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[10] Harvey (2014) similarly identifies capitalism's relation to nature as one of the three most dangerous, perhaps even fatal, contradictions for the perpetuation of capital, in the interim creating abundant profitable opportunities for a predatory 'disaster capitalism'.

The ability to imagine how we might be otherwise and "the capacity to see in a thing what it is not, to see it other than it is" therefore becomes central to all forms of agency (Castoriadis, 1997, p.127). The enormous difficulty we face, however, is in the creation of new imaginaries of previously unseen importance that could establish alternative ways of being and ways of doing when hegemonic imaginations are so invested in growth, even in the face of imminent civilisational collapse (Prádanos, 2019). To raise such counter-imaginations we must be able to envision, even dream, of changed social and economic institutional dispensations and relations, beyond capitalism's fetishised production and consumption, through exposing it as an arbitrary choice rather than allowing it to be naturalised as 'the way things are' (Klein, 2011; Gosling and Case, 2013). Moore (2016) argues that such efforts will only be achievable, in any egalitarian sense, through a renewed non-anthropocentric ethics and new ways of inhabiting the Earth that transgress capitalism's dualistic either/or ontology of nature/society (see also Roux-Rosier et al., 2018). One of the most promising contemporary developments, Davis (2010) espouses, is the emergence of fringe intellectual spaces where a growing chorus of diverse voices are demonstrating a new willingness to advocate for an 'optimism of the imagination' and hitherto unthinkable solutions for, "the Necessary rather than the merely Practical" (p.45).

In committing to these kinds of principles and exploring what type of 'impossible' narratives, signifiers and stories might be necessary to provoke such a reanimated discussion of irreal social futures to exit dominant imaginaries, Lear (2006) encourages the exploration of the cultural 'blind spot' of any society—it's inability to conceive of its own demise—and 'radical hope' involving neither denial nor blind optimism for sublimating a renewed ecocentric ethics that has been evacuated from our current perceptive frames by our growth-addicted civilisational culture (Eagleton, 2015). "That is, by naming the politics of intervention and admitting the struggle that follows from embracing novelty, we might conquer our phobias and dispense with

imaginary places to which there is no hope of return" (Robbins and Moore, 2013, p.16). Latouche (2014a) refers to this as the 'pedagogy of disaster' which can operate to, "jump start out of the madness of the productivist society" (p.94). "In effect", Gosling and Case (2013) suggest, "we need to find ways of imagining cultural catastrophe *now* if the worst excesses of what may be in prospect for western civilization—and those peoples and species also implicated by western-induced ecocrisis—are to be mitigated" (p.5, italics in original). As such, there is no longer a need for a revolutionary class politics to overthrow our present capitalist civilisation (Gorz, 2013). "The biggest problem we face, is a philosophical one: understanding that this civilization is already dead. The sooner we confront this problem, and the sooner we realize there's nothing we can do to save ourselves, the sooner we can get down to the hard work of adapting, with mortal humility, to our new reality" (Scranton, 2015, p.23).

This perspective corresponds with Bendell's (2018) 'deep adaptation' agenda to make a virtue out of necessity which takes as its foundation the inevitability of societal collapse as method for renouncing certain shared beliefs and meanings, and to open new restorative spaces for unknowing, unlearning the myths of our indexical, culturally validated narratives and for alternative ecosocial, post-capitalist renderings to emerge (cf. Nicholas et al., 2020). It is, as Gibson-Graham and Roelvink (2010) advocate, about human-nature ethics and ontological insecurities being transformed in response to a carbon-constrained, climate-changed world. The challenge in these circumstances is not to find ways to know the future, but rather to find ways to live and act without knowing the future which are manifest in a variety of growth-critical literatures for exploring alternative ideas, knowledge and performative processes of interbeing beyond growth, and as to how we might be otherwise (Lloyd, 2009).

Degrowth, Decolonisation & Difference

The concept of degrowth originally emerged from French intellectual critiques and heterodox activism that sought to challenge economism as the dominant ideology of human progress (Latouche, 2005, 2010b; Demaria et al., 2013; Asara et al., 2015). A literal translation of the French word *'décroissance'*, meaning 'reduction' or 'decreasing', it has gradually gained recognition on the academic peripheries as a disruptive neologism, or *mot obus* (missile word), to provoke fundamental debates on the diagnosis and prognosis of humanity's contemporary conjuncture. While the term defies a single categorisation, nor is it a unified idea, it is most commonly defined as, "an equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases wellbeing and enhances ecological conditions" (Schneider et al., 2010, p.512). As posited by Kallis et al. (2014):

> "The foundational theses of degrowth are that growth is uneconomic and unjust, that it is ecologically unsustainable and that it will never be enough."
> (p.39)

As such, degrowth has developed as an umbrella term for a variety of aberrant theoretical and practical proposals that seek to abandon economic growth as the guiding principle for human development and as a refractory expression for encouraging transformative possibilities, drawing inspiration from a miscellany of philosophical undercurrents including anthropology (Latouche, 2006; Escobar, 2011), political ecology (Gorz and Bosquet, 1977; Gorz, 2013), democratisation (Illich, 1973; Bookchin, 1989; Castoriadis, 1997) and ecological economics (Georgescu-Roegen, 1975; Victor, 2008; Daly, 1973).

Degrowth's paradigmatic imaginary proceeds from the gravamen that decoupling economic growth from ecological destruction is impossible; or indeed that, above a certain level, growth increases human wellbeing at all[11];

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[11] Daly (2014), confirming the so-called 'Easterlin Paradox', convincingly argues that the uncounted social and ecological illth caused by economic growth in the developed nations now significantly outpaces wealth creation; a situation which he describes as 'uneconomic growth' (see also Easterlin, 1974; Easterlin et al., 2010).

and that sustainable prosperity is only achievable through a planned material contraction to a steady-state world operating within safe biophysical limits which recognises the functional interdependence of society, economy and ecosphere (Demaria et al., 2013). Importantly, degrowth does not warn of limits in a Malthusian sense to avoid impending scarcity, as often traduced by critics. Indeed, from a degrowth perspective, the very opposite is the case. It is capitalist imaginaries that continuously mobilise scarcity (e.g. enclosure, privatisation, austerity etc.) in an effort to ceaselessly overcome these self-same limits through expanded competitive production as the engine of accumulation (Kallis et al., 2014). Degrowth, on the contrary, is a call for radical abundance through de-commodification, de-privatisation and de-enclosing the commons in order to render growth unnecessary (Hickel, 2019)[12].

Within degrowth literature, the call for limits, or rather voluntary simplicity, is consequently not an enforced adaptation, but a desirable and deliberate choice for regaining real democratic sovereignty, freed from the heteronomous imperatives of artificial scarcity (Kallis, 2021). As posited by Kallis and March (2015):

> "Only a collective self-limitation, premised on sharing the commons, dissolves scarcity and opens up the possibility for a society that is not capitalist." (p.366)

In the final analysis, what continues to stand in the way of realising real democratic freedom is that, no matter what, economic growth must always

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[12] From a global justice perspective, Hickel (2017, 2020a) repeatedly makes the point that almost all of all the benefit of worldwide economic growth over the past half century have accrued to the richest cohort of humanity in the Global North who are also responsible for the most environmental pollution. On the other hand, the world's poorest in the Global South have accrued almost no benefits but experience most of the adverse consequences of environmental breakdown. This tallies with other academic accounts of rapidly growing global inequality, even within rich countries (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; e.g. Piketty, 2017), and probative that scarcity is artificially created as an inherent part of the process of elite accumulation. For degrowth scholars, it is therefore higher-income countries with excess resource use and diminishing marginal returns from economic growth that need to degrow, or 'rightsize', simultaneously redistributing resources to allow poorer countries their fair share of global resource and energy use in order to meet their development needs, following locally determined development pathways rather than those externally imposed.

continue (Foster and Clark, 2012). Accordingly, true egalitarian conceptions of social and political justice can only be achieved by setting boundaries and thereafter robustly expanding the possibilities for redistributive social empowerment over the economy (Wright, 2010; Raworth, 2017). "That is why," for Latouche (2010b), "the degrowth project inevitably means giving politics new foundations" (p.30). By foregrounding a democratically-led, voluntary shrinking of production and consumption, degrowth seeks to transcend apocalyptic visions of overshoot and collapse, which risk misappropriation for authoritarian ends, instead achieving a prosperous way down by popular design, not disaster (Odum and Odum, 2001).

While degrowth is not explicitly anti-capitalist, it's implication is of course quintessentially inimical to the basic logics of market economies and the incessant quest for profits on the part of the owners of capital (Smith, 2010; Kallis, 2011; Hickel, 2019). As expounded by Boonstra and Joosse (2013), by, "singling out economic growth as the cause of ecological and social misery, degrowth blames the inner workings and logic of capitalism, since economic growth is the single mechanism that holds the capitalist economic system together" (p.172). As often misunderstood, and as introduced in Chapter 1, the concept is not synonymous with negative growth (i.e. recession) and neither is it a regressive call for doing less of the same. In contrast to the competitive social relations of capitalism, the goal is the pursuit of an entirely different world through a managed transition to 'rightsized' human societies living more simply in common which instead cultivates human flourishing and conviviality built around qualitative notions of autonomy, wellbeing, reciprocity, sufficiency, equality and justice (Flipo and Schneider, 2008; Jackson, 2009). As again explained by Kallis et al. (2014), in a degrowth society, "everything will be different: different activities, different forms and uses of energy, different relations, different gender roles, different allocations of time between paid and non-paid work, different relations with the non-human world" (p.4).

Latouche (2010b) distils this insurgent agenda into eight interdependent objectives, namely: revalue, reconceptualise, restructure, relocate, redistribute, reduce, reuse, recycle. Nevertheless, it is recognised that a decrease in material throughput will unavoidably result in a reduction in economic growth as currently measured and conceived. The political stability of our system is, however, predicated on endless economic expansion and there are few signs that it can willingly harmoniously contract (Kallis, 2017). Degrowth scholars thus seek to explore the concrete means by which this inevitable and desirable transition can be made socially sustainable through testing the potentialities of a multiplicity of degrowth compatible practical initiatives such as, for example, alternative development metrics, universal basic incomes, job guarantee schemes, reduced working time, community currencies, local cooperatives, non-debt monetary policy, fossil-fuel disinvestment, decommodified housing, creative commons, resource caps and direct democracy etc[13].

More importantly, however, from the perspective of this thesis, 'the economy' within degrowth literature, and what it means to grow, is conceived as an entirely arbitrary, self-referential system of symbolic representations created through societal, political and academic discourses, theories and metrics constructed in tandem with capitalism, rather than a natural, deterministic or ahistorical phenomenon. Therefore, what Schmelzer (2015) terms the 'growth paradigm' is no less an imaginary construct than any other aspect of culture, comprising an assemblage of reiterative significations which forcefully asserts the view that economic growth is a desirable imperative and an essentially limitless panacea (see also Mitchell, 2009). It is not growing throughput that is ultimately the problem, but the irrational and quasi-idolatrous cult of growth for growth's sake or what Harvey (2018) refers to as

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[13] There is insufficient space within this thesis, nor is it necessary, to detail the full breadth of practical policy approaches being explored within degrowth literature. See, for example, Cosme et al. (2017), D'Alisa et al. (2014) or Parrique (2019) for a more complete compendium of proposals.

'the madness of economic reason'. Degrowth actors are thus engaged in producing counterhegemonic meanings in an attempt to deconstruct the naturalness of the economy, to radically repoliticise debates and liberate imaginaries and inventiveness around desired socio-environmental futures currently colonised by the idiom of growth (Kerschner, 2010; Demaria et al., 2013).

This utopian vision stands foursquare against, "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it" (Fisher, 2009, p.2). As such, for Latouche (2010a), degrowth is "a political slogan with theoretical implications" (p.519) which transcends the scholarly-political spectrum and whose purpose is, not a concrete and universal blueprint, but a deliberately confrontational project for escaping the economy, offering a far-reaching interpretive frame for the reflective reorientation of present-day institutions and practices that make growth an imperative. Degrowth is not therefore a call, "for a return to a past that never existed, but for a simultaneous production of the present by the past and the future" (Kallis and March, 2015, p.361). Specifically, degrowth rejects the international reformist orthodoxy of 'sustainable' development which, *deus ex machina,* results in, "only marginal reforms when the problem demands fundamental change" (Rees, 2003, p.30; see also Hornborg, 2001). This corresponds to what Blühdorn (2004) calls a "post-conventional form of political mobilisation" (p.28) to undiscipline ourselves and to emancipate conceptual spaces for reimagining far-reaching alternatives by defamiliarizing something that is generally taken for granted as 'natural' and 'good'.

Degrowth's insistence in the power of negation as a positive project to gainsay unidirectional growth futures, and as a transgressive method to establish new post-growth ontologies which differ markedly from present realities, has given rise to its chief controversy that, given the ubiquity of capitalist social beliefs, it is simply an asinine strategy driven by Western,

middle-class values and is unlikely to avoid the impending ecological catastrophe that it purports to fight against (van den Bergh, 2011; Tokic, 2012; Drews and Antal, 2016). For detractors, the elementary Manichean fear of degrowth as tantamount to the devastation of recession or depression means that it is infelicitously condemned to perpetually defend and clarify what it actually means, offering little real-world potential as a convincing, practical programme (Kallis and March, 2015; Mayert, 2016). Against this, Hickel (2020b) argues that this animadversion misses degrowth's subversive potential to reveal critical intellectual spaces for reconnoitring the types of systemic institutional change needed for fostering community, cultural and psychological resilience which would otherwise remain unreachable if such a direct provocation was avoided, especially when the stakes are so high. As Holloway (2010) propounds:

> "We start from there because it is this failure or refusal to fit in to an oppressive society that is the basis for hoping that we can change it." (p.85)

This is why degrowth is so controversial as an interloper and reprobative within the *penseé unique* of contemporary capitalist culture. It is therefore precisely because the desired socio-ecological change is qualitative rather than quantitative that the prefix 'de' is appropriate as a necessary contradistinction for rupturing what has come to be understood and measured as 'growth', profoundly unsettling the hopeless dictate that there is no alternative to our current conditions of possibility. "The purpose of using a negation for a positive project", Kallis and March (2015) insist, "is not to frighten but to overcome a fear" (p.362). Järvensivu (2013), for example, describes how, through using degrowth as a disruptive practice-orientated investigative research method, subjects began to question their routinised goals, transforming the established ways in which they think about and behave in relation to nature. However, as of yet there have been few other empirical studies adopting such a degrowth-methodological approach and, specifically, how it might be applied to planning praxis and the ways in which practitioners

might come to establish alternative post-growth strategies following disruption (see also Joutsenvirta, 2016).

While the critics are right that, in the present circumstances, the prospects of a degrowth paradigm shift appear inauspicious, lacking sufficient public awareness or support, Buch-Hansen (2014) maintains that there remains some grounds for optimism in the countless degrowth compatible grassroots initiatives, at both individual and collective level, which involve, "radical new conceptions of livelihood and economy that cut against the logic of capitalist growth-based economic strategies" (North, 2010, p.586). For Latouche (2006), such self-managed, commons-based social learning; achieved through cultivating a shared sense of purpose, identity and solidarity, involving intertwined moments of rebellious negation and creation; are the most important strategic means for realising degrowth in practice. Authors point to, for example, the international Transition Towns movement (Hopkins, 2008; Smith, 2011; North and Longhurst, 2013), ecovillages (Trainer, 2010; Kirby, 2020) and other permaculture (Holmgren, 2002; Roux-Rosier et al., 2018) inspired eco-localisation experiments as offering autonomous, bottom-up strategies for prefiguring alternative de-centred, de-commodified and de-carbonised spaces.

For Bennett et al. (2016) these sympoietic seeds, occurring within the cracks and peripheries of capitalism, offer a prospective way forward for creating the conditions for a social and political impetus to change institutions in the same direction. Rather than concentrating on negative changes that have not yet occurred, they help sustain and amplify efforts that already exist, alongside local desires for a more positive, proactive evolution to a liveable post-growth, post-carbon future, intentionally downshifted to the inevitability of a resource impaired world. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 1, radical planning scholars have similarly long recognised the agency of such invented spaces of insurgent citizenship, not only as coping mechanisms for transforming the political and material conditions of peoples' lives, but also as

"workshops for liberation" (Muraca, 2016, p.11) where oppositional practice can prosper and directly challenge the *status quo,* to eventually subvert it and bring it down (Miraftab, 2004).

Critics, nevertheless, still contradict that such romanticised localism, or naïve folk politics, carries with it a very significant risk of elitist, anti-democratic tendencies which restricts its usefulness in bringing about the urgent socio-ecological transformation required and within the democratic principles it espouses (Born and Purcell, 2006; Romano, 2012). Harvey (1989b) too is deeply sceptical of the efficacy of local action, citing its potential for, "parochialism, myopia, and self-referentiality in the face of the universalizing force of capital circulation" (p.351). While North (2010) maintains that eco-localisation represents an altogether different calculus, it's hard to escape the pessimism; so often cited as the Achilles heel of small-scale, place-based activism; that the rhizomic spread of avant-garde contrapuntal ideas via informal, un-institutionalised international networks is unlikely to sum up to a suitable macro-alternative in the face of the wider unsustainability regime, at least not anytime soon (Born and Purcell, 2006; Bailey et al., 2010; Xue, 2014; Roux-Rosier et al., 2018). Indeed, for Fotopoulos (2000), admirable as many of these initiatives are, the politics of alternative lifestyle movements which seek to bypass, rather than confront, powerful interests are simply palliative and symbolic, offering little prospect to challenge or transform society and are destined to be perpetually marginalised, absorbed or crushed by the system unless they become integrated within wider ruptural social movements explicitly aimed at creating new political and economic structures for a truly democratic and equal distribution of power[14].

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[14] A case in point, which is also borne out by this research, is the Kinsale Transition Town initiative located in County Cork, Ireland, which is often cited as the birthplace of the international Transition Town movement. However, it has had limited influence beyond select, localised circles, and remains relatively unknown (Hopkins, 2005). A similar critique could be directed at Ireland's only ecovillage at Cloughjordan, County Tipperary (Kirby, 2020) which, although subject to sporadic media curiosity, has thus far had a largely negligible impact in challenging institutional frameworks or in creating a wider consciousness for systemic change (see Chapter 6).

Nevertheless, as insisted by Fleming (2016), while localisation currently stands, at best, at the edge of practical possibility, it does have one decisive argument in its favour—there is little alternative! As Carlsson and Manning (2010) write:

> "A movement capable of a revolutionary transformation cannot appear from nowhere, and it cannot depend on inevitable success. It has to emerge from daily practices among communities of human beings who trust each other and can take action together—in immediate practical ways as much as in far-reaching global ways." (p. 951)

The benefits of such place-based 'Nowtopias' therefore principally derive from creating protected spaces for developing new practices and ideas where citizens feel empowered to act as primers for revolutionary change, and motivated by a desire to produce an alternative future, today (Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). As argued by Holloway (2010), these are cracks at the sharp end of social conflict and, when the system is in disequilibrium, these small but accumulating social mobilisations can have profound repercussions, progressively challenging the established regime through foregrounding and naming different futures, and creating alternative social realities through giving concrete expression to the benefits of doing things differently (Demaria et al., 2019). As Illich (1973) explains:

> "We still have a chance to understand the causes of the coming crisis, and to prepare for it. If we are to anticipate its effects, we must investigate how sudden change can bring about the emergence into power of previously submerged social groups. It is not calamity as such that creates these groups; it is much less calamity that brings about their emergence; but calamity weakens the prevailing powers which have excluded the submerged from participation in the social process. It is the power of surprise that weakens control, that shakes up the established controllers, and brings to the top those people who have not lost their bearings." (p.105)

Consequently, as opposed to the 'politics of waiting', and irrespective of their present efficacy, the pursuit of micro-political, place-bound tactics in the here

and now are useful precisely because of their niche. Moreover, while the utopia of degrowth often claims to begin at grassroots level, the majority of its proposals typically focus on national, top-down governments as the major driver of universal change (Cosme et al., 2017). Accordingly, degrowth thinkers constantly sift back-and-forth between a, "ruptural desire to break the system, symbiotic moves to work within existing institutions, and interstitial activities that break free and lay down prefigurative future markers" (Chatterton and Pusey, 2019, p.25). The task of radical planning scholarship is to interrogate these various locales of struggle and to make common cause with subversive ideas so as to try and force them into the reckoning at different institutional scales and strategies as means to challenge the principles upon which planning has traditionally been based (Beard, 2003). It is as Escobar recommends:

> "To construct place as a project, to turn place-based imaginaries into a radical critique of power, and to align social theory with a critique of power by place requires that we venture into other terrains." (Escobar, 2001, p.156)

Nonetheless, from a degrowth perspective, alternative planning knowledge will never emerge exclusively from these smooth, voluntary initiatives where enlightened grassroots activists seek to purposefully take control of their local conditions of possibility. Attempts to harness such place-based activism are always destined to flounder so long as they remain untethered from a firm understanding as to how and why social imaginaries can be rendered susceptible to change (Varvarousis, 2019). As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, it is only moments of crisis that offer such generative opportunities, interrupting and reversing dominant ideas and permitting new and previously unimagined significations to emerge (Schneider et al., 2010). Discontinuity forces us outside the usual boundaries of `reasonableness', "generating new ways of thinking that change the way resources are used, (re)distributed, and allocated, and the way the regulatory powers are exercised to make alternatives happen" (Albrechts et al., 2020, p.3).

"Ultimately," as Alexander and Gleeson (2019) write, "the solution to crisis is crisis: a massive suspension of capitalism as prelude to a new economic and social dispensation" (p.15). It is these supervenient moments of disorientating tension between loss and becoming, and the ambiguity and anxiety of the unknown, that opens new terrains of experimental meanings, "*that are simultaneously products and producers of the new social imaginary significations emerging due to the destabilization of the prevailing older ones*" (Varvarousis, 2019, p.501, italics in original).

Within this reading, crisis represents a semiotic limit empowering real democratic contestation and producing liminal stages of suspension for new imaginary prospects to unexpectedly materialise from within the spatio-temporalities of stagnation and reversal, and to become credible alternatives (ibid.). Equally, crisis represents a moment of risk which can lead to further entrenchment of reactionary significations. Nevertheless, as of yet, the manner in which these transient moments of possibility might be apprehended in the real-world urban conditions of planning practice and to provide possible openings for new post-growth prospects to emerge has remained elusive, lacking concrete empirical and theoretical accounts as to how crisis destabilisation can lead to the defenestration of hegemonic planning rationalities and to the construction of alternative sociospatial imaginaries.

Post-Growth Nowtopias & Shrinking Cities

From the literature reviewed in the preceding sections, it is only in submitting to a radical acceptance of the loss of meaning generated by abnegating growth's privileged position as the touchstone of policy and institutional success—to exit our imaginaries—that opportunities for new political subjectivities for transformative change can arise from the crisis of individual and social identity (Mishan, 1967). The end of growth will bring with it a plethora of unfamiliar, complex and wicked challenges unlike anything contemporary human societies have ever experienced before, requiring new

ways of thinking about our place in the biosphere, resources, prosperity, community and purpose beyond techno-economic market logics (Crownshaw et al., 2018). Degrowth's anti-essentialist discourse of difference has emerged as a rallying point for such rethinking, in both theory and practice, and as method to interrupt the performativity of modern-day growth-dictated conventions.

Yet, reflecting that degrowth has largely developed outside the spatial sciences; and notwithstanding that scholars have long looked to cities as situated sites of grassroots prefiguration and as testbeds for non-reformist degrowth urban experiments to further its aims; theorising how these get framed spatially and engagement with questions of scale have largely been overlooked (Schmid, 2022). "There is theory and there are small experiments broadly inspired by degrowth, but there is no spatialized 'degrowth world' in its full plentitude" (Kallis and March, 2015, p.361). This spatial blindness is a significant shortcoming as, recalling the literature opened at the outset of this chapter, Harvey (2013) reminds:

> "If the capitalist form of urbanization is so completely embedded in and foundational for the reproduction of capitalism, then it also follows that alternative forms of urbanization must necessarily become central to any pursuit of an anti-capitalist alternative." (p.65)

Xue (2021) similarly subscribes that degrowth has, so far, not seriously engaged with theorising its spatial dimension nor advanced any proposals for planning's potential in supporting a degrowth transition. At the same time, there has been relatively little engagement from within geography or radical planning scholarship in conceiving sociospatial transformation from a degrowth perspective (Schmid, 2019). One avenue recommended by Demaria et al. (2019) as worthy of exploration to address this deficit are the crisis conditions of shrinking cities where the circumstances for urban growth have already subsided. However, to date these parallels have yet to be systematically explored.

To be clear, shrinking cities are not degrowth. As reviewed at the beginning of this chapter, from an urban political economy perspective—much like economic recession imposed by a crisis within a capitalist growth regime—urban decline and abandonment are immanent to the very contradictory dynamics of urban growth, whereby capital devalues and creatively destroys a fixed space in order to make way for a new phase of capital accumulation in new spaces elsewhere (Harvey, 2014). While such disinvestment is devastating for those affected, it also simultaneously produces profitable reinvestment opportunities from within the wreckage of devaluation, as a fresh basis for capital accumulation as part of an endless 'seesaw' of spatial fixes (Smith, 1990; Brenner, 1998b).

The most infamous modern-day global expression of such chronicity of devaluation and dereliction are deindustrialising cities, most notoriously in the USA's 'Rust Belt', where manufacturing was displaced, first to the suburbs, and then to newly industrialised countries leading to dramatic urban collapses. However, the phenomenon is not only related to well-known deindustrialising examples. Urban decline can now also be widely observed in differing spatial contexts in Europe and other developed countries, not due to a single process, but as a result of the complex interplay of multidimensional socio-economic macro-processes at a local scale, and this trend is anticipated to continue (see Figure 5) (Beyer et al., 2006; Hartt, 2019). Given the increasing empirical evidence of the reality and global frequency of shrinking cities, over the past two decades international planning scholarship has actively taken up the issue and extensive literature has now been written on the subject (see, for example, Oswalt, 2005, 2006; Pallagst, 2008; Dewar and Thomas, 2013; Pallagst et al., 2013; Weaver et al., 2016) [15].

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[15] A network of worldwide academics concerned with studying how cities shrink has also been established under the aegis of the Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCiRN). This research agenda has adopted the term 'shrinkage' as an attempt to provide a more positive or neutral sounding antidote to dominant narratives associated with negative terminologies such as 'degeneration', 'abandonment', 'blight', 'decay' etc.
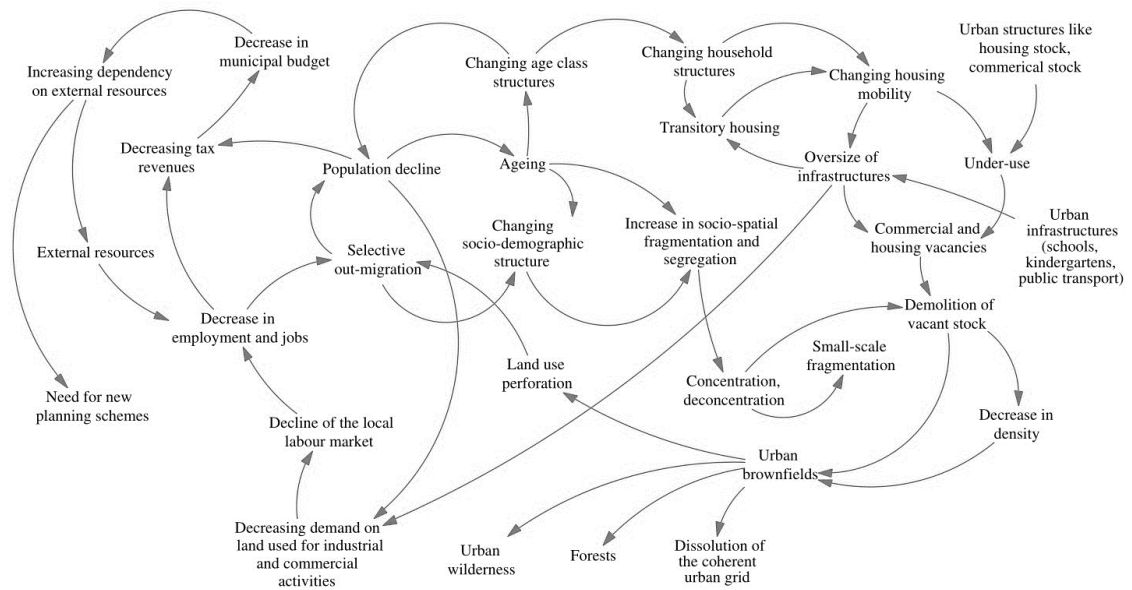
Figure 5: Conceptual model of the causal relationships between the drivers, processes and impacts of urban shrinkage (Haase et al., 2012b, p.96)

Whether it is called urban shrinkage or decline and whether it happens in a city, region or part thereof, it is rarely considered politically acceptable. As reflected by Sousa and Pinho (2015), in Western planning cultures a shrinking city, "carries the negative weight of a symptom of an undesirable disease" (p.13). Induced by wider growth-oriented tropisms, a healthy, successful and admired city always grows, providing the norm and ideal to guide future development (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012). Shrinkage, on the other hand, implies that afflicted places are following a negative pathology from something to nothing—an unpalatable anomaly that is understood and recognised as less significant than growth in prospering places elsewhere (Popper and Popper, 2010). As such, shrinkage is ubiquitously identified as exclusively associated with negative consequences and a stigma that does not fit with normative planning ideals, which must be reversed at all costs (Beauregard, 2003).

However, with the rising incidence and academic studies of shrinking trends, scholars have more recently begun to counter this received wisdom and to tentatively broach what is perceived as politically taboo, i.e. openly conceding the irreparable realities of urban decline and as to whether this in

fact, "might offer a paradigm shift to reimagine cities and their development from growth-centred planning to a more careful and place-based approach and towards more liveable cities" (Hollander et al., 2009, p.2). While often irately received by local policymakers as a pessimistic, unhealthy acceptance of decline and akin to admitting failure, this literature posits that, through mobilising a degree of political and intellectual honesty, aiming for growth in cities experiencing endemic obsolescence rarely results in successful outcomes. In fact, what Hackworth (2018) describes as the "growth derangement syndrome" (p.197) has largely proved counterproductive, where resort to anodyne planning buzzwords, such as 'smart growth', 'new urbanism' etc., have had little effect in reversing degenerative trends, constrained, as they are, by insuperable exogenous factors.

Instead, scholars have increasingly observed that from within the confusion and trauma of urban collapse, paradigmatic pro-growth development models are increasingly being subjected to fundamental contestation, unlocking opportunities for permuted spatial visions to emerge and for cities to redefine themselves and their future through crafting novel, creative policies that accept the inevitability of their smaller size (Purcell, 2000; Popper and Popper, 2002). Matthews (2002), for example, recalls how when Frank and Deborah Popper of Rutgers University in the USA proposed the introduction of ecologically sensitive land uses that fell somewhere between traditional agriculture and pure wilderness as the solution for the depopulating Great Plains 'Dust Bowl' region—an infamous rural region beset by boom-and-bust environmental and economic crises for well over a century and often identified as a key catalyst for the Great Depression—their ideas were met with considerable hostility, even death threats. For the Poppers (1987), decades of agricultural overproduction due to market imperatives and government subsidies had led to "the largest and longest running environmental miscalculation in American history" (p.12), "a spectacular

variant of the tragedy of the commons, Garrett Hardin's famous ecological fable" and, "an austere monument to American self-delusion" (p.16).

Their "daring proposal for dealing with an inevitable disaster" (Popper and Popper, 2002, p.12) was the, now near-mythic, 'Buffalo Commons' metaphor of a redolent past and feasible future which symbolised the Native American culture and landscape of the plains, and to help constructively deliberate on a shared vision for people, land and nature. While the idea, which included the gradual cessation of private cattle ranching and the rewilding of the plains with the reintroduction of the iconic American bison, was originally charily greeted as an apostate assault on frontier ways of life, it progressively crystallised into a provocative story that moved past nostalgia and eventually led to many ground-breaking initiatives that followed in its footsteps. This included the establishment of the Great Plains Restoration Council, which seeks to situate the region better for the inevitable realities of a climate changing, post-fossil fuel world (Popper and Popper, 2008). Although, thirty years after it was first coined, the 'Buffalo Commons' appellation remains controversial, it provided the touchpaper for a profound shift in thinking on the future of the Great Plains which continues to resonate in political debates to this day, as well as having a seminal influence on the emergent academic field of shrinkage planning research (Hollander, 2018).

The Popper's formative work challenged practicing and academic planners to develop an alternative approach to urban development that leaves behind blind assumptions of growth (Weaver et al., 2016). Schindler (2016), for example, highlights the case of Detroit's famously dramatic urban-industrial collapse where traditional planning tools were gradually acknowledged by policymakers to be of little utility in stemming the swingeing urban crisis realities they faced. Detroit's precipitous collapse from its former glory as the vibrant epicentre of the USA's auto industry has been particularly wrenching in the American socio-cultural psyche, even leading Vergara (1999) to propose an 'American Acropolis' in the downtown core to preserve abandoned

skyscrapers as an urban parkland to attract visitors to walk the crumbling streets (see Figure 6). Although many dreamed of restoring the city to its past vitality, the sheer scale and ruinous consequences of abandonment led to the emergence of a new 'degrowth machine politics' which, rather than simply seeking to augment the exchange value of urban land to spur further economic revival, was instead actively reorientated towards managing the city's irretrievable decline and reimagining its prospects in ways that sought to prioritise quality of life for the city's remaining residents.

Figure 6: Urban dissolution in Detroit (Maclean, 2014)

The Detroit Future City plan, which was the cornerstone around which this degrowth coalition coalesced, provided a long-term vision for the transformation of the city, based on neighbourhood stabilisation, community development and a post-urban reconstruction of the physical cityscape (City of Detroit, 2012). Therefore, even in contexts where municipal governments are historically strongly ideologically wedded to urban entrepreneurialism, as is the case in the context of the USA's strident market-orientated planning

traditions, the profound abysm of collapse can result in the upending of growth coalitions which, instead of seeking to neoliberalize their way out of the predicament, force local policy officials and elites to discard growth-oriented policies, generating a new willingness to experiment towards an alternative post-growth progressive urban politics.

Another oft-cited example of such an unorthodox 'planned shrinkage' approach is the case of Youngstown, Ohio which, following the collapse of the steel industry in the 1950s, haemorrhaged over half its population. The city experienced all of the characteristic visible symptoms of an austere post-industrial urban decline, including derelict buildings, depressed property values, high crime rates and an aging and heavily minority population, resulting in a downwards spiral of disinvestment, depopulation and desuetude (Hollander, 2009). After decades of abortive attempts to reverse this chronic situation, whereby the city sought regenerative 'economic saviours' (such as new industries and a military base), in 2002 local policymakers made a decisive break with the publication of the Youngstown 2010 Citywide Plan which called for a 'better, smaller Youngstown' embracing a novel vision that accepted the reality of the city's continued decline and leaving behind unrealistic expectations of future growth (City of Youngstown, 2005).

A major focus of the plan was on rightsizing the city through disassembling excess infrastructure, deconstructing vacant and abandoned properties and, most contentiously, consolidating residual communities in remaining parts of the city with a greater presence of serviceable amenities and infrastructure (Weaver et al., 2016). The whole process aimed to 'unbuild' the city on a deurbanised, downsized scale—and it did so deliberately (Lindsey, 2007; Schatz, 2008). Similar to other prominent examples, such as the Detroit Future City, described above, the plan also placed significant emphasis on renaturalising areas blighted by high vacancy and abandonment through the creation of a system of parks, forests, wetlands and even promoting productive urban agriculture as offering potentially ecologically and

economically restorative possibilities (Schilling and Logan, 2008; LaCroix, 2009).

In Europe too, the abrupt change from a centrally planned to a free market state in the former East Germany following political reunification led to a sudden upheaval and mass emigration. Paradoxically, throughout the 1990s many East German cities experienced a hyperdynamic phase of housing construction driven by over-optimistic population projections and generous tax incentives aimed at economic stimulus, leading to a massive oversupply (Bernt, 2009; Pallagst and Wiechmann, 2012). The rapid collapse of a formerly highly industrialised region led to structural symptoms similar to those of other shrinking cities, including an epidemic of vacancy, dereliction and an aging population, compromising the viability of public services and presenting enormous challenges for infrastructure provision (Moss, 2008; Florentin, 2010).

Despite the realities of the situation, depopulation was still perceived as a temporary aberration with growth-orientated policy prescriptions remaining generally unquestioned. However, in 2000 the situation changed and the concept of 'planned shrinkage' became the subject of an open, public debate (Oswalt, 2006). Recognising that growth-based approaches were proving ineffective and ongoing depopulation was insurmountable, at least in the short term, the government reversed course and introduced the *Stadtumbau Ost* (Rebuilding the City—East) programme which provided funding for the 'backward building' (demolition) of abandoned and underused structures, and to provide more stable residential districts (Pallagst and Wiechmann, 2012)[16]. Planning strategies subsequently renounced further growth objectives and shifted perceptibly towards adapting to smaller cities through improving the social environment, transforming vacant areas to green

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[16] The German government also funded the '*Shrinking Cities*' research project (www.shrinkingcities.com) while the EU funded the '*Shrink Smart*' (www.shrinksmart.ufz.de) project to help understand the main challenges for spatial planning in shrinking contexts and to elaborate alternatives for planning governance.

spaces and reusing buildings for different functions. Grassroots community initiatives included, for example, the *Wächterhaus* ('Guardian House') concept whereby coalitions of architects, planners and residents formed voluntary cooperatives for the temporary use of historic, dilapidated buildings, with minimal rent, in exchange for protecting them from vandalism and structural decay (Haase et al., 2012).

These examples of urban breakdown and attendant spatial governance crises within shrinking cities are illustrative of how, from within the anxiety and unsettledness of reversal, actors are forced to choose between radically opposing future visions where the undoing of the foundations of previous imaginaries releases collective inventiveness, "to (re)create the world *ex-nihilo* when the existing world does not seem to function anymore" (Varvarousis, 2019, p.509). In a similar vein, Solnit (2010) concludes; from her study of cities that have faced the destruction of major natural disasters; that from the grief and disruption of catastrophe, limits fall away, the storyline crashes; serving as watershed moments for new emancipatory communities of practice to emerge as, "in the suspension of the usual order and the failure of most systems, we are free to live and act another way" (p.7). For Hollander et al. (2009), the experience of many shrinking cities therefore exhibit important openings for a sweeping departure from conventional growth-fixated planning praxes which transcends the baleful pessimism often associated with depopulation and where planners are, "in a unique position to reframe decline as an opportunity: a chance to re-envision cities and to explore nontraditional approaches to their growth at a time when cities desperately need them" (p.5). Challenging growth as the key doctrine of planning, Martinez-Fernandez and Wu (2007) provocatively ask whether shrinkage is a problem to be solved or an opportunity not to be missed?

While shrinkage strategies have indeed been lauded as novel, innovative visions, garnering much media curiosity, they have also drawn criticism that, far from being a revolutionary post-growth epiphany they are

simply the latest manifestation in revanchist neoliberal tendencies to ruthlessly leverage transitory moments of disinvestment to reset growth and create speculative, profitable reinvestment opportunities, offering laboratories where the furthest bounds of neoliberalism can be tested (Kirkpatrick and Smith, 2011; Akers, 2013; Hackworth, 2015; Berglund, 2020). As such, for critics they very much resemble the much repudiated austerity urbanism of, for example, New York city in the 1970s (Hackworth, 2018). The central difficulty is that, while Hager and Schenkel (2000) suggest that "shrinkage could be a synonym for practical ecology", in contrast to the preponderance of research on urban growth, there is no "theory of shrinkage" (translated in Rink and Kabisch, 2009, p.227). Planners are consequently forced to react to their unfamiliar circumstances via uncertain processes of trial and error, without any coherent theoretical basis, leaving their efforts ill-equipped and always vulnerable to the constant threat of market reappropriation. This is why Mitchell (2013) submits that, despite celebrated rightsizing strategies, socio-economic inequalities have persisted in most shrinking cities due, in large part, to the fact that planning policy priorities are still determined on the basis of augmenting exchange value rather than use value.

In response, Hollander and Németh (2011) have made a first-cut at a foundational theory of 'smart decline' which takes as its point of departure the academic planning literature on ethics, equity and justice, and grounded in empirical observations of progressive shrinkage planning practice. Oswalt (2006), for example, has identified the four adaptive fields of action most commonly applied in shrinking cities: deconstructing, re-evaluating, reorganising and reimagining. However, for Hollander and Németh (2011), these essentially presume a *tabula rasa* and quieted public, lacking sufficient awareness of the influence of inherited norms, values and cultures. Their theory thus offers a set of broad criteria for judging the functioning of the planning process in shrinking contexts rooted in democratic notions of procedural and substantive justice, including the imperative of bottom-up,

inclusive participatory processes. Zingale and Riemann (2013), nevertheless, still conclude that a cultural-psychological shift away from the dominance of growth imaginaries, which drives a shared normative vision and understanding of how shrinkage should be perceived, remains the single biggest challenge that planners face in the spatial governance of shrinking cities. Dewar et al. (2012) therefore suggest that what is most needed is a cultural reorientation of planning as a profession that manages *growth* to a profession that manages *change*, necessitating a revolution in existing institutional expectations and the emergence of radical new imaginaries for producing urban space.

More recent research by Pallagst et al. (2021) concludes that, while their lasting effects remain to be seen, ongoing practical responses to the changed circumstances within shrinking cities themselves are generating such pedagogical opportunities for wider culture change, which is beginning to have a traceable, albeit incipient, influence on international planning knowledge in reappraising long-established practice norms. This is particularly so in the context of the search for new policy solutions in response to the deep-rooted demographic decline being experienced in many industrialised economies (see, for example, Copus et al., 2021). Explicitly "planning for less—fewer people, fewer buildings, fewer land uses" (Popper and Popper, 2002, p.23) has demanded its own distinct approach and a gradual change in political discourse away from exclusively entrepreneurial planning cultures to one that emphasises smaller, more liveable communities and which has yielded some surprising outcomes. An analysis of thirty-eight cities in the USA by Hollander (2011) found that shrinking cities often do not witness a significant deterioration in neighbourhood quality, in contrast to growing cities which often experience worsening life quality as a result of, for example, increased stress and traffic congestion. This break from conventional growth-orientated planning cultures has therefore been cautiously theorised as having the potential to trigger a broader paradigm shift within planning praxis,

introducing planning knowledge to a myriad of alternative spatial logics to radically rethink and reimagine how land-uses are traditionally allocated, and with the objective of achieving better societal and ecological outcomes (see Table 1) (Hollander and Németh, 2011).

Growth-oriented Planning (Conservative)	Decline-oriented Planning (Radical)
The focus is on growth, spatial planning as 'distribution' of quantitative increases (settlement and traffic land, population, jobs, etc.).	The focus is on redevelopment, cost efficient stock development, stabilisation, revitalisation, qualitative development (residential environment, infrastructure, traffic, etc.).
Building-law and regional-planning tools directed mainly towards new development of land and new construction; infrastructure development as concession and incentive for investment.	Importance of derelict land, recycling of land and buildings, differentiated reconversion, adaptation of infrastructure to changed needs.
Growth-oriented control (land use and constructional development).	Initiation and organisation of reconversion, rehabilitation and development with scarce financial resources.
Planning as the basis for distributing growth, separation of spatial functions (home, place of work, etc.).	Planning as management of shrinkage processes, small-scale functional mix.
Order-oriented control of land use and constructional development, designation of settlement land, protection of open areas.	Strategic planning and integrated concepts, consequence assessment, taking account of life cycle of facilities and demographic changes, model projects, use options, activation, contractual arrangements, efficiency.
Inter-municipal competition (residents, industry, etc.), sectoral incentives, inter-sectoral framework control.	Inter-municipal cooperation, equalisation arrangements, multilevel cooperation, intersectoral coordination.

Table 1: Characteristics of growth-oriented and decline-oriented planning (Müller and Siedentrop, 2004)

From a degrowth perspective, these distinctive, inventive practices emerging from the collapse conditions and abandonment of shrinking cities offer a compelling new discourse for thinking about the future direction of planning as a counterpoint to the literature on growth. Enforced by the urban triage realities that confront them, they present instructive insights into the discomforting, but stimulating, task that planners face in figuring out the new tools, incentives and adaption strategies for guiding an optimistic, positive vision for what a city can become in the absence of growth, and that more effectively anticipates and adapts to future development trends. While these experimental practices are not explicitly informed by degrowth, their outcomes allusively correspond with many of its values and principles for a purposeful, democratic and equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases local autonomy, wellbeing and ecological conditions. Such practices are demonstrative of the opportunities for far-reaching institutional rethinking that, often unexpectedly, only comes about from moments of crisis and where policy actors conclude that their priorities are no longer attainable in the present world (Varvarousis, 2019).

Similar to degrowth, however, the idea of proleptically accepting planned shrinkage within broader scales and strategies of action still remains counterintuitive in the context of mainstream Western cultural realism (Rees, 2005). Nonetheless, as has been expounded from the literature reviewed in this chapter:

> "Today a lack of realism no longer consists in advocating greater well-being through degrowth and the subversion of the prevailing way of life. Lack of realism consists in imagining that economic growth can still bring about increased human welfare and indeed that it is still physically possible." (Gorz, 1980, p.13; quoted in Kallis et al., 2014, p.34)

Future human prospects in the 21st Century imply the need for a planning praxis that is aimed more at 'coping with decline' rather than 'going for growth', for which practitioners have very little background, experience or

recourse. Shrinking cities scholars and practitioners, however, approach decline with a key underlying assumption that, like growth, it must be planned, and it is possible for a place to successfully shrink while, in the process, ensuring a high quality of life and positive economic, social and environmental outcomes. As such, these place-bound microcosms of radical planning expression present tangible proxies to vicariously explore the realities of a degrowth society *now* and to empirically examine how institutional planning comes to acquire and deploy alternative practices beyond growth-orientated goals. Accordingly, they provide potentially instructive testbeds for advancing understandings for how degrowth might bridge the gap between its idealised nature and mainstream thinking, and for prefiguring the types of political-institutional conditions that would allow its ideas to be translated into the real world of planning praxis to support a degrowth transition and for reimagining self-renewing, regenerative urban ecosystems contrary to contemporary capitalist significations (Rees and Mandipour, 2017).

At present, however, such is the predominance of the growth paradigm, planners are generally incapable of pre-emptively submitting to an honest discussion that much of local destiny now lies beyond their conventional capacities and categories. Such repoliticised self-awareness is a crucial first step in thinking creatively about the purpose of planning in the Anthropocene and to release the discipline in progressive new cultural directions. Some authors have already speculated that the political consensus for urban growth is gradually breaking down (e.g. Purcell, 2000) and that planned shrinkage represents a philosophical and actualised departure as an emerging planning paradigm (Pallagst, 2010). For Hackworth (2018), however, such talk of the demise of the urban 'growth machine' remains highly premature and naïve. The rentier class and coalitions of land-based elite interests will continue, as long as possible, to deploy their considerable predatory power to politically dominate planning processes to augment the

exchange value of their real estate assets. As such, hopeful post-growth planning thinking is likely destined to continue to languish firmly on the sidelines by the dictates of multi-scaled growth coalitions, requiring further theoretical research to understand how precisely this niche knowledge could potentially break through and be transferred into wider regimes of action.

Summing Up

This chapter has set out to review the literature that critically interrogates the political trends and bureaucratic transformations forming the conditions under which planners work in order to provide an account of the concatenation of governance landscapes and institutional rationalities, together with the intertwined dynamics between them, which have installed a 'growth-first' approach to planning, with its practices being ceaselessly discursively transfigured to that principal goal (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

Drawing initially on a Marxist political economy critique, the evolution of planning thought as essential for mediating the chronically unstable and contradictory socio-spatial dynamics of capital accumulation has been discussed, together with the means by which neoliberal growth-orientated orthodoxies gained, first credence, then dominance through the turn to consensus-seeking communicative rationality and depoliticised modes of spatial planning. The purpose of this theoretical exposé is to reveal both the materialist provenance of planning's growth imperative and, critically, the hidden power of discourse in performatively governing what planners do.

Also reviewed is the persuasive literature that, given the ineluctable structural dependence of capitalist civilisation on infinite economic expansion, humanity is today faced with a clear and present danger of socio-ecological collapse. Ultimately, this discontinuity will compel a global contraction—planned or unplanned—which will likely bring with it turbulent, multidimensional crises and unfamiliar, non-linear future changes, implying unprecedented challenges for institutional governance.

The necessity for a reformation of planning praxis is therefore twofold. Firstly, given planning's vital, albeit largely unacknowledged, role in reproducing economic growth, deposing current growth-orientated norms is essential for decelerating material throughput and mitigating further socio-ecological collapse. Secondly, planning can play a major role in accelerating wider societal adaptation in the face of the inevitable and desirable transition to a post-growth world, a role that it is currently incapable of fulfilling due to the exigencies of growth-orientated spatial doctrines.

I have further discussed the extensive scholarship which argues that for planning to acquire a reformed progressive purpose and to be a vanguard in this transformation, a radical repoliticisation is required through giving voice to divergent discourses. Degrowth has emerged as a deliberately confrontational project to enable such repoliticisation, offering a compelling critique of the growth-environment tension at the heart of capitalism and holding that it is only through conceiving new imaginary significations of limits, and the accompanying loss of growth-orientated meanings, that real democratic possibilities for alternative adaptive human futures can emerge (Asara et al., 2015). However, degrowth remains largely an obscure academic concept, excluded from mainstream policy discourses and, as of yet, offers no convincing epistemological answers as to precisely how this knowledge could emerge, become visible and be brought into conflict with growth-orientated meanings so as to facilitate such post-growth planning rethinking (Varvarousis, 2019).

A Marxist political economy perspective, generally underappreciated in degrowth literature, is instructive because it helps apprehend and unmask the underlying structural conditions and corresponding power relations which form the basis under which planners work (Koch and Buch-Hansen, 2021). One criticism, however, is that despite its penetrating explanatory critique, it can induce a hopelessness that planning cannot escape the dull compulsion of growthism (Holgersen, 2020). Nevertheless, from a more

optimistic standpoint, the utopian philosophy of Lefebvre, also working within a Marxian analysis, can still identify a possibility—a crack in the edifice—for apprehending a transgressive politics of space, emerging from within the very core-periphery tensions of capitalism itself (Merrifield, 2006).

These binary dynamics inadvertently instantiate conjunctural weaknesses where capitalism is confronted by the copresence of its own accumulated spatial contradictions, exposing conceptual and physical spaces that oppositional forces could conceivably exploit to broach counter-discourses, and as possible proving grounds for alternative post-accumulative planning strategies:

> "An existing space may outlive its original purpose and the *raison d'être* which determines its forms, functions, and structures; it may thus in a sense become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a purpose quite different from its initial use." (Lefebvre, 1991, p.167, italics in original)

This chapter has therefore also identified the literature on experimental planning discourses and practices emerging from the abandoned spaces of shrinking cities, where capital flows have (temporarily) ceased and growth-orientated meanings have collapsed, as providing some grounds for hope as planners and communities struggle to make sense of the crisis realities that confront them and to test alternative practices that push beyond the envelope set by current policies (Gribat and Huxley, 2015).

Scholars are consequently increasingly looking to these sites of urban shrinkage as living laboratories for planners to adapt and optimise to the consequences of shrinkage, rather than to reverse it (Schilling, 2008). This resonates with a degrowth perspective that it is only from the opportunity of crisis that genuine openings for new political subjectivities can emerge for radical reimagining. To date, however, the potential for harnessing this niche knowledge in prefiguring a broader regime shift within mainstream planning praxis has yet to be advanced.

I will return to shrinking cities and Lefebvre's utopianism later in Chapter 7 in seeking to theorise the bounds of an alternative post-growth planning discourse, as the major contribution of this thesis. In the meantime, picking up from the theoretical openings portended in Lefebvre's spatial dialectics, the next chapter describes the research strategy and method, together with my research hypothesis, which will be empirically explored through the case study in Part II.

Chapter 3: Research Strategy & Method

Introduction

From my account of the theoretical literature advanced in Chapter 2, I have identified the materialist origin of planning's growth imperative and demonstrated how institutional praxis has repeatedly been mutated to ensure there is no dissolution of hegemonic meanings, such that the primacy of economic growth continuously sits atop of the semiotic order. In searching for alternative prospects, degrowth has been proffered as an intentionally confrontational symbolic project with genuinely deconstructive potentialities to undiscipline praxis in alternative theoretical directions through radically repoliticising planning policy debates.

However, while degrowth literature advocates the utility of counterhegemonic discourses to decolonise imaginaries and to open up alternative post-growth possibilities, no study has yet attempted to systematically apply degrowth as a spatialised method of critique. This required the fashioning of a novel research strategy to bring its insurgent meanings into direct conflict with mainstream planning discourses, with the objective of making them both challengeable and changeable. The novelty of the research method being proposed here, and my attempts to interlace 'degrowth-as-method' with established epistemologies from both the social and spatial sciences necessitates some further detailed theoretical explication.

This results in this chapter being of a somewhat longer length than might otherwise be considered usual to ensure a rigorous and coherent argument consistent with my theoretical throughline and, particularly, to account for my own reflexivity. I stand by this on the grounds that, to the best of my knowledge, it has never been tried before and offers a further significant contribution of this thesis in providing an experimental departure from research-as-usual, and for extending the potential of degrowth as a transformative research agenda.

Commencing from Lefebvre's unique spatial synthesis of materialism and post-structuralism, I firstly proceed through a comprehensive engagement with discourse theory and its potential as a corresponding research praxis to methodologise degrowth in disarticulating growth-orientated planning rationalities. Secondly, this discourse analytical perspective is subsequently translated into an abductive, transformative research strategy as an empirical mode of enquiry to be applied to the Irish NPF case study via a multi-method qualitative approach, i.e. documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews. Finally, the chapter concludes with providing a description of how the interpretation of the data generated from the research was conducted.

A key outcome of this epistemological venture is to arrive at my original research hypothesis as to how planning's growth imperative is reproduced, concealed within its omnipresent master signifiers of 'balanced' and 'sustainable' development, as cohesive and coherent representations of space to harmoniously suture the endlessly unstable crisis tensions and contradictions of capitalist spatialisation to ensure there is no loss of growth-orientated meanings. Bringing these two taken for granted, but typically unquestioned, abstract concepts into view for critical reflection is therefore central to the empirical analysis conducted in Part II of this thesis and for investigating how planning's growth imperative is maintained and, more importantly, how it could be transcended.

Epistemological Departure

De-Abstracting Space

In a deliberately provocative paper, Leary-Owhin (2012) argues that it is noteworthy how planning theorists, with few exceptions, have tended to overlook the potential contribution that Lefebvre, as perhaps the only great 20th Century urban philosopher to engage directly with planning, can make to theory. Similarly, aside from a few cursory encounters, and notwithstanding his revolutionary political and intellectual project to open up paths to 'other' worlds beyond capitalism, Lefebvre's work has also thus far largely been unexplored as a spatial counterpart in degrowth literature. From the perspective of this thesis, however, the utility of developing a more comprehensive engagement between degrowth and Lefebvre's distinctive synthesis of materialism and post-structuralism is compelling and proceeds as a common thread in uniting both the diagnostic and prognostic elements of my research.

Throughout his writings Lefebvre was convinced that, it is only through the dialectic of practice and reflection at the intersection of language and social action that true (revolutionary) spatial and social understandings can emerge. For Lefebvre (1991), the realistic, but illusory, detachment of mental/conceptual space from social/material space reproduces, "in admirably unconscious manner, those dominant ideas which are perforce the ideas of the dominant class" (p.6). Advancing from this basic materialist foothold, the leitmotif that runs through his entire social-theoretical corpus is a rejection of reductive conceptions of language as independent, passive structure, but rather as an inherent process of signification that connects the symbolic dimension of space with the production of knowledge and which emerges at the level of discourse as the primary store of political power (Schmid, 2008).

While Lefebvre's ideas have often been criticised as frustratingly elusive; which is partly explainable in that he was writing for a French speaking audience; and too detached from empirical matters, his value, his whole project, is an attempt to make complex the taken for granted so as to encourage different ways of understanding space and, particularly useful from the perspective of planning research, how it is produced (Unwin, 2000; Pinder, 2015). Lefebvre's originality stems from his rejection of Cartesian dualistic divisions of disciplinary knowledge, which he sees as serving distinctively ideological purposes, striving instead for a unified theory of space which requires comprehending it, not as an absolute background container or independent material reality moulded from historical and natural elements, but as a dynamic, conflictual and generative process of social (political) production—a totality that can only be understood through dialectical exploration (Merrifield, 1993). As he prefaces in his *magnum opus, 'The Production of Space'*:

> "The aim of this book is to detonate this state of affairs. More specifically, apropos of space, it aims to foster confrontation between those ideas and propositions which illuminate the modern world even if they do not govern it, treating them not as isolated theses or hypotheses, as 'thoughts' to be put under the microscope, but rather as prefigurations lying at the threshold of modernity." (Lefebvre, 1991, p.24)

In this task, Lefebvre offers his trifold conceptual tool of a 'spatial triad' incorporating: (i) spatial practice; (ii) representations of space; and (iii) representational space, for parsing open this intricate web of ternary spatial relationships, with each element representing simultaneously inseparable and interdependent moments in the production of space (Carp, 2008; Milgrom, 2008).

In the first instance, spatial practice is perceived physical space, directly observable through the senses which conditions the seemingly mundane routines and naturalised daily norms with respect to the habitual

use of space. These practices generally conform with official representations of space; that is to say, discursively constructed social conceptions of space tied to a homogenised, commodified neo-capitalism—or what Lefebvre refers to as abstract space—which infuse certain meanings into space (productivism, unlimited growth etc.) while rendering others obsolete. These representations undergird our knowledge and, importantly, subsume an ideology of cohesion and coherence within its practice (Merrifield, 1993, 2013).

The final type, representational space, is distinct from the other two types of space but also dialectically encompassed within them (Soja, 1996). It is the directly lived, experiential space of everyday life which abstract space continuously attempts to restrain and rationalise to conform with official representations of space, but which our imaginations simultaneously ceaselessly strive to transform through rich tapestries of cultural memories, special meanings and deep-seated symbolisms that run counter to abstract space (de Certeau, 1998). It is thus a creative space and a liberated, fecund realm for counterspace, or counterculture, often linked to underground, clandestine and subaltern forms of grassroots social organisation and resistance.

Lefebvre ascribes representations of space as the dominant space in any society. That is the, "space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic sub-dividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent—all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived" (Lefebvre 1991, p.38). In other words, for Lefebvre, representations of space comprise the, "arcane signs and jargon, objectified plans and paradigms used by these agents and institutions" which is always a conceived space tied to the governing relations of production where, "usually ideology, power, and knowledge lurk within its representation" (Merrifield 2006, p.109).

For example, Lefebvre counts maps, plans, nomenclatures, zoning categories and so on, codified for administrative and property development purposes, among those representations of space which lend weight to

planning's power in parcelling, ordering and valorising abstract space as a commodity—produced, distributed and consumed. These representations legitimate technocratic modes of planning governance, dominating possibility, eliminating contradictions, subjugating realities and erasing all differences and peculiarities from spatial practice through technicity, scienticity and certain forms of rationality (Goonewardena and Kipfer, 2005). "The result", for Lefebvre (1991), "is an extreme formalism, a fetishization of consistency in knowledge and of coherence in practice: a cult, in short, of *words*" (p.131, italics in original).

Approached in this way, and revisiting the literature opened at the outset of Chapter 2, planning praxis can be seen as a discourse of imaginary representations to harmoniously cloak capitalism's endemic spatial contradictions, "arising from the inextricable tension between the usage and appropriation of place for social purposes and the domination of place (and space) as a productive and commercial force through private ownership" (Merrifield, 1993, p.521). Lefebvre instead invites us to open our eyes and to see how abstract space, where exchange value takes precedence over use value, produces a chronically uneven and unstable landscape, with dominated peripheries and dominating centres. "The space that homogenizes," he declares, "thus has nothing homogeneous about it" (Lefebvre, 1991, p.308). This, as has been discussed, on the one hand is necessary for capitalism's very evolutionary survival while paradoxically, on the other, constantly threatening it with the spectre of its own collapse. "To 'manage' an unmanageable contradiction", Lefebvre declares, "a new crew of frauds enters the fray: planners and politicians, technocrats and taskmasters, who speak a new 'discourse,'… replete with a new *ideology*: that of *urbanism*" (Merrifield, 2006, p.67, italics in original).

Lefebvre (1976) understands planning (urbanism) as inescapably the state's primary strategic instrument to help manage capitalism's inherently fragmented, unbalanced and crisis-ridden socio-spatial realities, producing

coherent and cohesive representations of space as a necessary precondition for the survival of the capitalist social order and, as further advanced in Chapter 2, adopting varying discourses over time appropriate to that goal. Once produced, these representations exert influence over the very long-term, becoming naturalised and making them difficult to notice. Thus, a Lefebvrian orientation encourages a critical deconstruction of planning *as discourse*—of political space and politics of space—such that the ideology hiding in plain sight and governing its practices can be exposed and opened to the possibility of change. As Lefebvre (1976) puts it, such "representations conceal the concrete situation, while 'expressing' it in their own particular way. One cannot dissociate ideology from practice by 'presenting' it separately" (p.69).

Accordingly, discourse does not precede space, but the production of space always follows, "a mental space, an 'encrypted reality' that is decipherable in thoughts and utterances, speech and writing, in literature and language, in discourses and texts, in logical and epistemological ideation" (Soja 1996, p. 63). "The urbanist", as Merrifield (2006) describes, "duly slips into the cracks, making a career in the shady recesses between 'developers and power structures,' a monkey to each organ grinder. A true left critique must therefore attack the promoters of the urban 'as object,' as an entity of economic expansion in which investment and growth are ends in themselves" (p.89).

Consequently, within a Lefebvrian analysis, there can be no adequate understanding of planning's growth imperative, or the production of new knowledge to transcend it, without first identifying and disarticulating the performative locus of its discursive imaginary power as possible entry points for new discourses to potentially become visible and gain traction. As Friedmann (1989) affirms:

"Planning discourse is the ground on which we stand." (p.130)

Querying Knowledge

Very much of his time and place, Lefebvre did not write in isolation but was actively involved in frenetic postwar intellectual and political controversies, nomadically open to new philosophical and material developments in an effort to forge a more hopeful, undogmatic Marxism as the basis for a revolutionary spatial praxis of social transformation. As recounted by Purcell (2014), by foregrounding the question of space—specifically 'lived space'— Lefebvre's heterodoxy abjured reductionism in all its guises, including class reductionism, advocating instead for a more transdisciplinary, holistic understanding of social life which is more attentive to human experience, to the extent that Soja (1996) places his thinking at the centre of a postmodern 'cultural turn' in urban and political geography:

> "My critique is aimed at opening up the discourse to multiple differences and 'other-ness,' but especially to a conceptualization of difference that is rooted in spatiality and, more specifically, in the relation between centers and peripheries. I emphasize the process of *peripheralization* because the most basic way of defining differential power in space is to recognize centrality and peripherality. That differential power is the essence of what gets called, in more empirical studies, 'geographically uneven development'; it is embedded in the center-periphery relation and that differential power is a fundamental aspect of spatiality." (Soja, quoted in Evans et al., 1992, p.51, italics in original)[17]

As has been explored in Chapter 2, with the weakening of the modernist ontology throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the growing theoretical awareness within the social sciences of the relationship between power and language, intellectual attention increasingly began to focus on the social constructedness of human realities and the need for new conceptual and

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[17] In a similar vein, Harvey's (1990) in the *'The Condition of Postmodernity'* used Lefebvre's conceptualisation in his effort to simultaneously embrace the post-structural engagement with radical difference while sublimating that difference within a class struggle and spatial frame.

methodological tools to grasp the complex intersection between power, discourse and knowledge (Imrie et al., 1996; Hastings, 1999).

This new wave was an invitation and challenge to scholars to radically rethink the epistemological foundations of their theories in the face of late modern processes of global change and growing individualisation of political identities (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999). The ensuing proliferation of discourse analytical literature emerged as an intellectual riposte to presuppositionless positivist objectivism, the totalising narratives of structuralism and the crisis of economic determinism and class reductionism within Marxism, in contributing to the critical renewal of many different disciplines, including planning. As described by Carver (2002):

> "Discourse analysis derives from a paradigm shift in philosophy. 20th century philosophy moved from taking a view about the world and its properties expressed through language, to a focus on language and its properties as such, and how the world is made *for us* from the meanings that language expresses. This represents an *inversion* of the scientific and commonsensical worldview inherited from the scientific revolution and empiricist philosophy of the last few hundred years." (p.50, italics in original)

By no means a uniform field, discourse analysis embraces a diverse mix of post-structuralist critical social theory perspectives, "to help us transcend the objectivist, reductionist and rationalistic bias of modern social science theory and radicalise hermeneutic alternatives by emphasising the role of discourse and politics in shaping social, political and cultural interpretations" (Torfing 2005, p. 4).

Despite the variety of approaches, theorists all share, as a common concern, a deconstructivist sublation of transcendental truths and ahistorical absolute knowledge, alongside a rejection of the distinction between the human and natural worlds (Rorty, 1989). Within this evaluation, language is conceived, not as a transparent, neutral medium of expression for conveying

objective truth, but as a value-laden symbolic system of temporally situated and culturally contingent ways of categorising the world through which power allocates meaning to social and physical phenomena (Burr, 1995). As again explained by Carver (2002):

> "Truth is a term of power, like any other, a claim that some ideas are 'trumps' and have enduring validity that originates from 'how things are', independently of human minds, purposes and proclivities." (p.52)

Even the veracity of the reified Enlightenment ideal of modern science can therefore be understood within a discourse analytical perspective as simply one discourse among many, which is always pursued and gains communicative universality through a socio-political field, producing and maintaining specific intersubjective knowledge, identities and realities, which can change over time (Kuhn, 1970). As Lefebvre himself proclaims:

> "'Truth' today is scarcely more than a value. The 'value of truth' accompanies and conceals the break-up of the True as such, which is accompanied by its shadow, its reverse side: the investment of scientific truth in production, in the mode of production and the reproduction of its relations. Some of the most effective 'maintenance men' are the ideologues who manufacture systems. They lead the intimate prayers of all those who hope that 'real', existing society can be fulfilled and 'enclosed', that its stability can be guaranteed." (Lefebvre, 1976, p.30)

Consequently, as further asserted by Torfing (2005), "there is no extra-discursive instance, in terms of empirical facts, methodological rules, or privileged scientific criteria, which can safeguard either Truth or Science" (p.13). Discourse analysis therefore fundamentally shifts from the positivist concern with scientific method and objective facts produced by experts (exogenic perspective) to a postpositivist concern with the experience of truth as a bifurcation of reason and emotion (endogenic perspective) as being of paramount importance in fashioning knowledge (Gadamer, 2004). "In the final analysis", Friedmann (1978) asserts, "the doctrine of objective knowledge

insists upon its own inherent superiority over the claims of every other kind of knowing. Expert knowledge may not be perfect knowledge, *but it is the best there is!* It is this unwarranted assumption which underwrites the technocratic construction of society" (p.82, italics in original).

Eliminating Difference

Discourse analysis thus offers a particular standpoint which confronts received wisdom about scientific objectivity and its veridical moral authority, instead emphasising the discoursal practices through which it both makes sense and acquires meaning, so as to probe into its legitimacy and how it might be changed, especially through the knowledge which it excludes (Carver, 2002). As meanings are enmeshed within oscillating social and historical fields of power, which are subject to endless semiotic displacements and disruptions, and always provisionally constituted through relational discursive ensembles, they can never be considered neutral (Rogers, 2011). As Foucault (1980) observes:

> "… there are manifold relations of power which, permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse." (p.93)

Knowledge therefore permanently involves the conditional, unsaid exercise of power over the inclusion and exclusion of who can speak and the relevance of what can be spoken, transiently privileging some meanings and identities over others, and temporarily delimiting the normative horizons for rational thinking and acting (McGuirk 2001; Torfing 2005). Power, discourse and knowledge are thus an intrinsically linked triple nexus, such that power relations are reflected in language, but not a consequence of language (Hastings, 1999). As explained by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002):

> "It is power that creates our knowledge, our identities and how we relate to one another as groups or individuals. And knowledge, identity and social

relations are all contingent: at a given time, they all take a particular form, but they could have been — and can become — different. Therefore, power is productive in that it produces the social in particular ways. Power is not something you can make disappear: we are dependent on living in a social order and the social order is always constituted in power. But we are not dependent on living in a *particular* social order, and the exclusion of other social orders is also one of the effects of power. On the one hand, power produces an inhabitable world for us, and, on the other hand, it precludes alternative possibilities." (p.37, italics in original)

Foucault therefore rejects without question the modern objectivist conception of knowledge which, for him, is simply the 'will to truth', designed to undermine and exclude alternatives (Sheridan, 2003). "Objectivity", for Laclau (1990), is accordingly, "sedimented power where the traces of power have become effaced, where it has been forgotten that the world is politically constructed" (p.60). Berry (2008) goes one step further, insisting that the reification of objectivity, which refuses to acknowledge anything other than empirical proof as knowledge, is a form of ignorance to avoid coming to moral conclusions.

As a result, all discourses, by representing reality in particular ways rather than in other possible ways, constitute selective (mis)representations, 'simplifications' (Jessop, 2002) or 'condensations' (Harvey, 1996) and are fundamentally an ideological distortion of reality. It is in this sense that discourse is performative of social realities through the systematic naturalisation and legitimisation of associations of normalised truths, shared beliefs and accepted meanings amongst epistemic communities, through which subjects identify as members of a meaningful society (Thompson, 1990; Gee, 1996). Power is thus most influential when it is most invisible, when people are unaware that power, through discourse, is being exerted on their rationalities, such that they do not have the consciousness to resist (Sandercock, 1998a). As a result, ideology becomes inseparable from practice and the more effective the ideology, the more securely it is linked to practice

such that it does not appear as ideology at all and can even profess to be non-ideology (Lefebvre, 1976). In short, as usefully abridged by Flyvbjerg (1998c), "power has a rationality that rationality does not know. Rationality, on the other hand, does not have a power that power does not know" (p.234). Hence, as emphasised by Gunder and Mouat (2002), the need for, and value of, a post-structuralist critique in its exposure.

As scientists and other sorts of bureaucratic experts, including planners, have privileged positions as elite authorities, their rhetorical strategies are at the heart of naming what counts. However, the underlying ideological dimension of their practices is not always visible, or knowable, creating an illusion of neutrality. For example, when certain planning discourses are persistently reiterated, they become categorised as established facts, masking their inherent contingency such that we cannot see that they could be different. "The facts speak for themselves", as Žižek (1994) declares, is, "the arch statement of ideology — the point being, precisely, that facts never 'speak for themselves' but are always made to speak by a network of discursive devices" (quoted in Gunder and Hillier 2004, p. 224).

No View from Nowhere

The utility of discourse analysis in practice-orientated research is that it offers a distinctive interpretive diagnostic to study actors' sensemaking. In doing so, the objective is to disrupt received knowledge and its hidden power relations through elucidating their historical conditions of possibility as a waystation to formulating alternative propositions from which to fundamentally critique the contingency of those meanings (Gee, 2011). As again described by Carver (2002), discourse analysis, "does not look for truth but rather who claims to have truth and how these claims are justified in terms of expressed and implicit narratives of authority" (p.52).

In this sense, discourse theory is a phronetic rather than an epistemic theory for transforming how things could be articulated differently in the

endless struggle to (re)define social reality (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). Indeed, for Sandercock (1998a), writing histories differently, making the invisible visible and advancing new connections between oppositional and mainstream discourses to interrupt and unmask political fields, such as planning, represents a significant research objective in its own right, as well as being an essential precondition for fostering new knowledge-extending possibilities:

> "Each of us — academics, policy makers, politicians — tends to think within a discourse. But we do not need to be imprisoned within it. Moreover, being made aware of what we have been taking for granted… can be liberating, academically and politically." (Hidding et al., 2000, p.129)

A discourse analyst, however, like anyone else, is situated within the self-same discursive field as she or he wants to explore and does not have privileged access to a detached position from outside our linguistic frames to attain a "view from nowhere" to objectively observe reality (Flyvbjerg 2006, p.9). As there is no independent reality to gain access to, research can only gather different accounts filtered through a researcher's own interpretations where theory and method become interwoven and contribute to (de)constructing the field of enquiry, and how it should be understood and studied, in particular, idiosyncratic ways (Gibson-Graham, 1994).

Differing theoretical frameworks, or "basic sets of beliefs that guides action" (Guba 1990, p.17), will necessarily apprehend the same field of inquiry differently and research choices, and the adoption of particular empirical methods, together with the scope of material to be studied, are always inherently subjective processes and inescapably shaped by personal or academic biographies. Consequently, it is impossible, according to Bateson (1972), to separate theory and method as the researcher is, "bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which — regardless of ultimate truth or falsity — become partially self-validating" (p.314). As a result, the

theoretical framework that forms the grounds for research becomes potentially problematic as a mirror of an internal reality (Gergen, 1985).

It is therefore implicit within discourse analysis that there is no neutral ground. Instead, and in keeping with the activist-scholarship positionality of this thesis discussed in Chapter 1, research is *always* political, embedded in an interventionist social justice oriented perspective, and researchers should seek to make their position, epistemic interests and values, both within their discipline and society at large, as upfront and transparent as possible, while simultaneously making clear the fallibilistic nature of the knowledge produced (Meyer and Wodak, 2009). Knowledge is not to be pursued as a goal in itself, but to be applied in some particular way, to resolve some particular problem and that application should aim at social change. This will unavoidably involve the mobilisation of bias and value-rational truth claims, and how these are justified depends on the researcher's own theoretical viewpoint (Hajer 2002). As Mason (2002) writes:

> "Your epistemology is, literally, your theory of knowledge, and should therefore concern the principles and rules by which you decide whether and how social phenomena can be known, and how knowledge can be demonstrated." (p.16)

The relativism inherent in social constructionism has given rise to its foremost academic criticism that, by abandoning claims to objectivism's demands for reliability, validity and repeatable regularities, it is tainted by 'unscientific' philosophical idealism which lapses into tendentious, impressionistic descriptivism (Kaplan, 1964; Mottier, 2002). It is further contended that, if all knowledge is subjective, then it follows that everything is in flux and it is impossible to defend any truth claims e.g. 'post-truth' (Billig, 1994; Cromby and Nightingale, 1999).

Qualitative scholars respond that, as no social analysis occurs outside power, objectivity of this kind never exists, nor can such claims ever be made. Accordingly, positivist methods are but a, "certain kind of science, a science

that silences too many voices" (Denzin and Lincoln 2008, p.10). Embracing relativism cannot therefore diminish the academic value of research, so long as the researcher is reflexively aware of their own subjectivity, requiring vigilant self-scrutiny, awareness and consciousness (Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Edwards et al., 1995). As Flyvbjerg (2004) underscores:

> "The bracketing of one's own horizon of meaning can never be absolute, needless to say, but it can be practiced to a greater or lesser degree." (p.17)

In this endeavour, Seale (1999) recommends a form of 'reflexive methodological accounting' for researchers to take stock of the extent to which their own preanalytic thoughts, actions and decisions shaped the research process (Holloway and Galvin, 2016). Indeed, for Mason (2002), "the very act of asking oneself difficult questions in the research process is part of the activity of reflexivity" (p.7). This is necessary for establishing the 'completeness' or 'credibility' of the research outcomes—criteria designed to replace the classical concepts of 'neutrality' or 'objectivity' in social scientific research (Meyer and Wodak, 2009). With the stringent, transparent application of theory and method, a researcher can gain sufficient critical distance from the discursive field, transforming it into an external object of analysis.

Fallibilistic research outcomes, however, are always negotiable, open-ended and never a matter of final proof. Nonetheless, as advised by Seale (1999):

> "A fallibilistic approach… is not well served by presenting a personal interpretation and then simply saying that people are free to disagree if they so wish. It requires a much more active and labour-intensive approach towards genuinely self-critical research, so that something of originality and value is created, with which, of course, people are then always free to disagree, but may be less inclined to do so because of the strength of the author's case." (p.6)

Within discourse analytical research, a concern with credibility is thus considered the most crucial criterion for establishing completeness, whereby

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readers are compelled to accept the account, even if they might not ultimately agree (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Consequently, for Fjørtoft (2013), "a researcher's opinion and evaluation of a situation should be accepted as a contribution to scientific and public debate on the same grounds as other opinions and evaluations" (p.72). "The real issue", Silverman (1993) suggests "is how our research can be *both* intellectually challenging and rigorous" (p.144, italics in original) and not whether or not it proves anything, but explicates, illuminates.

For Mauthner and Doucet (2003), the 'reflexive turn' in the social sciences has been vitally important in demystifying bureaucratic expert knowledge, "where the partial, provisional and perspectival nature of knowledge claims is recognized" (p.416) and there is an increased awareness that, "*how* knowledge is acquired, organized, and interpreted is relevant to *what* the claims are" (Altheide and Johnson, 1994, p.486, italics in original). This accords with Gibson-Graham's appeal; presented in Chapter 1 as the key principle guiding this thesis; for an experimental research praxis where, "the epistemological and the performative ontological become one. What motivates this thinking practice is commitment to an open future" (Gibson-Graham, 2014, p.149).

Fixing Meanings

Notwithstanding the criticisms, most social constructionists view discourse analysis as a much more rule-bound and regulative epistemology where there is already a set of criteria for what is accepted as meaningful, governed by communities of shared intelligibility (Gergen, 1985). As Harvey (1992) cautions:

> "If we accept that fragmented discourses are the only authentic discourses and that no unified discourse is possible, then there is no way to challenge the overall qualities of a social system." (p.594)

Fainstein (2001) similarly declares, "everything may matter, but not equally" (p.19). In the final analysis, for Harvey (1992):

> "The stick used to measure what is right and what is not is the most abstract expression of right itself, *namely justice.*" (p.562, italics in original)

This realist perspective is more closely aligned with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), most notably the work of Norman Fairclough (1989, 1992). CDA is distinguishable from other post-structuralist theories in that discourse is not only seen as constitutive but as constituted, with social realities also existing independently of human consciousness and knowledge of them (see also Bhaskar, 2008). Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) radicalisation of Gramsci's critique of Althusserian totalisation, on the other hand, views social realities as fully discursive and argue that it is only in politics, understood in the manner by which social antagonisms are created through the inclusion/exclusion of identities, that is the sole determinant of social reality. Drawing on the Lacanian notion of 'empty signifiers'—free-floating signs with no intrinsic or essential meaning—competing discourses continuously battle to anchor the meaning range of 'nodal signifiers' at key tension points in the discursive field to achieve an established fixity of meaning and to halt their endless semiotic sliding (Gunkel, 2014). Consequently, discourse is always constituted relationally from what it is not. This constitutive 'other' helps stabilise discourses whilst also dialectically introducing a surplus of semiotic claims which constantly threaten to disrupt them in divergent, incommensurable ways. It is this excluded remnant that makes discourse continuously open to the possibility of change, through equipping people with the resources for resistance (Laclau 1990). As Foucault (1990) explains, "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (p.101).

Discourses are therefore always contestable, contradictory and unstable equilibriums that can never be durably closed but are ceaselessly being transformed through discursive struggle. Indeed, as discussed by

Rogers (2011), and corroborating degrowth's theorisation of crises as generative events for the production of new meanings (see Chapter 2), history is pockmarked with semiotic discontinuities where one discursive formation breaks down and gives way to another through intense dislocations that reorganise the social order in radically conflicting ways, revealing the lack of a fully achieved community:

> "These are times when things are changing or going wrong. What is significant about these moments is that they provide opportunities to deconstruct the various aspects of practices, particularly language practices, that are often naturalized and therefore difficult to notice. In this regard, important sites for investigation include policy documents, well-circulated documents that serve to redefine current thinking, and specific events where particular voices, ideas, or agendas are brought to the front and acted on." (p.157)

It is by making visible these inadmissible discourses through deliberate attempts to introduce excluded semiotic claims; which cannot be domesticated, integrated or explained within conventional discourses; that the basic equivocality of 'proper' ways of meaning become apparent. Fairclough, drawing on Harvey (1996), conceives these moments of discursive struggle as 'cruces tension points' where:

> "… different groups of social agents develop different strategies for change which include discourses which project imaginaries for new forms of social life, narratives which construe a more or less coherent and plausible relationship between what has happened in the past and what might happen in the future." (Fairclough, 2012, p.460)

In most cases, of course, any destabilisation of the discursive regime typically provokes an urgent hegemonic counterreaction to salve social antagonisms and restrain agonistic significations in ways that are broadly consonant with reproducing the established order, through reinventing the meaning range for

polysemic empty signifiers (Gunder, 2010a)[18]. Nonetheless, it is precisely these thoroughgoing attempts at counter-discourse that becomes the focal point for discourse analysis, where a researcher can begin to ask what the consequences would be if one understanding were to be accepted instead of another and how social realities could be, and could become, different (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002).

Within a CDA perspective, however, where unalloyed post-structuralist understandings, as espoused by Laclau and Mouffe, become problematic is in their intransitive over-determination of the possibility of social change and under-theorisation of the relative immutability of social practices. Very often these practices do not originate from the discursive level but from important structural preconditions which limit actors' autonomous possibilities e.g. class, ethnicity, gender, space, profession etc. (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999b). That is to say, CDA's critical pragmatism represents a vestige of the materialist theoretical problematic that distinguishes more sharply between the discursive and the non-discursive (Jessop, 2004). Language in practice always draws on traces of patrimonial discourses which implicitly positions people ideologically and builds upon an already sedimented field of meanings. Discourses can thus be more or less ideological (misrepresentational) and, as a result, more or less resistant to change—a distinction that would be eschewed in an exclusively Foucauldian analysis. To account for this 'doubleness', CDA proposes a dialectical rather than unidirectional relationship between discourse and power, such that the valency of a discourse is shaped by social practices, but also *vice versa.*

In this sense, and similar to Lefebvre's theorisation of the inseparability of ideology and practice, discussed above, actors are both 'the masters and slaves of language' with each communicative event functioning

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[18] This is evident, for example, from the literature discussed in Chapter 2 where planning discourse was constantly transfigured to fix the meaning of its key nodal signifiers to ensure the semiotic primacy of the growth agenda.

as a form of social practice and instantiation of power in the reproduction and evolution of a discourse (Barthes, 1982). Fairclough (2012) refers to these social practices; embodied in mediating social fields, institutions, and organisations; as 'orders of discourse', comprising ensembles of genres, discourses and symbolisms within the same social domain or institution which compete amongst manifold ways of making meaning to monopolise the production of truth. One aspect of this ordering is dominance, in that certain meanings emerge to become mainstream, while others are blanketed from the imaginary of political possibility as illegitimate and unmeaningful to arrive at the Gramscian concept of hegemony—'the organisation of consent'—and a naturalised, routine and ostensibly objective politics of consensus which can be difficult to push against, or even to recognise (Barrett, 1991).

Methodologising Exclusion

The implication of CDA is that it is actually buoyed up by outcasted meanings that are systematically excluded from discourse in the first place, offering agonistic vocabularies of difference that, "sharpens the jagged edges of opposition, and brings to the surface the underlying politics, exposing attempts to control and appropriate knowledge" (Richardson, 1996, p.290). These offstage 'sub-political' (Beck, 1992) or 'infra-political' (Scott 1990) voices, concealed beneath the threshold of political detectability, constitute a store of residual meanings to help notice and name the order of discourse which would otherwise remain unnoticed, threatening to expose and destabilise it by, "continually pressing against the limit of what is permitted onstage, much as a body of water might press against a dam" (Scott 1990, p.196).

Resistance, as explained by de Certeau (1998), is therefore always performed from the, "space of the other… it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power" (p.35). "It is this 'more than', this remainder, this misfitting, that is the source of hope" (Holloway, 2010, p.150). As discussed in Chapter 2, the (proper) political

sequence irrupts as a recalcitrant reaction to the social order when the accumulation of subjugated meanings, banished from 'rational' discourse by ideology (e.g. degrowth), become visible and assert alternative descriptions of social realities, questioning the arbitrariness of political participation and opening up the possibility for their further articulation and institutionalisation (Swyngedouw, 2011).

Fundamental to the theory and practice of CDA is therefore an explicit ethical commitment to social justice and the creation of an 'other' more equitable world through a hermeneutic moral critique of semiotic data and struggle over meanings, norms and values through the polemical articulation of difference (Fairclough, 2003). The intention is to bring a system of excessive power imbalances into disequilibrium by unveiling the symbolic power that sustains, legitimates, condones or ignores social inequalities and injustices (Fairclough, 2013). "The hope", as described by Van Dijk (2009), "if occasionally illusory, is change through critical understanding" (p.252). CDA is consequently primarily motivated by 'social wrongs' (and, particularly in Fairclough's case, the increasing inequalities associated with the contemporary neoliberal global order) that are harmful to human wellbeing and that can only be ameliorated through radically divergent social realities. Therefore, as also advocated by Rogers (2011), while critique is crucially important, "[t]he end goal is to hope, to dream but also to create conditions that are more conducive to human flourishing than the present ones" (p.5).

My interest in CDA is not therefore so much as a method of deep linguistics, as has also been advocated by Fairclough, as I certainly do not mean to do that. Rather, in the context of the activist research agenda of this thesis; and my efforts to methodologise degrowth as a form of counter-performativity to open up change-resistant, consensual and growth-dictated planning knowledge to alternative post-growth possibilities; my syncretic use of discourse theory is potentially auspicious for its critically pragmatic conception of reality as, "a reductive acceptance of the way things are instead

of a utopian embrace of the way things might be" (Dean, 2001, p.630). As of yet, and notwithstanding the conspicuous absence within degrowth literature of any epistemological theorisations for exploring practical questions for how its excluded revolutionary, strategic orientation could be translated into a practical method for waging what Rancière (2011) calls "material political combat" (p.72), the potential of this homology has yet to be seriously explored. The question then becomes how can we deploy degrowth as a discourse-theoretical method of repoliticisation in planning research and, most importantly, where can we locate this discursive struggle?

Embracing Conflict

The use of discourse analysis to deconstruct social practices and to provide insights into the key role of language in maintaining inequitable relations of power is also shared by other scholars, including Maarten Hajer and Bent Flyvbjerg, both leading proponents of Foucauldian inspired discourse analysis. The added advantage of both of these authors, in the context of this thesis, is that they explicitly focus on the substantive concerns and scale of spatial governance and planning.

As has been described, within a Foucauldian connexion, the governance of modern states always requires the mobilisation of particular 'regimes of truth', its general politics of truth, that serve to govern-the-mentality of normalised populations (Foucault, 1979). This involves the more or less calculated activity of the 'conduct of conduct' to shape normative human behaviours towards prearranged ends to produce docile, productive subjects that routinely accept the values and expectations of government as part of the ethical governance of themselves (Dean 1999; Rose et al. 2006; Gunder and Mouat 2002).

Foucault (1980) refers to these practices of governmentalisation as 'biopower', covertly exerted through various *dispositifs* that subjects routinely accept and make function as true, colonising their lifeworlds and structuring

their possible field of actions such that, as advanced in Chapter 2, they cannot challenge them, even if they have the ability to resist (Flyvbjerg, 1998c). What Foucault refers to as our 'political task' is to defamiliarise these governance practices, which appear both as neutral and independent, in order to reveal, "how not to be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them" (Foucault, 1997, p.44, italics in original).

Crucial to understanding Foucault's conceptualisation of power is therefore his notion of 'counter-conduct'. That is to say, power only exists if those it is exerted upon can resist back, as without resistance there is no power (Foucault, 1982). Consequently, as freedom is always present in power relations, a subject's possibilities can never be completely determined (Rosol, 2014). Opposition and struggle to redefine rationality is therefore, in contrast to consensus, the apotheosis of democratic freedom and the antinomies between the works of Habermas and Foucault, and the ineradicable tension between consensus and conflict, highlight the essential dualism of modernity (Gunder, 2003).

Thus, rather than seeking to dismiss conflict; which is routinely avoided as corrosive of the social order but which, for Rancière (2001), is simply the 'end of politics'; what Ziarek (2001) refers to as the 'ethics of dissensus' should instead be openly embraced as the essential dynamic for holding democratic societies together. Indeed, as insisted by Flyvbjerg (1998a):

> "Governments and societies that suppress conflict do so at their own peril.' (p.108)

Foucault refers to this as *parrēsia*, literally 'fearless speech', insisting that:

> "For there to be democracy there must be *parrēsia*; for there to be *parrēsia* there must be democracy." (Foucault, 2011, p.155, italics in original)

Consequently, as advocated by Jørgensen and Agustín (2015), real democracy requires a 'politics of dissent' which entails fundamentally questioning

consensus and opening up discourse to multiple 'othernesses' through conceptualising moments of opposition that move beyond mere negation to prefigure alternative institutional possibilities (see, in particular, Nielsen, 2015).

Practicing Phronesis

The key strength of Foucauldian discourse analysis in practice-orientated research is therefore that it "reflects a sophisticated understanding of Realpolitik" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.98) to disarticulate the contingent nature of policy rationalities that are given and available to practitioners, unconsciously parameterising, "what is actually done in planning and related policy processes" (Flyvbjerg 1998b, p.19). Foucault offers genealogy as his major tool to enable such reflexive desubjugation through charting the 'history of the present' and the emergence of problematisations which have occasioned the development of particular governance practices (Koopman, 2013; Garland, 2014).

For Gualini (2015), the identification of a problem (e.g. geographically uneven development) simultaneously explains the difficulty and what demands a solution (i.e. balanced development), and how these solutions become naturalised as frames of reference through which policy debate takes place can also be critically problematised such that other answers become possible as the basis for alternative action (Simon, 1971; Kretsedemas, 2017). As Gribat and Huxley (2015) remark, "these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was they were made" (p.180-181). Therefore, a key feature of genealogy is its disruptive capacity which, "seeks to bring the ready-to-hand but unexamined into sight for critical reflection. It attempts to make obvious and questioned the un-obvious taken for granted of unquestioned processes and practices of human disciplines, such as planning" (Gunder and Mouat, 2002, p.132).

A persistent criticism of Foucault's writings, however, is his assiduous refusal to promote any kind of practical methods which, for him, all too easily lead researchers astray from an awareness of how their own use of methods is generated (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 2014). Frustratingly, he famously quipped that:

> "I played my political role by bringing out the problem in all its complexity, prompting such doubts and uncertainties that now no reformer is capable of saying, 'this is what needs to be done.'"(Foucault, 1994, p.127)

Thus, what Foucault offers is not so much a methodology but a deeply querist disposition that requires, among other things, a particular post-structuralist evaluation and an appropriate ethical agenda (Gunder, 1998; McPhail, 2001). It is from such a standpoint that Flyvbjerg (2004) advocates his phronetic approach to planning research as a teleological epistemology that goes beyond scientific and technical knowledge, and that can be summarised in four simple value-rational questions:

(i)   Where are we going with planning?

(ii)   Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?

(iii)   Is this development desirable?

(iv)   What, if anything, should we do about it? [19]

In order to practically organise research based on a phronetic approach, Flyvbjerg recommends, as discussed in Chapter 1, focussing on specific case studies as situated instances for examining how discourse performatively disciplines practice and how it could be changed to work differently, but always with the conscious understanding that there can be no indisputable validity claims. The goal is therefore less theory and more debate through research:

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[19] As presented in Chapter 1, Flyvbjerg's four value-rational questions for phronetic research reflect the overall research questions for this thesis.

"Phronetic planning research is in this way interpretive, but it is neither everyday nor deep hermeneutics. Phronetic planning research is also not about, nor does it try to develop, theory or universal method. Thus, phronetic planning research is an analytical project, but not a theoretical or methodological one." (ibid., p.25)

In a similar vein, Hajer (2006) proposes three key concepts to help deconstruct planning discourses, namely: metaphor, storyline and discourse coalitions. Metaphors are typically two- or three-word pithy phrases which aphoristically symbolise the core ideas of a discourse, functioning as emblematic narratives as to the problem the discourse seeks to resolve. Storylines, on the other hand, fulfil a particularly important mediating role as condensed manifestations of public debate, summarising complex policy problems to make sense of them in a generally coherent and cohesive manner, and which intuitively just 'sound right' (Barnes and Hoerber, 2013). Crucially, as Hajer points out, this does not mean that the storyline comprises a common understanding amongst actors. Rather, its purpose is precisely to conceal interpretative misalignments, permitting diverse groups and individuals to subscribe to its main tenets, offering a sufficient degree of discursive affinity in the face of a bewildering array of societal complexity.

Indeed, per Hajer (2006), storylines help to explain the 'communicative miracle' where people from widely varying, and often opposing, backgrounds find ways to converse through positioning their particular knowledge within the storyline, and through which they seek to dominate a particular field of debate by imposing their view of reality, criticising alternatives and using the storyline in ways that assume others agree with and share an understanding of what they mean. Storylines are, as a consequence, crucial political devices, acting in a similar way to empty signifiers, to suspend conflict and achieve semiotic closure at key tension points within the discursive field, and where actors seek to secure support for their definition of reality (Ockwell and Rydin, 2010). At the same time,

storylines can simultaneously include other empty signifiers, making them even more indeterminate, allowing actors to continuously evolve their meaning over time in response to the changing course of events and in ways that broadly correspond with reproducing the established order, thus placing contestable meanings into a semiotic 'black box' and facilitating a certain 'thoughtlessness' that they could be, and could become, different (Annison, 2021).

Similar to Fairclough's order of discourse, Hajer defines his third conception of discourse coalitions as, "a group of actors that, *in the context of an identifiable set of practices*, shares the usage of a particular set of story lines over a particular period of time" (Hajer, 2006, p.70, italics in original). For example, when storylines are not confined to any one organisation, but are extensively shared by national and local players at different sites and scales (i.e. academic communities, professions, media etc.), these diverse assemblages combine to form a discourse coalition e.g. 'growth coalitions' (Molotch, 1976). Discourse structuration can be said to occur when a discourse coalition starts to dominate how certain policy domains conceptualise the world, which is then reflected in the institutional practices of that domain, recursively lending authority to policy positions through which the discourse coalition exerts its performative power (Hewitt, 2009). If it solidifies and becomes inscribed into societal and governmental institutional practices and embedded routines, we can use the term, discourse institutionalisation. This simple stepwise procedure can, for Hajer (2006), be used for determining whether a discourse can be considered dominant and how different actors and social practices deontologically reproduce hegemonic meanings without

necessarily coordinating their actions, and especially without sharing the same values[20].

Tension Breaches

A key methodological question for undertaking discourse analysis is whether it can be applied to time limited research projects where an extended, or potentially indefinite, period of study is unavailable, such that the researcher is always open to allegations of partiality (Hewitt, 2009). This limitation is an ineluctable drawback of much of planning policy research, as long research timespans are required if the effects of policies are to be analysed over time (Jacobs, 1999). Nevertheless, Hajer (2006) advises that an important means for overcoming this challenge, and for managing and containing the research exercise, is that, in searching for data, not simply, "to reconstruct the arguments used but to account for the argumentative exchange" (p.73).

Sharp and Richardson (2001) similarly counsel that an important means of making discourse analysis manageable is for researchers to focus their data collection and analysis at specific sites of conflict and to identify discursive struggles through collecting descriptions of opposing viewpoints, particularly in studying the difference between policy rhetoric and how the policy plays out in practice. This also corresponds with Fairclough's (2003) approach to CDA in that, through concentrating on how competing discourses are interdiscursively articulated together at the level of social practice, it is possible to penetrate how discourses are jointly reproduced and changed.

This implies that key to deconstructing and transcending planning's omnipotent growth imperative is to look for tension points in the discursive field and the signifiers and storylines that have emerged in response to those

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[20] Schmelzer (2015), for example, traces the genealogy of the rise to dominance of the economic growth discourse in the postwar period, particularly the emergence to prominence of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), from its obscure, controversial origins to its predominant position within academic, politics and the wider public sphere as the unquestioned, take for granted and natural goal of society.

tensions (problems). As described by Flyvbjerg et al. (2012), problematising tension points, "may be compared to hitting a rock with a hammer. If you hit the rock at random it seems unbreakable, even if you hit it hard. If you strategically hit the rock at the small, near-invisible fault lines that most rocks have, the rock will fracture, even if you hit it gently" (p.5). Tension points are thus cracks that phronetic researchers seek out in order to prise them apart and to potentially open them up to new and 'better' practices, "that are legitimate and pertinent to the issues at hand, but that may have been marginalized by other more powerful values and groups, had the former not achieved a voice through phronetic research" (ibid., p.2).

Returning full circle to Lefebvre's socio-spatial dialectics; discussed at the outset of this chapter as offering a potentially novel theoretical contribution to radical planning research praxis; typically Marxist analyses apply a critical, and mostly negative, lens to diagnosing the inequitable contradictions of abstract space, "pivoting around 'uneven development' and pell-mell differentiation" (Merrifield, 2006, p.112). However, as hinted at the end of Chapter 2, from a more hopeful perspective, less explored is Lefebvre's prognosis that these contradictions simultaneously harbour within them theoretical doorways for different social realities to emerge:

> "Thus despite—or rather because of—its negativity, abstract space carries within itself the seeds of a new kind of space. I shall call that new space 'differential space', because, inasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences." (Lefebvre, 1991, p.52)

Lefebvre's unique philosophy therefore directs our attention to the ways in which meanings are contested, together with the ways in which planning seeks to suspend those contestations through mobilising specific representations of space to restrain agonistic meanings such that there is no failure of hegemonic significations. This similarly accords with Miraftab's

conception of radical planning as insurgent planning which, "seizes advantage from the contradictory nature of neoliberal capitalism, exposing the rift between inclusion and redistribution. It understands the world of such contradictions contrapuntally, looking not only at how systems of oppression are conceptualized and exerted, but also at how they are contested" (Miraftab, 2009, p.46). As also advocated by Holloway (2010), putting these cracks at the centre of our analysis gives us a different vantage point:

> "The method of the crack is the method of crisis: we wish to understand the wall not from its solidity but from its cracks; we wish to understand capitalism not as domination, but from the perspective of its crisis, its contradictions, its weaknesses, and we want to understand how we ourselves are those contradictions. This is crisis theory, critical theory. Critical/crisis theory is the theory of our own misfitting." (p.9)

Organisationally, for Holloway, the enemy is always the systemic closure of capitalism, or what he refers to as the 'social synthesis', which ascribes a particular harmonious logic as a false, illusory totality and tool of power and submission, which is at the same time the loss of social determination. "It is not the states that constitute the social synthesis: rather they protect the process by which that synthesis is established" (ibid., p.206). To try and chart a way forward and to create misfitting moments of 'otherness' that walk in the opposite direction, Holloway espouses that we must seek out these cracks, exposing them and use them as openings to rupture our own socialised, reiterative creating of capitalism, "that constantly pulls us back into conformity in practice, back into the reproduction of the system that we want to break" (ibid., p.95). Cracks are therefore dialectical openings in a world that presents itself as closed and are always questions, not answers.

Papering Over the Cracks (Hypothesis)

The result of this epistemological disquisition leads me to a previously overlooked research hypothesis for explaining how planning's growth

imperative is ideologically maintained and reproduced, emerging from the invisible, or near invisible, structural fault lines and schisms of abstract space.

Returning, to capitalism's endlessly contradictory and crisis-ridden character, theorised at the beginning of Chapter 2, in what follows in the empirical analysis presented in Part II of this thesis, I will test an alternative proposition as to the role of planning's universal discourses of 'balanced' and 'sustainable' development. In contrast to standard accounts, I theorise these discourses as having emerged to dominance as pivotal stratagems (storylines/signifiers) to furtively dissolve the endemic core-periphery and growth-environment tensions of capitalist spatialisation, and through which praxis is continuously transfigured to negate any loss of meaning and to ceaselessly stabilise spatial practice towards growth-orientated ends. "This is the capitalist society that stands over against us, the social cohesion or synthesis that makes a mockery of our attempts to do something else, tells us that our cracks are the cracks of insanity" (ibid. p.131).

From a degrowth perspective, it is precisely such loss of meaning—or in Lefebvre's parlance, a failure of cohesion and coherence—which is a prerequisite for transformative change. Within this reading, these perfectly ordinary, self-evident and harmonious representations of space—hiding in plain sight—which superficially appear as expressive of planning's ostensibly neutral, progressive and rational purpose (for who could be against them?), can be radically repoliticised and reinterpreted as important sites of investigation for deconstructing the unapparent, unobvious performative power of planning's institutionalised growth imperative.

The effect of these nodal discourses is to paper over the cracks, stealthily pulling us back into a conformity of practice, stabilising meanings and forestalling the emergence of genuine political debates on counter-worlds to the abstract space of capitalism, rendering them, "complicit in covering over the radical contingency or unevenness of social relations" (Glynos et al., 2009, pp.11–12). Because these cracks represent the crisis in capitalist domination,

they can be viewed, in my theorisation, as important loci for performing a discursive struggle such that socio-spatial realities might be opened up to alternative imaginary significations where:

> "Some form of militancy is required to tease them out, to point a finger, to make people think and act." (Merrifield, 2006, p.139)

Performing Otherness

Again, a key challenge in operationalising discourse analysis in the manner outlined above is that very few scholars offer much guidance as to what specific methods might be used to translate its theoretical claims into concrete tools for empirical analysis. As Gill (1996) notes, "it is much easier to explicate the central tenets of discourse analysis than it is to explain how actually to go about analyzing discourse" (p.143). Indeed, as has been discussed, an unfortunate consequence of discourse theory's anti-epistemological stance has been the demotion of practical questions of method. "One is left with the sense", Kumar and Pallathucheril (2004) write, "that the analysis consists of sifting in an intensive but unstructured way through texts with just common sense and a hypothesis as a guide" (p.830).

It is therefore left entirely to the discourse analyst to do the 'hard work' of 'fitting' the theoretical concepts to the empirical research questions (Richardson and Jensen, 2000). Nevertheless, in order to justify the validity of the research, when moving from theory into the empirical world, discourse analysts must, as with any research strategy, reflect critically on strategic decisions relating to the specific methods chosen for collecting, analysing and interpreting data, in order to ensure that theory and method form a clear 'logic of enquiry' and to safeguard the completeness and credibility of the research outcomes (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Blaikie 2009). Given the novelty of my research hypothesis, alongside the absence heretofore of any comparable prototypes for methodologising degrowth as an epistemological weapon of critique, the construction of a novel research strategy was also required.

Logical thinking in academic research has characteristically been delineated by two camps—induction and deduction—concerned with gathering empirical data to develop theory, and *vice versa*. For an experimental research praxis, such as being advanced here, the weakness in both of these logics is that they can result in a relegation of a creative focus on the revelation of 'surprising facts', or 'smaller noises', which often remain invisible or hidden, but which are essential to the discovery of new knowledge (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014). A categorially distinct third alternative logic, first pioneered by Peirce (1931), but largely ignored ever since, is abduction, offering a middle course for the generation of novel, experimental insights (Patokorpi and Ahvenainen, 2009).

Abduction is a form of syllogistic reasoning used in situations where, as a result of a loss in individual or collective meanings and identities, there is a need for more speculative explanations which are unfamiliar to conventional knowledge (Brinkmann, 2014). Central to abductive reasoning is a concern with the relationship between situation and inquiry which is neither exclusively data-driven nor theory-driven, but *breakdown-driven*. Consequently, abduction is very much grounded in an interpretivist social scientific perspective whereby the basic starting point is the tacit, ordinary biographical accounts given by actors of their practices and how their everyday meanings constitute their social realities (Blaikie, 2010).

However, as recounted in my literature review presented in Chapter 2, interpretations of everyday practices are routinely unarticulated and insentiently conducted in an unreflective manner, and thereby difficult for subjects to notice. The task of abductive research is to mediate between demotic descriptions of these perfunctory realities and some version of a technical explanation in order to produce concepts and categories that make sense of and produce new knowledge relevant to the research problem at hand. It is in this hermeneutic process that the notion of abduction is applied, as research becomes a negotiated back-and-forth dialogue between data and

theory until a satisfying answer to the research questions is arrived at (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014).

In this task, Blaikie (2010) recommends the deliberative use of disruptive research techniques as a form of performative defamiliarization to challenge normalised understandings and to reveal underlying estranged meanings hidden from view, and which can suddenly become a possible focal point for alternative interpretations. Through provocatively juxtaposing incongruous discourses to make new and strange those meanings and identities which are usually taken for granted as self-evident and familiar, actors can be compelled to explicitly confront the arbitrariness of their automated, normative understandings in ways that raise, "havoc with our settled ways of thinking and conceptualization" (Marcus and Fischer, 1999, p.138). As explained by Hornborg (2001), defamiliarization involves the cross-cultural experience of becoming aware that what had been normal before is now irrational, as a prerequisite for societal transformation:

> "… we cannot understand or hope to solve global problems of solidarity and survival unless we are prepared to experience a radical 'defamiliarization'… vis-à-vis conventional categories of economics and technology. What is required is a major epistemological or paradigmatic shift." (p.89)

For Peirce (1931), one way to break down preconceived ways of thinking is to add urgency to shortcut usual reasoning and to reach more provisional, inferential explanations for alternative, albeit fallible, knowledge possibilities (see also Earl Rinehart, 2021). Abduction therefore provides a basis for a heuristic 'logic of discovery' requiring a speculative intellectual leap that adds something very new to the data that does not already exist and where the goal is, not to arrive at fixed and universal knowledge, but to be able to act in specific situations, particularly, "when there is a crisis or when we do not know what to do next" (Reichertz, 2010, p.9; see also Hanson, 1958).

Interpretative methods which attempt to make routine features of the social world problematic and which see people, and how they make sense of

their everyday experiences, as the primary data source are of course a common feature of qualitative research methods (Silverman, 2013). There have been many attempts to define qualitative research which has grown out of eclectic waves of theorising and which privilege no single methodological practice. Characteristic of qualitative research, nevertheless, is a situated inquiry that seeks an emic perspective producing 'thick descriptions' of particular cases through a variety of distinct empirical methods to gain knowledge of actors' realities through immersion in them and adopting a position of a learner rather than an expert, including through documentary analysis and interviewing (Mason, 2002). It is understood, however, that different methods make these realities knowable in different ways. Hence, there is frequently a commitment to using more than one method and data source to explore multiple perspectives, to corroborate each other, add rigour, enhance confidence and offset any weakness or bias in order to gain more comprehensive knowledge (ibid.).

Broadly conceived, combining two or more methods in a single study is associated with methodological triangulation (Taylor et al., 2015). Silverman (2016) however maintains that the use of data from different sources to triangulate upon a single 'truth' is problematic within research based on a social constructionist philosophy, and necessarily involves subscription to an inappropriate ontological and epistemological perspective. Sarantakos (1998) similarly remarks that studies based on multiple methods are not necessarily of a higher calibre nor do they inevitably produce more complete knowledge. Consequently, Richardson (2000) advances an alternative concept of 'crystallisation' which departs from the idea of converging on a single fixed point as offering a more appropriate lens in fallibilistic, politically driven research. The symbolic use of a crystal, rather than a rigid two-dimensional triangle, offers deliberately transgressive and transformative potentialities to refract infinite angles of approach to uncover supressed meanings disruptive

of the *status quo* as, "[w]hat we see depends on our angle of repose" (ibid. p.934).

A crystallisation lens also corresponds with a transformative research paradigm, as described by Mertens (2010) as an umbrella term for researchers who view their roles as agents to further social change and where the axiological belief system is always of primary importance. A transformative paradigm holds that reality is socially constructed, but it does so with a conscious methodological awareness that certain individuals occupy positions of greater power. Accordingly, the role of the researcher is reframed as one who recognises inequalities and injustices, strives to challenge consensus and, "who is a bit of a provocateur, and aims with overtones of humility, and who possesses a shared sense of responsibility" (Mertens 2007, p.212) to bring the voices of those who have been pushed to societal margins into the world of research.

For Creswell (2009), a key tenet for the selection of methods that best serve a transformative paradigm is the application of a sequential approach involving two data collection phases, each building on the other and overlaid by a theoretical lens which shapes the direction of the study to include a broader set of interests in the resulting knowledge claims. The aim is to use the findings of one method to inform the issues to be addressed in the subsequent method to capitalise on the benefits derived from each and to interrogate overlapping, but also different facets of a research object, yielding an enriched and elaborated understanding, much like the analogy of, "peeling the layers of an onion" (Greene et al., 1989, p.258). Through using these two distinct imbricated phases, this approach can, "give voice to diverse perspectives, to better advocate for participants, or better understand a phenomenon or process that is changing as a result of being studied" (Creswell, 2009, p.213).

The strength of a transformative research strategy is that it provides a framework that is useful for addressing questions about the theoretical

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assumptions that underlie the research methods and their contribution to enhancing social justice in uncovering meanings, developing understandings and discovering new insights relevant to the research problem. The weakness is again the lack of guidance in the literature on how to actually conduct it in practice and, in particular, the transformative nature of moving from the first phase of data generation to the second. Resolving these practical challenges primarily falls on the researcher, necessitating both reflexivity and flexibility to determine what will work best for a given situation, but always with the conscious awareness that the, "specific ideology, or advocacy, is more important in guiding the study than the use of methods alone" (Creswell, 2009, p.212).

In these circumstances, pragmatic methodological choices must always be made based on scholarly knowledge of the research field in question together with the time and resources at hand, while also ensuring rigorous, critical standards to ensure some structure can be imposed to simplify the research process and that facilitates a greater focus on the object of analysis. In the end, as Silverman (2016) counsels:

> "There are no right or wrong methods. There are only methods that are appropriate to your research topic and the model with which you are working." (p.125)

Research Design

Case Study

To make discourse analysis effective and practically relevant, both Flyvbjerg (2004) and Hajer (1995) endorse concrete case studies, bounded in space and time, to narrow down and enclose the body of data. Hajer (2006) particularly emphasises studying social practices, or 'settings', which regulate the actions of social actors over and above discourse, so as to examine power relations at play.

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As introduced in Chapter 1, the case study selected to operationalise this research was the process of preparing the Irish NPF. A potential criticism of research based on case study analysis is that it produces idiographic findings which cannot be generalised beyond the sampled case (Flyvbjerg, 2006a). As discussed above, similar criticisms are often made of interpretative, qualitative methods more generally (Blaikie, 2010). However, the particular value of case studies for activist research lies in their ability to explore issues in depth and from the perspectives of different participants, providing explanations of the underlying social realities that are pivotal to understanding how social and political change may be achieved (Maruster, 2013).

This approach benefits from letting the case 'speak for itself' and avoiding abstract theorisations which detach social phenomena from their contingent frames of meaning such that the results can be appreciated for their general conceptual significance as a wider contribution to the advancement of planning knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006a). As Eysenck (1976) reflects, "sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases—not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something!" (p.9).

Documentary Analysis

The first phase of the empirical work comprised desk research and documentary analysis. As recommended by Bowen (2009), "document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies—intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organisation or program" (p.29). This process commenced with a preliminary survey and collection of the literature in order to make an opening chronology and interpretation of events, including a critical reading of both the draft and final NPF documents, together with a range of ancillary technical and issues papers published during the process of preparing the NPF (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Key documents interrogated in the documentary analysis (see Part II)

There is also a surfeit of background literature related to planning policy and praxis in Ireland dating back to the 1960s, including books, journals, newspaper articles, conference proceedings, media, government publications, statutory and non-statutory reports and the internet (see MacFeely, 2016). Of

key advantage in undertaking this general sifting of the literature was my own personal biography and knowledge of Irish planning praxis, which provided a strong contextual understanding as a point of departure for the research.

The original feature of the documentary analysis, however, involved downloading and collating each of the 664 pre-draft stage[21] and 948 draft stage[22] public consultation submissions made during the preparation of the NPF. This rich and unique store of raw secondary data, which has yet to be explored for academic research purposes, offered a readily available and comprehensive source of authentic documentary material. Using this archive provided a window through which to analyse, in their own words, the discourses mobilised by a very wide range of actors with differing perspectives in respect of both the NPF and Irish spatial planning policy more broadly, including planning authorities, planning consultants, governmental and non-governmental organisations, business groups, developers, academics and private citizens. Crucially, this repository offered a 'non-reactive', stable and bounded source of evidence to help parametrise the case study and to counter the potential biases of my own positionality in the subsequent collection of primary data during the second phase.

Given the very large size and complexity of the documentary archive, which includes both short layperson and very lengthy and technical written submissions, all documentary sources were uploaded to NVivo Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) which was used as the principal means to facilitate the systematic storing, handling and analysis of all documentary sources. Following an initial superficial reading to get an overall grasp of the archive, the first objective of the documentary analysis was to begin to construct tentative ideas, themes and recurring categories that

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[21] Downloaded from: www.npf.ie/submissions-predraft. *This excludes approximately 2,640 single issue submissions received in respect of a proposal to extend the Waterford City jurisdictional boundary into the neighbouring County Kilkenny (See Chapter 7).

[22] Downloaded from: www.npf.ie/submissions-draft

seemed to fit the theoretical concerns of this thesis. At the same time, the archive was also an important source for identifying possible interviewees and for formulating an initial interview guide for the subsequent primary data collection phase of the research. Working iteratively, the documentary analysis continued throughout the primary data collection and analysis phases, recursively moving back and forth between secondary and primary data to open up new lines of enquiry, prompts and questions for interviewees, in a continuous process of discovery (Bowen, 2009). All of the NPF public consultation submissions cited in this thesis are referenced in Appendix 1.

Interviews

General Approach

As a rich source of situational, or naturalistic, data derived from the direct lifeworld experiences and everyday realities of actors, qualitative interviews are considered the 'core business' of interpretivist research (Wagenaar, 2014). Within discourse analysis, semi-structured and unstructured interviews are typically the most commonly applied primary data source. From a social constructionist perspective, however, interviews are not regarded as offering a neutral window into a prior independent reality of the interviewee. Rather, interviews are designed as a form of dynamic 'interpersonal drama' involving both researcher and respondent who actively co-construct a negotiated version of reality through what Garfinkel (1967) terms 'practical reasoning'. Consequently, the interviewer's subjectivity becomes entwined with that of the interviewee's, and *vice versa*, such that it is impossible to view this social interaction as bias which can be controlled for (Pool, 1957; Denzin, 1997, 2001). As Ratcliffe (2002) writes:

> "Bias is a meaningful concept only if the subject is a performed, purely informational commodity that the interview process might somehow taint. But if interview responses are seen as products of interpretative practice, they are neither perfected nor pure." (p.30)

This accords with Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) idea of an 'active interview' where a respondent not only holds details of experience, but in the very process of offering them up, adds to, takes away from, and transforms these self-same experiences. Therefore, interviews should be seen as being as complex as any other interpersonal encounter, albeit, as discussed above, the interviewer should always be reflexively aware of their own subjectivity (Potter, 1996). As a result, discourse analysis interviews are fashioned in a manner so as not to produce colourless interaction, but actively orientated towards apprehending social complexities and tensions through obtaining a diversity of opinions and stimulating and provoking discussion to infer and probe meanings from these situated encounters (see Table 2)

Traditional Interviews	Interviews for Discourse Analysis
Goal—to obtain consistency in responses, which is one of the main evidence.	Goal—to obtain both consistency and diversity in responses. Feedback and member check are important evidence.
Techniques are oriented to support consistency.	Techniques are oriented to support diversity: - active intervention - provocative questions - informal information exchange - facilitating disagreements
All interviews are independent from each other.	Every interview is interrelated with the previous ones and the context.
An atmosphere during an interview is neutral, business-oriented.	An atmosphere is business-oriented, but important to bring informal tones.
An interviewer as a 'speaking questionnaires'.	Active role of an interviewer.

Table 2: Comparison of main principles in traditional and discourse-based interviews (Bondarouk and Ruel, 2004)

The use of an active interview format was accordingly considered highly apposite for the research strategy and to stimulate variability by asking provocative questions, confronting respondents with conflicting values and facilitating disagreement to focus, "on contradictions in the social and material

world and on the potential for action and for change, with an emphasis on the transformative aspects of an interview" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p.140).

Participant Recruitment

As qualitative research is always concerned with the in-depth interpretation of the research problem, it typically relies heavily on a purposive selection of interviewees who are able to provide information-rich accounts of their perceptions which cannot be obtained through other means (Liamputtong, 2019). Purposive sampling demands, however, that researchers think critically about the parameters of the population under investigation and to choose interviewees carefully which, "will make some sampling choices more sensible and meaningful than others" (Mason, 2002, p.122).

Using the documentary analysis, described above, a database of possible interviewees was created with each potential candidate categorised according to their professional, institutional, political or personal backgrounds. This database was constructed from collating each of the 1,612 public submissions to the NPF which provided the names of each submitter, albeit email and other contact details were publicly redacted for data protection reasons. An initial purposive sample of 23 interviewees; including national, regional and local government actors, as well as actors from NGO and private sectors; were identified due to their particular characteristics and my own general knowledge as to their role in NPF debates which, it was considered, enabled a detailed exploration and understanding of the research questions (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Geography was also a key consideration in the interviewee sampling process, as I was keen to include participants from both urban and rural locations, while avoiding a duplication of similar perspectives. It was also considered particularly important to reach a cross-section of actors occupying different positions in the discursive field and at different scales including, for example, professional policymakers, planning practitioners, community stakeholders, business groups, environmental

organisations and elected public representatives. This was to account for the argumentative exchange and, through the active interview process, to help deliberately stimulate critical reflection and to compel interviewees to confront differing interpretations.

The participant database was subsequently updated as further possible interviewees were identified during the fieldwork via 'snowballing', albeit always seeking to avoid the problems of sampling preference linked to such an approach (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012). As will be further discussed below, the approach to recruitment was also heavily influenced by the hands-on experience as well as certain practical limitations in conducting the interviews, together with wishing to interview key high-level policy actors whom I knew, from my own knowledge, were highly conversant in the NPF preparation process and, from my professional experience, were known to me and I could gain access to. All in all, a total of 48 potential interviewees were contacted and a total of 21 interviews undertaken, including 3 pilot interviews. A summary of the interviewees and their categorisation is presented in Table 3 below.

Interview No.	Category of Interviewee
1	Policy Researcher (National)*
2	Planner (Regional)*
3	Business Group (National)*
4	Business Group (National)
5	Planner (Private)
6	Politician (National)
7	Senior Planner (National)
8	Environmental Group (ENGO) (National)
9	Community Group (National)
10	Senior Management (Regional)
11	Senior Planner (National)
12	Planner (Private)/ Planner's Representative Group (National)

13	Senior Planner (Local)
14	Senior Planner (Local)
15	Planner (Local)
16	Planner (Local)
17	Environmental/Heritage Body (National)
18	Academia
19	Community Group (National/Local)
20	Senior Planner (Regional)
21	Academia/Planner's Representative Group (National)

*Table 3: Summary of interviewees (*denotes pilot interview)*

Interview Process

Brooks et al. (2018) caution that a key danger in using interviews is that the method is considered so straightforward that it doesn't require much forethought or planning. McNamara (2009) highlights that, as with any other research method, the importance of preparation, rigour and strategy in the design and execution of interviews is imperative, particularly for the researcher as a discovery-oriented research instrument and in acquiring a self-reflexive stance and specific set of intellectual and social skills to enable the smooth flow of communication (see also, Poggenpoel and Myburgh, 2003)[23]. For discourse analysis interviews, it is also particularly important for the interviewer to be a "resistant listener" (Gee 2011, p.12) who refuses to buy into the self-evident knowledge, assumptions and meanings that interviewees' intend.

As discussed above, following the initial documentary analysis, a preliminary master interview guide was developed around a series of

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[23] A number of authors, such as Chenail (2011) and Turner (2010), helpfully offer a series of pre-interview exercises researchers can use to improve their instrumentality and which were consulted for this research. Preparation was particularly important in this research as a number of the interviewees were, what Richards (1996) refers to as, 'elite' individuals who can be adept in avoiding controversy and in using their rhetorical skills to control the direction of the interview. My own personal biography, standing and proficiency in the planning field also assisted in the interview process by facilitating mutual respect, rapport and understanding.

'essential questions' orientated towards eliciting responses in respect of each of the thesis' research questions (Berg 2007). The guide was prepared to facilitate a semi-structured approach to the interviews whereby key themes for discussion and possible phrasings of questions were identified in advance to provide a consistent set of self-instructions to ensure that the same general areas of information were collected from interviewees and to provide reliable and comparable data (Kitchin and Tate, 2000). The guide was then tested through the three pilot interviews in order, "to assess how effectively the interview will work and whether the type of information being sought will actually be obtained" (Berg 2004, p.90). The time taken to complete each interview was also recorded so it could be determined whether it was reasonable in the context of participants' likely time constraints (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001).

At the completion of the pilot interviews, which proceeded in tandem with the ongoing documentary analysis, it was concluded that a satisfactory approach had not been arrived at. Consequently, the guide was extensively restructured so that the questions better responded to the primary research questions, to improve interpretation and to overcome practical challenges in the use of the method (see Chapter 6). While all research questions were addressed in each interview, the precise wording and sequencing of questions typically varied. This approach offered more focus than a purely unstructured conversational interview but was not slavishly followed to facilitate a high degree of freedom and adaptability. All questions were open-ended to offer overtures through which interviewees could elaborate on their personal perspectives and insights with little or no limitations. In keeping with the active interview approach, this permitted additional questioning in response to topics which emerged during other interviews, or on the basis of increasing knowledge of the context from preceding interviews and documentary analysis, to enrich the interaction through posing differing viewpoints and to

deliberately provoke critical reflection. The final version of the master interview guide used in the interviews is presented in Appendix 2.

Interview requests originated through an initial email contact with the potential interviewees which clearly outlined the nature of the research, the scope and purpose of the interview and what participant's involvement would entail. This ensured that all interviewees provided 'informed consent' that they were being studied and given an opportunity to decline (Flick, 2009). The invite also made clear that all interview data, including all text transcripts and any audio files, would be treated strictly confidentially and securely stored in accordance with all data protection regulations and ethical approval requirements of the University of Liverpool[24]. Interviewees were also advised that they would not be identified by name in the research outcomes. To strengthen the validity of the participant consent process and enhance the quality of responses, an abridged version of the interview guide was emailed to each interviewee in good time in advance of the scheduled interview (also included in Appendix 2).

Interviews normally occurred at the place of work of the interviewee or a similar relatively neutral and quiet setting with minimum distraction. The master interview guide was structured so that 'icebreaker' questions that participants were likely to feel more comfortable answering were posed first and more difficult, challenging or thought-provoking questions left to later in the interview or introduced through follow-up questions. Written notes of impressions, emerging ideas and themes found potentially significant were taken immediately during and after each interview. At the end of the interview, the master interview guide was crosschecked to ensure that all the research questions had been satisfactorily covered. The average interview

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[24] Ethics Approval Reference: 4807

length was approximately 65 minutes. All interviewees were happy to have the interview audio recorded.

The interview recordings were subsequently sent to an external, reputable transcription service as soon as possible following the interview to be transcribed verbatim and to maximise time for analysis. All transcripts were subsequently rigorously scrutinised while simultaneously listening back to the recordings to ensure accurate representation and to detect and rectify any errors. The reviewed and corrected transcripts were thereafter emailed to the interviewee for proofing. Where amendments were suggested, these were incorporated into the transcripts but typically only included minor additions or clarifications rather than any comments as to the substantive accuracy of the conversation.

Limitations

The art of interviewing is a practical and applied one, learned through practice and experimentation (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Initially, I had intended to undertake approximately 30 interviews. However, as the process evolved and I became more adept and confident in questioning, listening and interpreting, I realised that each interview was generating a significant volume of good quality data. This also reflected the calibre of the selected interviewees, whom I knew in advance from my own background and experience would have a consistent and deep understanding of the subject matter and a real openness to communicate their experiences and insights.

The sheer number of individuals involved in the NPF meant that data collection could have continued almost indefinitely, possibly without much further advantage. The final interview was undertaken on 11 March 2020, just before COVID-19 pandemic 'lockdown' restrictions were introduced in Ireland. At that point, I had to consider whether to continue with the interviews via online videoconferencing formats. Of concern, was that the use of virtual interviews might disrupt the informal flow, rhythm and 'affective

atmosphere', particularly when using an active interview approach (Ash, 2013; Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst, 2017)[25]. Upon reflection, and reading across all the data collated, I concluded that any additional online interviews would be an inferior substitute and would not, in any case, add significant new insights or perspectives in answering the research questions. I also considered that any deficits in the primary data collected from the relatively small pool of interviewees could be very adequately compensated by the volume and quality of secondary documentary sources, and that 'saturation' could be achieved such that nothing new would be generated from further interviews (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

It had also initially been my intention to complement the qualitative interviews with focus group meetings as a further means to provoke the argumentative exchange between a spectrum of differing perspectives, together with providing an opportunity for some supplementary participant observation. Again, for the reasons outlined above, this did not prove possible, particularly in the context of the general prohibition of indoor group events throughout the pandemic. Of more concern, however, was that, although all interviewees politely indicated a willingness to participate in a focus group, I generally sensed some reservations and had concerns that assembling such group discussions might present a significant practical and epistemic challenge. This was due, in part, to the likely time and travel constraints of participants but also, more importantly, the relatively small size, tightly networked and close-knit planning policy profession in Ireland where individuals would often be very well acquainted with each other. This professional familiarity could be a barrier to an open disclosure and frank exchange of perspectives, especially the expression of unusual or 'unpopular' views that departed from the consensus.

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[25] It is acknowledged that, at that moment, people were less familiar with online videoconferencing as they subsequently became following two-years of pandemic conditions, which has increasingly faded into the background as a communication technology.

Despite these research design deviations, in the context of the objectives of this thesis, reading for a PhD during a global pandemic was an instructive experience, both intellectually and methodologically. Firstly, it provided a unique moment of crisis disorientation, where society slowed, ontologies shifted and there was an active, albeit somewhat confused, public conversation on the opportunities to create a different type of post-pandemic 'normal'. This was particularly evident in the planning and design of urban spaces where emergent discourses, such as 'build back better', momentarily surfaced in public policy conversations. However, from a more practical sense, these limitations also forced me to confront the realisation that my original data gathering ambitions, as is perhaps the temptation for many PhD students, tried to do too much and through a deeper engagement with the data, "the point of qualitative research should be to say a lot about a little!" (Silverman, 2013, p.441).

Generating Data

As explained by Denzin and Lincoln (2017), qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretative such that a researcher does not leave the field and simply write up the findings. Instead, the interpretative practice of making sense of the data is both artistic and political, and, while data analysis should always be systematic and logical, there is no universal procedure. Within a social constructivist paradigm, the concept of analysing data is itself problematic and it is more accurate to speak of generating data, requiring an interpretive understanding, or '*verstehen*', to present findings in the form of a story (Mason, 2002).

Within qualitative research, one of the most commonly used methods for handling data is coding, frequently supported by the use of CAQDAS (Charmaz, 2006). As described by Clifford (2016), "coding is basically a way of evaluating and organizing data in an effort to understand meanings in a text" (p.441). It is important to distinguish, however, between coding used within a

positivist epistemology and the distinct form of coding used in a social constructionist analysis, as the use of CAQDAS can reinforce, "an air of scientific objectivity onto what remains a fundamentally subjective, interpretative process" (Mauthner and Doucet 2003, p.122). Much then depends on our modes of abstraction and how the data is theoretically conceptualised and broken down, which opens up some analytical possibilities and closes off others so as to generate a useful and comprehensive analysis (Starks and Brown Trinidad, 2007).

In keeping with the abductive research strategy, discussed above, coding was not conducted linearly, but cyclically as part of a heuristic, recursive analysis (Richards and Morse, 2012). The first set of codes was constructed through the unrestricted reading of the entire cache of data, marking sections, phrases or individual words that seemed to fit my theoretical framework, but continuously open to new interpretations including the possibility for surprising themes to emerge. Once this initial 'open' coding was considered exhausted, each of the main commonly occurring codes was carefully reviewed and teased out in greater detail. This involved sifting back and forth between the research questions, theory and the data to further narrow down the analysis (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005). Strauss (1987) refers to this process as 'axial' coding because the analytic focus is on the intense examination along the 'axis' of different categories, themes and concepts.

The final cycle of coding followed the saturation of analysis, where no new codes emerged, leading to the selection of core categories. Specifically, in accordance with my research hypothesis, during this 'selective' coding, identifying tensions within the data to account for the core-periphery and growth-environment argumentative exchange became the deep focus of analysis and key to managing the scope of the study (Fairclough, 1992). This selective cycle of coding represented an extremely active phase of the analysis to arrive at one central interpretation—the story of the case (Flick, 2009).

Moving On

This chapter has provided an overview and justification for the research strategy and methodological choices made in this thesis. The novelty of attempting to apply degrowth as a transgressive method of practice-orientated enquiry in planning research has necessitated some considerable theoretical groundwork to ensure a comprehensive logic of enquiry, tailored to fit with my overall philosophical framework in the achievement of the thesis objectives.

The resulting research strategy and method is highly experimental, responding to an identifiable gap in the literature as to the absence of a research praxis for methodologising ('weaponising') degrowth as a transformative research agenda, and not only within planning research. The conspicuous absence of methodological reflections within degrowth thinking might help explain why it is so often marginalised and dismissed as lacking empirical rigour, curtailing its advancement as a genuine programme for transformative change (see Chapter 1).

Ultimately, while degrowth is a revolutionary agenda, I cannot claim that there is anything particularly ground-breaking in what I have arrived at. Instead, I have simply attempted to forge new connections between degrowth and longstanding Marxist, social constructionist and spatial thinkers in order to make theoretical progress in ways that have not been tried before, and just seem right, so as to arrive at a research strategy that potentially allows us, "to ferret out the unapparent import of things" (Geertz, 1973, p.26). So here, I am certainly standing on the shoulders of giants!

Nevertheless, I am of the firm view that a shared intellectual voyage in this direction is essential to extend both degrowth and radical planning scholarship in linking knowledge to action, and to overcome our contemporary epistemological injunction in conceiving of spatial futures beyond growth (Hajer and Versteeg, 2019). The outcome of this foray has been to arrive at my novel research hypothesis for identifying a theoretical crack as

to how planning's growth-imperative might be transcended and opened to alternative political possibilities beyond the economic rationalities of accumulation, but of course with some uncertainty.

For Holloway, breaking with certainty from something we reject to 'exploring-beyond' and creating something that we aspire to with uncertainty is, however, no grounds for not trying. "*Movement is what matters. The possibility of the cracks is in their moving.*" (Holloway, 2010, p.172, italics in original). "This is the courage of the intellect", Kaika and Swyngedouw (2014) insist, "that is now required more than ever, a courage that takes us beyond the impotent confines of a sustainability discourse that leaves the existing combined and uneven, but decidedly urbanized, socio-ecological dynamics fundamentally intact, and charts new politicized avenues for producing a new common urbanity". As Alexander and Gleeson (2019) also implore:

> "The work of radical scholarship and praxis, as never before, is to *raise hell.*"
> (p.205, italics in original)

This is the aim of Part II.

Part II: Case Study

Chapter 4: Growth Futuring

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to address the first research question of this thesis, namely: *By what means has Irish spatial planning policy institutionalised the imperative of growth?* As discussed in Chapter 3, the strength of discourse analysis, as method, is in its capacity to illuminate the role of language found in policy debates, through which power is tacitly exerted. As a starting point for my empirical analysis, and in keeping with my research strategy and method:

> "The metaphor comes first, giving access to the higher levels of abstraction in which it increasingly conceals itself as a point of orientation, and into which it finally disappears." (Blumenberg, 2012, p.251)

That is to say, people implicitly imagine the future through symbolic representations of it, reinforcing a shared imaginary of desirable futures whilst organising others out of our imaginations.

In the case of the NPF, this chapter will argue that it was the desideratum of accommodating very significant national population growth which emerged to become the governing imaginary, shaping normative conceptions of anticipated futures, whilst eliminating others. Accordingly, the aim of this chapter is to examine how and why this inevitability came to be installed as such an undisputable and taken for granted demographic 'truth'

and to provide the basic terms for subsequent NPF policy analyses and debates.

I commence with providing an account of the prespecified population growth targets which framed the NPF public consultation process and how these gained near universal, unquestioned authority amongst policy communities as a consequence of Ireland's particular socio-cultural memories of mass emigration and depopulation. These sensibilities preordained highly receptive pro-growth cultural mentalities amongst policy communities while also simultaneously providing powerful metaphorical analogues for contemporary political tensions over growing perceptions of geographically uneven development, further reinforcing pro-growth predispositions.

However, disarticulating the provenance of these growth targets reveals how they were wholly conditional upon the international immigration that it was assumed would arise from an unstated future trajectory of endless economic expansion which was, by and large, entirely unremarked upon in NPF policy debates, despite the lack of any published evidence in support of the targets. Illustrative of the power of planning to define social realities, this leads me to an alternative conclusion as to what I will suggest is the real rationality of the NPF, as an implicit spatial-economic strategy for sustaining the overriding imperative of high national economic growth, covertly delimiting the meaning range of future development possibilities admissible within policy debates.

Knowing the Future

> "What will Ireland be like in 20 years' time? It's a fundamental question that no one can answer for sure but, based on what we do know now, we can make informed and strategic choices now about what kind of challenges and opportunities we will face in the future. For example, we know that there will be more of us—as many as a million additional people…" (DHPLG, 2017, p.2)

From the very outset of the NPF preparation process, such as the above passage from then Minister Simon Coveney's foreword to the initial pre-draft NPF 'Issues and Choices' public consultation paper; and notwithstanding his frank acknowledgement that the future is inherently unknowable; it was commonly accepted as a given that Ireland stood on the "cusp of a great change" (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.5) where sustained population growth of an additional one million people (+20%), 600,000 jobs (+33%) and 500,000 additional homes (+25%) in the next two decades was presented as a known:

> "… that is what the tea leaves at the bottom of the cup are telling us, it's coming at us, whether we like it or not. There isn't a strategy to grow the population; there's a strategy that's recognising that the population is growing. And whether we like it [or not] … we can't stop it." (Interview 7)

This agenda setting narrative framing was not, therefore, about choosing between alternative possible futures but a definitive prognostication of things to come:

> "It is hugely significant that growth and change is set to continue. There will be more people, who will be more diverse and older and will need more homes and more jobs, supported by new infrastructure, services and facilities." (DHPLG, 2017, p.9)

The public was thus invited to, "honestly ask ourselves some key questions about what should Ireland be like in 20 years' time" (DHPLG, 2017, p.2), so long as they remained fully circumscribed within the sphere of the clearly defined parameters of what was open for discussion and where, "our population is still growing very strongly, and will continue to grow, [and] we have to plan for this level of growth" (Interview 20).

Indeed, the imperative of managing the assured inevitability of significant demographic expansion was presented as practically the same as the very purpose of planning itself—synonymous with the common good and the public interest—and invoking the language of the 1916 Irish Declaration of

Independence, necessary for addressing and achieving the most essential societal challenges and ambitions of the Irish state as its *raison d'état*:

> "If we fail to plan for this growth and for the demands it will place on our built and natural environment, as well as on our social and economic fabric, then we will certainly fail in our responsibility to future generations of Irish men and Irish women. That responsibility is to ensure their prosperity and happiness in an ever changing world." (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.10)

Metaphorical Premonitions

The centrality of substantial population growth projections was not, however, a unique innovation of the NPF but has characteristically been a central feature of successive Irish national spatial planning polices, including the former National Spatial Strategy (NSS). In fact, national population growth significantly exceeded the forecasts included in the NSS, increasing by an unprecedented 844,662 (+21.5%) between 2002 and 2016 (CSO, 2017). This was chiefly due to natural increase and, more latterly, immigration as a result of very strong economic performance throughout the Celtic Tiger period and the expectation was that this would continue:

> "I mean, the demographics… are not a difficult science and thing to do, and the projection… was based on, you know, sort of reasonable mid-range assumptions… we share a lot more in common with places like Canada or Australia than we do with… European countries, even like Scotland which is the most similar country in the world to us. In my lifetime their population has grown by maybe 3%, our population has grown 60%… as a society I think we're the only place on the planet … that has a smaller population now than it did in the 1840s. You know, there might be some indigenous tribe exceptions to that but, by and large, that mentality influences us hugely as a people… I genuinely think that there are people who don't think we cannot [not] consider growth until we reach the pre-famine levels of population." (Interview 11)

This strongly developmentalist outlook was widely shared throughout the documentary and interview data gathered for this thesis, whereby a pervasive concern with recovering past population levels of the mid-19th Century prior to the Great Famine, together with Ireland's distinctive post-colonial 20th Century legacy of economic underdevelopment, high emigration and low levels of urbanisation, contributed to a very strong sense of national uniqueness, which significantly influenced the future expectations of actors:

> "… we are the only country in Europe that we have a smaller population now than we did in the 18th Century, so it makes us very, very different." (Interview 5)

Ireland was therefore widely considered to have "unusual demographics" (Interview 20) and thus an exceptional case for continued, rapid demographic growth to catch-up with Western European norms:

> "It is anticipated that with the current rate of population increase we could see Ireland's population approaching the pre-famine figures of 6.5 million by the end of the period of the national planning framework… It should be noted however that even with this increase our population density will still remain below Spain's current density of 92/km2 and significantly below England's density of 407/km2… Due to the low density levels pertaining in Ireland we have the opportunity to be less stringent on our development limitations than our competing European neighbours and in doing so, albeit in a sustainable manner, create a competitive edge for Ireland." (Submission B0871, p.3)

Consequently, unlike many European countries, where population growth is an increasingly fraught political topic, this characteristic Irish cultural memory of the demographic loss and trauma of the Great Famine, together with more recent 20th Century episodes of mass emigration, served as a commanding constitutive backdrop for an ardent, reflexive consensus within the national social imagination of the virtues of population growth as essential for socio-economic vitality and vigour, contrasted with stagnation and decline:

> "I think it's peculiarly Irish and I think there's a lot of particularly Irish memory embedded in this… people were saying, you know, we had the famine and depopulation, and we just want to restore our population… the scenario was that, you know, 'look how terrible Ireland was with all the emigration in the 1950s and then the slump in the 1980s'…" (Interview 8)

> "Like I came of age in the mid-eighties when we all emigrated, it was last out turn off the lights and a desperate kind of pessimism, I suppose, of our future." (Interview 6)

Notwithstanding more recent experiences from the turn of the century of rapid national population growth, this enduring psychosomatic scarring of Ireland's demographic past continued to have a profound shaping effect on NPF debates, re-emerging in the context of increasingly fraught political tensions over geographically uneven, and principally Dublin-centric, development trends and lagging peripheral growth in more rural regions. This typically manifested in a generic concern with an ill-defined spatial category of a, so called, 'Rural Ireland' which, according to one interviewee, went, "… way beyond the simple meaning of the word 'rural' [and] a metaphor for all sorts of things in Irish polity" (Interview 11).

The spectre of regional depopulation was further reinforced by a persistent mediatization of an urban-rural divide and the extensive use of emotive, ominous tropes around the 'death', 'desertification' and 'battle' to 'save' 'Rural Ireland', similar to *Paris et le désert français* (Daly, 2015). This became particularly pronounced in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, resulting in ongoing heated public protests in the context of what was widely perceived to be an accelerating 'two-speed' national economic recovery (RTÉ, 2015; see Figure 8). A further commonplace allegory was that of the 'national park', i.e. a premonition that 'Rural Ireland' was depleting and destined to become a mere tourist destination and playground for urban elites, devoid of local populations:

"I don't think it would be good… for cities to turn rural Ireland into a national park… You need people at the end of the day, I suppose. A country needs people." (Interview 9)

Figure 8 : Protest over the closure of rural services (Quinn-Mulligan, 2023)

Another oft-cited metaphor, but which significantly pre-dated the Great Famine, was that of Oliver Cromwell's 17th Century conquest of Ireland and subsequent land clearances which was a particularly emotive episode in Irish folk memory:

> "If this draft plan [NPF] is adopted without change we will destroy any potential of recovery for rural Ireland, this plan as presented is most Cromwellian in its approach to rural Ireland and will have the same desired effects of the policy espoused by Mr Cromwell for the west of Ireland." (Submission B0897, p.2)

These presentiments were further evocatively captured in a quotation from a newspaper article by prominent national broadcaster and economist, David McWilliams, who was also selected as the moderator at the NPF public consultation launch event at Maynooth University in February 2017 (see Figure 9):

"… what was termed 'Rural Ireland' will become 'Empty Ireland', pretty but desolate, a theme park for tourists trying to find the 'Real Ireland'. It will be a bit like a giant famine village—an abandoned place, which used to be thriving but is now silent." (McWilliams, 2017, quoted in Submission A0050, p.1)

Figure 9: Launch of the NPF public consultation phase on 2 February 2017 at Maynooth University moderated by broadcaster and economist, David McWilliams (first from right). Also in attendance, former Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Simon Coveney (first from left)

This reification of 'Rural Ireland' as a distinct spatial category within Irish political, policy and media imaginaries, and persistent fears of its demise, has been the subject of significant academic analyses and often attributed to a romanticised nostalgia for a pre-modern pastoral idyll (Scott et al., 2010)[26]. Other authors, however, trace it to a markedly atavistic anti-urban bias in the Irish collective imagination, indelibly shaped by the spatial legacy of colonialism and the subsequent nationalist independence movement of the early 20th Century which sentimentalised the Gaelic origins of Irish identity

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[26] This is most evocatively captured in John Healy's oft-cited book '*No One Shouted Stop! Formerly Death of an Irish Town*' (Healy, 1988).

and that, "rural Ireland was real Ireland" (Kiberd, 1997, p.492; see also Horgan, 2004; Moore-Cherry and Tomaney, 2019). As a consequence, and as described by Daly (1985), peculiar to Ireland was the idea that the loss of rural population was synonymous with "loss of race or nationhood" (p.191), particularly due to the dramatic effects of historic depopulation on mostly Gaelic speaking regions during the Great Famine (OSI, 2018). In contrast, urbanity was treated with antithetical suspicion as an alien phenomenon where Dublin was the seat of Anglicised elite power, instilling a distinctive rural mentality in the project of post-colonial nation building. Accordingly, as further described by Kiberd (1997), Dublin is a, "classic example of a periphery-dominated centre" which is very much guided, if not controlled, by the, "values and mores of the surrounding countryside" (p.484-485).

This characteristic cultural legacy has bequeathed a deeply ambivalent, dissonant, and even hostile relationship between Irish polity and the processes of urbanisation alongside a strong proclivity towards highly ruralised, dispersed settlement patterns. This has been so, even as urbanisation has increasingly become essential to Ireland's national industrial strategy to expand its position as a global financial, services and technology hub (Moore-Cherry and Tomaney, 2019). At the same time, 'Rural Ireland' has become progressively fetishised; even as it has become deterritorialized, suburbanised and devoid of authentic content; playing a key role in how actors conceive of their social realities, even if not as a lived reality, as astutely apprehended by one interviewee:

> "… the amount of airtime that's given to rural issues always surprises me. It's disproportionate… It's almost as if the government are constantly afraid to annoy rural Ireland." (Interview 13)

In Lefebvrian terms, 'Rural Ireland' can be theorised as constituting a form of representational space, incorporating deep-seated cultural meanings and symbolisms that run counter to the abstract space of urbanised capitalism. Moreover, as described by Fivush (2010), "in many ways we are the stories

that we tell ourselves" (p.88) and the self-representations that are imaginable, what is thinkable and unthinkable, depend on these culturally contingent metaphorical narrative frames of meaning as, for example, exemplified by one interviewee from a rural planning authority:

> "If you think of a country like France, you never see a young person in the countryside because they're all gone to the big cities. I would hate that to happen in Ireland, you know, I would absolutely hate it. It shouldn't happen." (Interview 16)

For Hajer (2006), these metaphorical understandings should not be seen as incidental in policy debates but crucial emblematic utterances, suffused with symbolism and normative assumptions, providing common sense comprehensions of complex phenomena through another, and which predetermine what policy communities consider problematic and, crucially, what kinds of evidence is sought, or not, and what kinds of arguments are intuitively accepted or rejected. Metaphors essentially act as 'problem setting stories', generating a sense of self-evident obviousness as to what is wrong and what needs fixing, whereby simply uttering the metaphor invokes the whole problematic of which it is part (Schön, 1979). This is, nevertheless, to be distinguished from having a basis in fact. For example, it is noteworthy that the perception of depopulation is significantly contradicted by Census data which shows that rural population in Ireland continues to grow strongly:

> "Taken as a whole, rural Ireland experienced unprecedented levels of population growth between 1996 and 2011, at a rate and scale that had not been experienced since before the Famine. This level of growth was almost unique in Europe, where the trend has generally been that rural populations have declined, especially where located outside the catchments of large cities." (DHPLG, 2017, p.30)

Nevertheless, incorporating real demographic anxieties as to the past, present and future, and often distorted by saccharine echoes of archaic values, the 'Rural Ireland' typification served as a highly influential moniker within NPF

policy debates as shorthand for intensifying socio-spatial imbalances and strident political grievances whereby regions outside the greater Dublin area (often including other regional cities) were represented as insignificant or ignored within the national conversation:

> "Our clubs, schools, churches and people need to exist in rural Ireland. People were hunted out of it and starved out of it during the Famine, and this is something similar. People are being driven out of rural Ireland now and are being persecuted for living there." (McGrath, 2018)

This anaclitic discontent was frequently idiomatically captured in colloquial taglines such as 'there is life beyond the M50 motorway' (the orbital motorway that circumferences Dublin) or 'the world doesn't stop at the Red Cow roundabout' (a renowned junction on the same motorway) which were used analogously as caricatures for 'beyond the Pale', i.e. a reference to the medieval region of Ireland which surrounded Dublin. At the same time, however, these metaphors also propagated an imaginary of Ireland, in contrast to the 'full' countries of Europe, as an 'empty' space (e.g. Canada, Australia etc.) offering illimitable opportunities for future growth, underpinning powerful pro-growth 'developmentalities' amongst policy actors. This might even be described as something akin to a national inferiority complex, where national prestige was equated as comparable to reversing the 'lost decades' of depopulation, returning Ireland to a conventional urbanised demographic trajectory equivalent to its Western European peers:

> "I suppose relative to other European countries we typically have a relatively low population density… we've large land mass, land area relative to our size of our population. So, and also with natural underlying demographics, you know, population changes already that are occurring in terms of births and so on. You already get up to seven or eight [million people] so the question is just whether it goes on from that." (Interview 6)

Defining Reality

Framed within these extremely benign and pervasive preanalytical socio-cultural leanings towards the merits of demographic growth, the NPF population projections were, by-and-large, accepted as a *fait accompli*. This was also supported by largely uncritical and buoyant news media coverage of future population projections where there was little, or no, analytic reflection as to how they were actually arrived at (see, for example, O'Connell, 2017)[27]. As might be expected from the discussion above, this predisposition was most prevalent amongst rural policy actors outside Dublin, as exemplified by one senior rural local authority planner who, when asked if they had ever looked behind the population projections to see how they were calculated, simply responded:

> "No, but I don't think we wanted to undermine their projections. What we wanted to do was to say that there was a capacity to deliver on those projections…" (Interview 14)

Within Dublin, policy actors were somewhat more inquisitive, as revealed by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown (DLR) County Council in their consultation submission to the Draft NPF:

> "Reference is made… to a 'range of options' having been considered, yet there is a complete paucity of supporting information presented in this regard by way of statistics, models and/or background papers. This makes it very difficult for parties in the consultation process, such as DLR and other Local Authorities, to formulate evidence-based positions on the policies and content of the NPF." (Submission B0685, p.5)

In fact, the demographic modelling prepared for the NPF by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), in a report entitled the '*Prospects for Irish Regions and Counties: Scenarios and Implications*' (Morgenroth, 2018), and which

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[27] This also tallies with Mercille's (2014) study of the uncritical and adherent role of the Irish media in championing the Celtic Tiger property bubble.

formed the entire basis for the population projections; and, as will also be discussed in Chapter 5, was extremely influential in establishing the whole strategic direction of the NPF; was not published until January 2018, some considerable time after the NPF public consultation process had closed, and just a month before the final NPF was adopted by Government, as confirmed by one interviewee:

> "… we'd asked them for a long time to publish the data and they didn't publish the data until very late in the day…" (Interview 4)

Accordingly, despite multiple references to the ESRI projections within the Draft NPF, the projections themselves were not made available as part of the public consultation process, as further attested to by another interviewee:

> "So, when the NPF came out and was published, there were things that we would question. 'Okay, can you tell us where you're coming up with these figures from?' you know? 'Because we want to know what the figures are, [do] they stack up, you know'?" (Interview 12)

This is instructive, as in the aftermath of what was widely perceived as the evidenceless, developer-led planning of the Celtic Tiger era, resulting in a "catastrophic failure of the planning system" (Kitchin et al., 2010, p.2) (see Chapter 1), the imperative of an 'evidence-based' planning system had been installed as the foremost principle of the Government's 2015 '*Planning Policy Statement*' and that it, "expects planning authorities, other public bodies and those that engage with the planning process will observe" (DECLG, 2015, p.1). As discussed by Flyvbjerg (1998c), the lack of factual documentation or evidence in support of certain policy positions may, "be more important indicators of power than arguments and documentation produced" as a, "party's unwillingness to present rational argument or documentation may quite simply indicate its freedom to act and its freedom to define reality" (p.321). This, for Flyvbjerg, is the privilege of power and, "the greater the power, the greater the freedom… and the less need for power to understand how reality is 'really' constructed" (ibid.). Thus, as insisted by Davoudi

(2012b), despite the much vaunted 'evidence-based turn' in planning, there remains no straightforward extra-ideological relationship between evidence and spatial policy.

Driven by an apparent deference to the ESRI's perceived status and credibility as neutral "statisticians and number crunchers" (Interview 7), the absence of any published evidence did not, at all, diminish the general acceptance nor deter enthusiasm for the population projections which were, by-and-large, blindly accepted as uncontroversial, despite most actors continuing to have very little, if any, knowledge as to their provenance:

> "Well, I think they're fairly evidence based. My understanding of the ESRI report from data produced, it's a relatively evidence-based assumption in the sense that the trends are happening in Ireland, the demographics, the mortality rates, it's a fair assumption and my understanding is that it's a conservative figure." (Interview 10)

Contrariwise, and in what may be revealing of the different rationalities and underlying ideological premises that different actors implicitly bring to policy debates, one Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation (ENGO) interviewee countered that:

> "So, we were getting very good data and it was very clear that the modelling … was based on a return to the Celtic Tiger, it was based on a combination of a return to very significant inward investment… predicated on those twin factors of inward migration, continued fertility levels and inward investment, multinational inward investment which Ireland would be attractive to." (Interview 8)

Regardless, even though the population projections provided for a very significant 20% growth in national population in just twenty years, a common criticism was that the projections were far too low, even unrealistically so, and should be considered an absolute minimum:

> "Oh, I think it's what our position would be, and I'm of a belief, that it's incredibly conservative. And we've said that at all times." (Interview 4)

This contended lack of ambition was pithily captured in a submission by John Moran; former Secretary General of the Irish Government's Department of Finance and former chair of the Land Development Agency (LDA) as well as a well-known commentator on national spatial policy; who wrote in a pre-draft submission to the NPF:

> "Has post-Famine low and stable population dominated so much of our modern history that we have become incapable of appreciating and planning for this level of rapid growth?" (Submission A0641, p.16)

In a similar vein, when questioned on whether the population growth projections could perhaps be considered overly ambitious, one senior planning official significantly involved in the preparation of the NPF reacted:

> "So, you know we have a kind of a developmental system of economy, society and… your comment there about ambitious and quite significant growth is not something that is often reflected to me. In fact, the opposite is more often reflected to be honest… we are still on a weekly and daily basis questioned about the low-level of ambition or provision for many parts of the country." (Interview 11)

Moreover, as recounted by the same interviewee, a key challenge was actually keeping the general quixotic buoyancy for future population growth in check:

> "… once you go beyond the short-term and sort of reasonable estimates of population, people very quickly lose the run of themselves… And even as recently as a couple of days ago, you know, yet again I heard the RIAI [Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland], the architects, talking about an initial two million people by 2050." (ibid.)

This bullish outlook was substantiated throughout the documentary and interview data gathered for this thesis which, with minor exceptions, were by-and-large adherent to the confident consensus that over the next several decades Ireland would reach and surpass pre-famine population levels:

> "Oh, we think by 2050 the island of Ireland will grow to 10 million people. And this is not beyond [us], this is in keeping with… back in the 1840s. Like

we're the only country out there that we're getting to that system, we're only going back to what our population scale was. But if it's properly planned, yes it can happen, but the issue is for the NPF is getting that right." (Interview 4)

Economism Revealed

As it turned out, according to the ESRI modelling belatedly published with the final NPF, population growth was to be principally propelled, not by natural increase, but by sustained in-migration as a consequence of, "a relatively benign scenario which would see Irish GDP grow by 3 per cent or more each year until 2040" (Morgenroth, 2018, p.5). As presented in the NPF:

> "It is clear that an increase in net in migration to Ireland could have a positive impact on future population growth. While the reverse also applies, the ESRI projected outlook, which is a midrange scenario, is based on sustained in-migration and economic growth to 2040." (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.25)

In other words, the NPF population projections were fundamentally tied to the international immigration patterns that would occur from a continued development trajectory of sustained economic expansion:

> "It should be noted that with the natural increase declining as a source of population growth, … the projections are more sensitive to variations in the migration assumptions. However, a larger population due to larger immigrant flows needs to be consistent with the underlying economic model. The baseline scenario of the ESRI Economic Outlook is a very benign scenario with growth rates that exceed those projected for most international economies. A more positive demographic scenario would need to be accompanied by an even more positive economic scenario." (Morgenroth, 2018, p.47)

Little information is adduced as to how the assumed 3 per cent average GDP growth rate was actually arrived at, only that as per the ESRI's attendant '*Economic Outlook*' (Bergin et al., 2016), it accords with the past, "sustainable

long-term real growth rate of the Irish economy" (Morgenroth, 2018, p.21). As Harvey (2014) has observed, the much used 3 per cent average growth rate seems to be the generally accepted rule of thumb for capitalist economies based on the average growth rate of the late 20th Century global economy. Future growth projections were thus simply based on linearly extrapolating this past trend into the future. One interviewee, significantly involved in the development of the NPF, did concede, however, that, in contrast to the NSS where demographic change was delivered primarily by natural increase, the NPF demographic projections were implicitly driven by economic assumptions:

> "But in fairness,… the ESRI's work was very much a conscious effort to address maybe the criticisms of the NSS, in that, it was too demographically based, and didn't have enough, if you like, understanding of the economic drivers and factors and assumptions…" (Interview 7)

In reality, as discussed above, there was little criticism of the demographic growth projections in either the NSS or NPF. Moreover, few actors appeared to have any understanding, or any cause to query, the underpinning economic assumptions driving the population projections which were largely accepted as a given. This reflects what Schmelzer (2015), discussed in Chapter 2, labels the 'hegemony of the economic growth paradigm', where the self-evident inevitability of economic expansion is the one inviolable constant in policymaking. To safeguard this authority, there are strict norms as to who gets to participate in making future projections, which are always expert led and driven by elite economic assumptions (Oomen et al., 2021). Indeed, as the ESRI's *Economic Outlook* only provided projections to 2030, the last ten years in the projection horizon were simply, "linearly extrapolated forward to 2040" (Morgenroth, 2018, p.4). This, as one interviewee declared, was how to deal with unpredictable growth futures, you just put, "a straight line across it" (Interview 5). Consequently, the only remaining variable for the NPF to consider was that:

> "Knowing that the economy will expand in the future does not help in identifying where new infrastructure is needed." (Morgenroth, 2018, p.2)

A number of different 'macro-spatial' scenarios were subsequently evaluated to allocate the regional distribution of this growth, albeit the horizon national population projection remained steadfastly constant on the basis of, "[t]he lack of fully worked alternative scenarios at the national level that might encompass higher and lower growth than the baseline… means that such high and low scenarios are not produced in this report" (ibid., p.4)[28]. The only question that remained to be answered was how this population growth was to be spatially, "apportioned across the country" (Interview 4). Therefore, the implications of population growth primarily driven by immigration and as a by-product of economic expansion was generally considered uncontroversial and conspicuously absent from the NPF policy debate:

> "But the assumptions around inward migration are reasonable if you look at what's happening, it's not that controversial. So, I think the overall number in terms of likely projected growth are reasonable assumptions. I think then the question is growth where and planned in what way…[and]… Now how far we want to push that and how far we want to, I suppose, [have] migration policies to serve an economic growth strategy is the political question." (Interview 6)

This is possibly reflective of Ireland's mostly untroubled experience with immigration as a relatively recent phenomenon and principally from other Caucasian European countries. However, one interviewee struck a note of caution concerning the closed national consensus on the merits of future population growth driven by immigration:

> "… I think the complex thing in the message there is that, increasingly that population growth will be formed of non-Irish people and people coming

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[28] Notably, in a separate study by Wren et al. (2017), cited extensively in the analysis underpinning the ESRI projections, three hypothetical population scenarios were examined, whereby the difference between the 'Low' and 'High' population scenario was over 800,000 by 2030. However, the possibility of this lower population growth was simply discounted in the NPF.

from elsewhere… and I do fear that, you know, people don't make that connection and they think somehow, they assume that it'll just be people having more children and settling down in a rural context to repopulate the parish or the county… So, I think those dynamics aren't quite fully understood [when] people, very likely talk about growth." (Interview 11)

This begs the question as to why this was not made explicit in the NPF debates and, indeed, may explain why the ESRI population projections were not published during the consultation process. To this point, some interviewees, who had a substantial role in making policy submissions to the NPF on behalf of their local authority, continued to have very little awareness that immigration was the central component of the population projections:

"I'm not sure it is realistic [the population projections], unless there is a specific policy of encouraging in-migration from outside Ireland, [and] that's again very debatable." (Interview 15)

This lack of understanding can, in part, be attributed to the unavailability of the ESRI population projections, alongside their presumed scientific rigor and rationality, during the NPF public consultation process and the generalised strong cultural inclination towards the merits of population expansion, described above, where actors were reluctant to go against the grain. Nevertheless, and despite repeated caveats by the ESRI that heavily emphasised that, "the projections should not be taken as a forecast, but as a scenario that might arise given a set of assumptions and unchanged modelling parameters" and "subject to significant uncertainties" (Morgenroth, 2018, p.15), this singular growth future was phlegmatically transcribed into regional population and housing targets in the final NPF:

"The word 'target' was used because it was preferable to 'allocation' and the way it was seen before was that we had a somehow, kind of a, set of magic numbers or you know, people almost like at our whim to be allocated or dispersed in that way. The target was simply to reflect that there is local ambition and there is a desire to grow and there is a feeling that, you know, that's what marks a healthy place and it's a kind of a, you know, in the wider

context of dispersing population from Dublin or encouraging growth elsewhere, developing our regions, it fits in with that narrative as well." (Interview 11)

Achieving population growth targets was therefore to be the primary "proxy indicator for performance" (Interview 20) and the basic touchstone for measuring the success of the NPF in driving economic growth, disciplining planning policy practice:

> "Yeah, I think planning has to deliver, yeah, economic opportunities. There's jobs and housing, and housing targets are key." (Interview 5)

As described by Brady (2016), similar to the NSS, the primary thrust of the NPF can be best understood as an integrated spatial-economic policy to ensure that selected regional urban centres perform to a certain targeted level of population growth. As such, the economic performance of these centres was indirectly linked to their ability to attract population growth, and *vice versa*:

> "If we fail to create jobs, we will not achieve these population targets because we will not get the immigration required to meet that so-called prediction or target or whatever you may call it." (Interview 18)

In striving to reach targets, regional and local planning policy would thus play a pivotal role in a self-reinforcing process of economic and population growth:

> "I think from the Department's [national government] point of view, if they don't see that growth happening, they're going to start questioning themselves whether it's appropriate to invest in that area… So, I think if [X place] is not seen to be growing or if the population isn't reaching the targets that it set out for it, then I think investment might dry up." (Interview 14)

Indeed to account for the possibility of higher net in-migration (i.e. higher economic growth) over the period to 2040 and, "to enable ambition and flexibility in planning for future growth" (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.25), the overall national population target was eventually set at 1.1 million additional people, which was approximately 25% more than the ESRI projection. The fact that past population projections in previous national

planning iterations did, in the main, come to pass, or were exceeded, provided general confidence that the horizon national population targets could indeed be correctly identified and attained:

> "Yeah, well I think the reality is we do have a growing population and you know, our previous projections have broadly proven correct, so even you know going back to Buchanan, the first attempt at national spatial planning, I think Buchanan's projections from the '66 census to 1986 were correct to within 50,000 people. So, you know, in the 1960s we could do it, in the NSS we have made a national projection and that was correct as well." (Interview 11)[29]

Nevertheless, while the headline national population growth targets were typically undisputed, several interviewees expressed some scepticism as to the ability of the NPF to easily turn demographic change into regional spatial allocation targets:

> "Okay, it might take a projection and turn it into a target, but there's a big assumption there that it is possible to allocate that growth, that population growth to certain centres. It's a big assumption, and it has actually never worked in Ireland. So, I think… the targets are being set out on the basis of the fundamental principle of 'Balanced Regional Development'. And that's what lies behind those." (Interview 21)

This revealing insight is precisely the argument that will be developed in Chapter 5 as to what I suggest is the real rationality, or *Realrationalität*, behind the NPF population growth targets as a spatial fix to decentralise national economic growth and as a palliative means to modulate the increasingly factious socio-spatial tensions associated with geographically uneven development, described above, but which has persistently failed to achieve spatially balanced outcomes (Flyvbjerg, 1996).

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[29] The '*Buchanan Report*', commissioned by the Irish government and published in May 1969, comprised a set of proposals for regional industrial development over the period 1966–86 and is recognised as the first attempt at a national policy related to regional and spatial planning in Ireland (Buchanan, 1968).

Conclusions

As future-orientated praxis, planning is, at its heart, a policy domain that lays claim to imaginations of desirable futures (Albrechts, 2006; Davoudi et al., 2018). It is thus a key repository of what Jasanoff (2015) refers to as the hidden shaper of collectively held, institutionally stabilised and publicly performed policy practices through which this 'futuring' occurs (Hajer and Versteeg, 2019). The proposition put forth in this chapter is that contrary to the received wisdom of the NPF as a strategy to accommodate the inevitable development growth associated with an inexorably expanding population 'that is just going to happen anyway', it was precisely the other way round.

Instead, through deconstructing the 'formal rationality' of the NPF, a deeper unpacking reveals the pre-emptive deployment of significant population growth as a discursive grand narrative for maintaining and reproducing particular growth cultures. This, without doubt, auspicated common sense imaginaries as to what policy actors perceived as plausible and likely in the coming decades, subconsciously positioning their realities to reproduce and legitimate growth-orientated spatial meanings. The self-actualising 'futuring' effects of this 'strong discourse' provided *the* precise means by which the NPF institutionalised the imperative of growth, consonant with the exigencies of the contemporary Irish political economy (Bourdieu, 1998a; Pløger, 2001).

The near exclusive uncritical acceptance of the population targets within the NPF is illustrative of what Erving Goffman (1959) refers to as a dramaturgical 'front-back' relationship. "'Up front' rationality dominates, frequently as rationalization presented as rationality. The front is open to public scrutiny, but it is not the whole story and, typically, not even its most important part. Backstage, hidden from public view, it is power and rationalization which dominate" (Flyvbjerg, 1998b, p.321). This staging elided the NPF's true purpose as a spatial-economic strategy for sustained economic (and immigration) growth to 2040 while simultaneously shrinking the political

space for debate on alternatives towards relatively narrowly defined technical issues around the management and spatial distribution of this growth (Metzger, 2017). Within this consensual milieu there was no place for deliberation on optimal scale, with diverse ensembles of actors, with often diametrically opposing goals, simply bargaining for a greater share of this limitless expansion:

> "… apart from businesspeople, regional development people, we had the social justice sort of people … really just arguing, you know, that a fair share of the cake, that the growth should trickle down to everybody. There was no fundamental critique of growth." (Interview 8)

The NPF therefore provides an instructive site of veridiction, in Foucault's coinage, for defining the social realities of policy actors and, "literally keeping planning's 'dark side' in the dark" (Yiftachel, 1998, p.9). The near-monomaniac exaltation of population growth as both inevitable and synonymous with the public interest and the common good, meant that actors were generally indifferent as to the absence of any published evidence whatsoever substantiating these future demographic claims. Instead, regional decline was represented as the main threat and, as a result, growth had to be prioritised at all costs, and echoing Lefebvre's insights described at the start of Chapter 3, the outcome of this representation of space was:

> "So, we have this kind of mad thing that we just want to keep growing, growing, growing, and it has to be growth in a, you know, in a consistent, coherent way like putting populations into certain locations." (Interview 5)

This was, without doubt, aided and abetted by specific Irish social-historical sensibilities towards depopulation, which provided salutary metaphorical analogues for contemporary spatially imbalanced core-periphery demographic and economic conditions. The use of metaphors, however, were not simply matters of communication about material and social circumstances but profoundly performative of social realities, engendering extremely sanguine sentiments within the cultural register; analogous to a form of

national 'manifest destiny'; towards rapid population growth to reverse peripheral decline. Indeed, one of the most surprising results of this research was the persistent reference to the Great Famine as an anomalous historical disjuncture which must be corrected, and which continued to have a very profound shaping effect on the NPF but rarely acknowledged or articulated in official policy documents.

That answers the question as to by what means Irish planning practice institutionalised the imperative of growth. The next question is how this imperative is applied and pursued in praxis, which is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Growth Harmonies

Introduction

Developing the analysis presented in the previous chapter, which highlights the deep and divisive core-periphery socio-spatial tensions which pervaded NPF policy debates and deconstructs, what I suggest, is the real rationality of the NPF as an implicit spatial-economic strategy for reproducing the consensus for rapid national economic growth, this chapter focuses on the second research question of this thesis: *How has this growth imperative been applied and pursued in practice?*

As discussed in Chapter 3, the importance of storylines in creating common orientations for action is one of the most fundamental ways in which power is exercised in the policy sphere. In accordance with my research hypothesis, this chapter focuses on the hegemonic storyline of 'Balanced Regional Development' (BRD) which, it will be argued, played an essentialised role in maintaining and reproducing planning's growth imperative, providing a harmonious representation of space to prevent political tensions destabilising growth-orientated meanings, and thereby threatening the national growth consensus.

I first focus on the persistent failure of BRD as a policy goal over successive decades which, peculiarly, rather than its critical reappraisal, only served to reflexively trigger redoubled efforts at its more assiduous

application. This chapter therefore advances an alternative understanding of BRD, not so much as a failure, but as a continuously reinvented storyline to create a hermeneutically sealed 'growth first' policy universe which was deeply performative of actors' collective social realities and through which their meanings were ceaselessly positioned and marshalled.

Policy Failing

Ever since Buchanan, but particularly following the publication of the NSS in 2002, the promise of BRD has been the holy grail for Irish spatial planning policy:

> "Many of these projections and trends indicate that while economic progress has been rapid, its geographical—or spatial—distribution will continue to be unbalanced in many respects. This could adversely affect our international competitiveness because of impacts upon the attractiveness of areas, particularly in relation to skilled workforces that are increasingly mobile. A realisation is growing that there is now a need for more 'balanced development'—balance across socio-economic groups, balance between economic growth, overall quality of life and the environment, and balance in terms of spatial or geographic locations." (Government of Ireland, 2001, p.6)

The BRD concept emerged to prominence following the publication in 1999 of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) and advanced as an antidote to increasingly centralising national space economies and to achieve, "a more even geographical distribution of growth across the territory of the EU (aiming at cohesion)" (CEC, 1999, p.7). The ESDP reimagined the European territory as a dynamic, networked and polycentric urban system grounded within market and competition orientated spatial logics as a precondition for sustainable, cohesive growth in support of EU single market and political integration. As discussed in Chapter 2, at an abstract level the underlying philosophy of the ESDP was arguably much more influential than its content, "revealed in the way that the hegemonic status of economic knowledge shapes the concepts, frameworks and mindsets of stakeholders within the field of

spatial planning in the EU member states" (Richardson and Jensen, 2000, p.516).

The new ESDP discourse proliferated widely and, although not expressly referenced, was subsumed into Irish spatial policy via the NSS (Davoudi and Wishardt, 2005). Indeed, its assimilation was so successful that the NSS was frequently cited by ESDP proponents as an exemplar of the 'polycentric turn' in European spatial planning policy (MacFeely, 2016). Regardless, its impact, like Buchanan before it, was, as described by one interviewee, an "utter failure" (Interview 11). The defining pattern of the two decades succeeding its publication was one of intensifying spatial imbalances and extensifying urban sprawl. By 2017, the demographic and economic dominance of Dublin and its extended Eastern and Midland Region Assembly (see Figure 3; p.34) area accounted for some 40% of the national population and 49% of economic output, significantly exceeding that of comparable peer countries, and precipitating the socio-political perception of acute spatial imbalances recounted in Chapter 4 (DHPLG, 2017). When it was announced in 2013 that the NSS was being officially abandoned to make way for a successor strategy (the NPF), the then government minister responsible simply remarked that, "nothing had happened" (O'Brien, 2013). This litany of policy failure and unfulfilled promise of BRD was succinctly captured in one pre-draft public consultation submission to the NPF:

> "The need to tackle the issue has been recognised since the 1960s, and there have been several 'strategies' and 'initiatives' rolled out by various governments to address it, from the time of the Buchanan Report (1969) through to the National Spatial Strategy (2002), the controversial decentralisation programme (2003), and even an Atlantic Gateways strategy within the framework of the NSS (2006). They have all failed abysmally." (Submission A0251, p.6)

However, notwithstanding BRD's persistent failure to deliver upon its policy goals, and the very significant gap between its policy rhetoric and how the

policy played out in reality, an assiduous commitment to the ideal of spatial balance steadfastly endured as the governing doctrine for the NPF:

> "We need to manage more balanced growth between the three regions because at the moment Dublin, and to a lesser extent the wider Eastern and Midland area, has witnessed an overconcentration of population, homes and jobs. We cannot let this continue unchecked…" (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.11)

This begs the question as to why a concept, which is perceived to have so palpably failed, continued to have such routine salience and uncritical acceptance amongst policy actors as an auspicious policy paradigm? Is its omnipresence simply indicative of an enduring belief in planning's ability to control future spatial change or, as per my research hypothesis, could this inviolability be suggestive of a more fundamental role that BRD performs in maintaining planning's growth imperative? To quote Wildavsky (1973) in his seminal essay on planning failure:

> "To err is human; to sanctify the perpetuation of mistakes is something else. If governments perseverate in national planning, it must be because their will to believe triumphs over their experience." (p.153)

The persistence of policy failure has been the subject of extensive theorisation within policy mobilities literature as to why the potential for learning the lessons of past failures is seldom realised (Davidson, 2019; Lovell, 2019). This scholarship seeks to empirically investigate and conceptualise how policies transfer internationally as best practices or as cautionary tales of worst-practices to avoid (McCann, 2011). Paradoxically in the case of BRD, its transnational currency as a policy totemic is continuously bolstered, not by succeeding, but by consistently failing, resulting in continuous redoubled efforts at its more resolute application (Peck, 2011).

A key diagnosis within the literature is that failure is frequently excused because of poor execution or other external technical considerations. For example, the NPF advances a number of justifications as to why the NSS

failed, including that it "was weakened by proposals regarding decentralisation of the public service" (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.16) or that it:

> "designated too many [urban] centres, created a perception of 'winners and losers', wasn't adequately supported by the political or local government systems or by a subsequent relaxation of controls on new rural housing, that it lacked an economic dimension and did not have statutory legislative backing." (DHPLG, 2017, p.14)

Therefore, it is insisted that, "[w]hilst the experience of the previous National Spatial Strategy (NSS) didn't influence the pattern of development in Ireland as intended, it provides valuable lessons for future planning at a national scale" (DHPLG, 2017, p.14). These *a posteriori* justifications are revealing of what Jessop (1998) terms the 'self-reflexive irony' of governance. That is, despite experience and strong likelihood of continued failure, policymakers proceed as if success is always possible through, for example, improved institutional design, knowledge or political practice, as was again strikingly apparent throughout the interviews undertaken for this thesis:

> "Unfortunately, [the NSS] came off the rails with some political decisions over decentralisation and in terms of the actual commitment to it, but I think we've learned from that." (Interview 13)

This pervasive post-rationalisation of the NSS as a failure of technical realisation tallies with many academic accounts which have subsequently emerged of the NSS as a strategy that simply did not live up to expectations, disabled by an implementation gap between its technical-rational goals and reactionary political opportunism (Walsh, 2012; MacFeely, 2016). This is a viewpoint that was again also widely shared by those interviewed for this thesis:

> "I worked in the planning system here so, you know, arguably there's a degree of culpability but it was just our system was not capable of delivering

that strategy. And it goes back to that hyper-local franchisee system of local authorities." (Interview 11)

Although superficially persuasive, for Davidson (2019) such accounts lack sufficient concern with underlying causation and, at best, provide a partial explanation and, at worst, are part of the problem, simultaneously overdetermining technical reasoning whilst systematically depoliticising political-economic factors (McCann and Ward, 2015). Instead, as suggested by Howlett et al. (2015);

> "… the persistence of policy failures across both time and space suggests the sources… lie not only beyond idiosyncratic elements such as the background and composition of policy decision makers but also beyond technical considerations in policy design or implementation, which are fairly easily amendable for correction." (p.210)

This corresponds with my own study of NSS failure (Daly, 2016), discussed in Chapter 1, where, rather than being seen as an important watershed moment for thoroughgoing critical reflection, there was a distinct unwillingness amongst policy actors to engage in a deeper political and economic introspection, alongside attendant efforts to quickly reinscribe a proactive new growth agenda in support of shifting political priorities and economic realities:

> "I don't think there's been any effort, really, to sit back and reflect. I've certainly said it, that we can't be passing off the blame on everybody else. And I said it at a conference—didn't go down too well, although people did come up to me afterwards and said, okay, you did need to say that. I said some of our plans had been lousy, and absolutely unrealistic, and things like that… When you have a system that's clearly not up to scratch, a large proportion of the blame has to go to the system. Without saying that you're not without fault, but it's not nurses' fault that the health system is collapsing. Although, maybe you could argue the nurses should be more involved in, actually, around discussions around the organisation. Okay, that's fair enough. Or doctors. And same with planners, they need to

probably be more proactive in broader discussions around the planning structure, and I think we should have had that." (Interview 21)

In fact, as reviewed in the literature presented in Chapter 2 and will be further discussed later in this chapter, in ways that contradict conventional thinking, there is growing evidence that 'failure matters' (Chang, 2017) and is endemic within entrepreneurial, neoliberal forms of (spatial) governance and its dynamics of economic and social reproduction (Brenner et al., 2010b). For example, as described by Grange (2016), "one of the means to achieve culture change in planning has been to implement a self-perception of failure among planners, in order to generate a self-governed desire among them to adjust in order to better meet political objectives" (p.2). Therefore, in seeking to understand why failure matters, "[w]hat demands attention is not the end product of botched governance efforts but the actual practices and conditional forces that create these moments of policyfailing" (Wells, 2019, p.475). Or as Wildavsky again rhetorically asks:

> "One good question deserves another: can it be rational to fail? Now anyone can do the best he can and still not succeed. Suppose, however, that the failures of planning are not peripheral or accidental but integral to its very nature. Suppose planning as presently constituted cannot work in the environment in which it is supposed to function. Is it irrational to entertain this hypothesis?" (Wildavsky, 1973, p.128)

Seeking Balance

Viewed within the lens of urban political economy theories of geographically uneven development, the unbroken faith amongst policymakers in BRD is potentially explainable as:

> "It is not just a question of what does capitalism do to geography but rather of what geography can do for capitalism." (Smith, 1990, p.4)

In other words, as has been previously discussed at the start of Chapter 2, overcoming spatial inequalities and the polarising effects of capitalist

spatialisation are insuperable. Rather, the process of capital accumulation actively intensifies and maintains spatial inequalities, and the increasing gap between more and less developed regions is structurally necessary for its own reproduction, generating its now ubiquitous core-periphery economic geography (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). As Harvey (2014) has observed:

> "Without uneven geographical development and its contradictions, capital would long ago have ossified and fallen into disarray." (p.147)

Through processes of cumulative causation, advanced regions constantly draw economic activity back into themselves because of their size, path-dependent returns to scale and necessity to avoid devaluation of emplaced fixed capital that would otherwise be threatened by redistribution, as apprehended in one submission by a Dublin local authority to the Draft NPF:

> "Viewing the resolution of these problems as being about a redistributive approach to population growth and economic activity to numerous other urban locations across Ireland is not evidenced by any supporting research findings… Implementation of such a policy could damage the national economy, sacrifice the returns to scale that essential capital investment in Dublin can achieve, and very significantly reduce capital investment in Dublin's aging infrastructure." (Submission B0820, p.3)

At the same time, overconcentration presents a very serious risk of overaccumulation and a potential fetter on continued national economic expansion:

> "Dublin's success as a city-region is a double edged sword. It has enabled Ireland to compete in an international context but such success has also given rise to pressures in areas such as housing, transport and infrastructural requirements, which affect competitiveness." (DHPLG, 2017, p. 23)

This apprehension, often expressed in polemical terms, of Dublin as an overheating "monster" (Submission A0038) that is "out of control" (Submission A0235) and will "eat" (Melia, 2017) the rest of Ireland was a common refrain right across the spectrum of documentary and interview data

gathered for this thesis. Moreover, reinforced by the schismatic political tensions around perceptions of increasing regional imbalances, as presented in Chapter 4, the chief political demand was that:

> "… the rampant progression of the exponential growth of Dublin will continue, to the detriment of most regions of Ireland, leading to depopulation and further marginalisation of people who remain committed to live in rural Ireland. Such an outcome cannot be contemplated." (Submission A0277, p.2)

Redistribution was also justified on the basis that overconcentration in Dublin and its adjacent region risked storing up potentially destabilising political antagonisms in the capital itself:

> "If we do nothing and allow the market to determine the next 25 years, this part of Ireland will become unpleasant, angry and unstable." (McWilliams, 2017)

However, of greater concern from a NPF policy perspective, was the potential impact on the durability of national economic growth:

> "If Dublin is underperforming, Ireland is underperforming. Should the Dublin City-Region suffer a loss of competitiveness and become a less attractive place in which to invest as a result of housing and infrastructural bottlenecks, investment and influence will inevitably be attracted to other similar city-regions in Europe or elsewhere." (DHPLG, 2017, p.23)

As a result, "failure to optimise regional performance will result in unsustainable pressures on Dublin" (Government of Ireland, 2017, p.24). This was described in the NPF as the 'Business as Usual' scenario whereby:

> "Unbalanced growth, largely focused in Dublin and the surrounding region creates a significant risk, whereby not achieving the economy's full potential will give rise to a shortfall in Ireland's economic performance with serious and long-lasting consequences for future living standards and the quality of life overall, across all regions of the country." (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.138)

To offset this risk, as has been detailed in Chapter 2, within the theory of geographically uneven development, countervailing forces, typically actioned through the state, are compelled to persistently strive towards the levelling of spatial differences and to open up new terrains for accelerated economic expansion by way of spatial development policies and geographical restructuring, i.e. "by 'bending' the economy through targeted investment to reverse the peripheralization of the regions" (Submission B0695, p.11). While some NPF consultees maintained that addressing regional imbalances could only be achieved through "positive discrimination" (Submission B0431, p.9) in favour of less-developed regions (referred to as the NPF 'Regional Dominance' scenario), i.e. "putting the East on a diet" (Submission A0641, p.4), this was rejected as, "neither realistic nor implementable given the significance of Dublin and would result in a diminished scale of overall national development" (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.26). In the end, a 'Regional Parity' scenario was selected as the primary policy objective for the NPF (National Policy Objective 1a), charting a 'balanced' middle course whereby:

> "The projected level of population and employment growth in the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly area will be at least matched by that of the Northern and Western and Southern Regional Assembly areas combined." (ibid.)

Thus theorised, the NPF is demonstrative of the dialectically intertwined, conflicting and mutually inseparable moments of spatial differentiation and equalisation under capitalism. BRD can therefore be conceived, not as a benign policy reaction to reverse deterministic regional decline in response to supposedly exogenous geoeconomic forces, but the 'actually existing' policy expression of a restless search for a 'spatial fix' to geographically circumvent and displace capital's perpetual surplus absorption problem whereby, as concluded in Chapter 4, maintaining national economic growth and competitiveness was *the* overriding national policy priority (Soja, 1980).

Fictional Expectations

In this Sisyphean quest for balance, failure is guaranteed. This is, "because of the simple reality that not every place can win simultaneously, but also because winning and losing creates complex effects. Failure creates poverty and inequality among the losers, harming people and places and their capacity to compete in the future" (Nunn, 2020, p.952). Moreover, as further expressed in a submission by DLR to the Draft NPF, the policy tendency towards equilibrium is constantly negated by equally powerful counterforces which tend towards disequilibrium:

> "Any suppression of natural growth in the Dublin Region counterbalanced by a rapid and exponential acceleration of growth in other city regions [would] represent an acute shift from long standing and well embedded patterns that is undesirable, unsustainable, and likely to prove unachievable." (Submission B0685, p.1)

The resulting uneven spatial development patterns are consequently systematically determinate, even deliberate, as opposed to deterministic (Smith, 2008). Thus, as pithily observed by the Futures Academy (2008):

> "At a fundamental level lies the very real possibility that at the grand scale we are planning for a future that will never happen." (p.7)

The futility associated with attempting to intervene in market forces driving spatial development patterns, particularly for hyper-globalised service sector dominated economies like Ireland, and to redirect growth to other regions was further apprehended in a pre-draft submission to the NPF by Mr. Conor Skehan, a lecturer in planning at Technical University Dublin and prominent free-market critic of Irish national spatial policy:

> "… it is very important to articulate the reality that a small open economy has relatively little capacity to 'shape' its future. For this reason, success as defined by a prescriptive 'blue-print' approach must be viewed as an inappropriate strategy that will fail." (Submission A0572, p.6)

In a further submission to the Draft NPF, the same author similarly remarked that BRD was an, "attempt to address issues that are ideological obsessions of the planning profession but little practical significance in practice" (Submission B0678, p.9).

Within this reading, BRD can be seen as symptomatic of what Alfred North Whitehead refers to as 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness', in mistaking an abstract theoretical construct for an (unrealisable) concrete reality. Nonetheless, as insisted by Beckert (2017), fictional expectations of imagined futures are critical to the functioning of capitalism, which works only so long as we have faith in its future benefits. By transforming political conflicts over distribution into technocratic spatial management questions with apparent 'win–win' outcomes, BRD provides what could be termed an 'imaginary resolution of real contradictions' and the fundamental promise of future capitalism, while simultaneously masking its true nature (Schmelzer, 2015).

The evidence offered above supports my hypothesis as to the key role of BRD in maintaining planning's growth imperative through seeking to preserve the stable power relations upon which reproducible economic growth depends and forestalling any destabilisation of growth-orientated meanings:

> "So, it meant that yes, we do have to provide that level of ambition and aspiration for every place because that's what the system demands. It… would not have been possible to achieve this strategy without doing that in an Irish political context." (Interview 11)

This revealing insight as to the systemic imperative of satisfying subnational growth aspirations accords with Hickel's (2017) analysis that growth is essentially a substitute for equality and as long as there is the prospect of growth there is hope, making large spatial differentials continuously tolerable:

> "One of the reasons growth is so appealing to politicians is that it allows them to sidestep the thorny problem of distribution. As long as the pie is

growing there's less pressure to redistribute existing resources. Even the promise of growth acts as a kind of damper on redistributive politics." (p.412)

Ironically, this further accords with Rodríguez-Pose's (2018) analysis, at a European scale, that the long-term and deepening territorial inequalities and the perceived unfairness of regions being 'left behind' is having detrimental political consequences, manifesting in the emergence of new 'geographies of discontent' as the root cause of a populist 'revenge' (e.g. Brexit), presenting a "serious and real challenge to the current economic and political systems" (p.33). Therefore, he concludes that business as usual is not an option and implementing EU cohesion and regional development policy to achieve more balanced development is a crucial strategy to stave off democratic revolts. Indeed, in later empirical work, Rodríguez-Pose and Dijkstra (2020) argue that:

> "Cohesion Policy has played, and can continue to play, an important role in keeping the rise of discontent in Europe at bay and, consequently, stymying the ascent of Eurosceptic and anti-system forces." (p.15)

The harmonious imaginary of 'balance' thus offers a 'good word', providing an essential discursive glue, performatively deployed in a strategic and persuasive way to marshal actor's orientations, expectations and rules of conduct to deliver a shared sense of cohesion and coherence towards the future, acting as a magical ward to sublimate a powerful growthist common sense:

> "I don't think there's any area not selected for growth. I think what it [the NPF] was trying to do was the rates of growth are going to be different in different locations. So, the urban location is where we're trying to accelerate growth at a higher rate but there's also going to be growth in rural locations, just not at the same rate." (Interview 14)

The universal promise of future growth therefore acts as a bulwark against 'noisy' political demands for real spatial redistribution, instead offering the

chimeric stratagem that everyone can be a 'winner' if only more balanced spatial policies are pursued, but which studiously avoided translating them into real redistribution:

> "The reality is, you know, Dublin's influence and the east is actually, it's unstoppable, … even just to break that pattern would be an achievement … So, what might be described as 'noise' around… allowing kind of more peripheral or smaller counties to have a growth aspiration is actually worth it if you consider the overall picture of breaking that pattern and the relativities of the other cities and ensuring that the core element of the [NPF] strategy does start to achieve." (Interview 11)

This explains why BRD steadfastly retained its ritual incantatory resonance in the NPF, despite its demonstrable, persistent failure. Its primary utility was, not as a realisable material policy programme, but as a palliative, fictional discourse of political necessity, an 'imaginative geography' imbued with power and which cannot be resiled from, even if it is inimical to the underlying growth logic of the economy where Dublin increasingly acts as a 'national champion' on the global stage, inescapably drawing growth evermore towards the centre (Moore-Cherry and Tomaney, 2019). "Using the metaphor of balance", Grant (2022) insists, provides a sufficiently vague and slippery euphemism through which neoliberalism strategically usurps and incorporates democratic resistance in ways that, "naturalizes conflict and growth, masks mechanisms of power and choice, and privileges some participants and perspectives over others" (p.13). The search for spatial balance may therefore be usefully described as the core illusion of planning ideology, "a particular cast of mind…, a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies, and a fantasy which unleashes passions" (Sachs, 1992, p.xvi).

BRD, however, not only enabled and legitimised material planning practices but was also simultaneously enacted and maintained by them, giving continuity and permanence to growth-orientated meanings amongst policy

actors, bringing an illusory imagined future into the policy present (Gregory, 1995). Nevertheless, for the discourse to hold firm proponents needed to continuously evolve its meaning over time in order to maintain a clear and convincing logic to support its continued existence in response to its endless failures. This suggests that, as reviewed in Chapter 2, in seeking to better understand how planning's growth imperative is applied and pursued in practice, critical attention must be paid to BRD's episodic mutations which seek to actively displace and defer, even to capitalise upon, its own endemic failures in order to prevent it irreversibly collapsing under its own weight of contradictions.

Re-Failing Forward

An explicit understanding that spatial imbalances are intrinsically necessary for the reproduction of economic growth is not, as has been also apprehended in the previous section, the sole preserve of Marxist political economy interpretations. Indeed, in a curious correspondence, from a free-market perspective they are also recognised, most unequivocally by the World Bank in their 2009 '*Reshaping Economic Geography*' report:

> "Policy makers should identify and execute strategies that balance development outcomes across areas by means other than resisting the forces of unbalanced growth—because that is tantamount to fighting economic growth itself." (World Bank, 2009, p.259)

In other words, economic growth is not a 'win-win' but always a 'zero-sum' spatial process and, not only is the notion of 'balanced growth' a contradiction in terms but, properly managed, spatial imbalances are the prime vehicle for economic expansion. In fact, Ireland was singled out by the World Bank as an instructive model for how the active implementation of a 'space-blind' policy approach was *the* principal catalyst for rapid early 21st Century convergence with European living standards:

"What is behind Ireland's success? Among other things, recognising the national benefits of spatial concentration, and coordinated efforts to promote domestic integration through a sensible blend of spatially blind social services and well-placed investments in infrastructure." (Gill, 2010, para. 13)

The trouble is that throughout this period Ireland's official national spatial policy, as articulated in the NSS, was BRD. This report, which was directly cited in the Draft NPF (p.23), but eventually omitted in the final published version, warns that too often:

"Governments intervene (usually incorrectly) to spread the benefits of economic growth more evenly across space. Even when the imperatives are political, they have economic consequences... The economic costs of mistakes can be large and lasting: recognizing the importance of economic geography means realizing that once producers and people make decisions on where to locate, they can be difficult to reverse." (World Bank, 2009, p.34)[30]

Consequently, it is recommended that the main objective of spatial planning policies should be 'people-based', i.e. to move people to places where there are opportunities, not opportunities to people, as was originally implicitly acknowledged in the Draft NPF:

"Practical experience and research shows that in an economy and society such as Ireland's, simultaneously fostering economic growth on the one hand and spreading it out smoothly or evenly across a country, is neither realistic nor practical." (Government of Ireland, 2017, p.32)

In response, prominent academic commentator and author on Irish regional and spatial policy, Professor Jim Walsh of the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis at Maynooth University, wrote in a public consultation submission:

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[30] See Harvey (2009) for a commentary on the World Bank report from a Marxist political economy perspective: "As a result of intellectual inertia, it has taken the World Bank economists until now to get us back to where we were in the 1960s, but this time backed by mathematical models that tell us once more how capitalist space should be organized so as to produce more capital in the hope that one day this will redound to the benefit of all."

"I would caution against the reference to the World Bank report on p.23 —
citing this report on its own gives a privileged position to World Bank
wisdom that is not universally shared — you may be handing a stick to some
commentators to beat the conceptual underpinning of the NSS/NPF!"
(Submission B0939, p.5)

Nevertheless, although similarly sharply censured by the Western
Development Commission as a "very strong, debatable statement [which]
seems to undermine the entire basis and purpose of the NPF" (Submission
B0443, p.12), the World Bank's position that, only once international economic
convergence is achieved should countries consider internal policies to support
BRD, was revealingly alluded to by one interviewee involved in the drafting
of the NPF:

"When you get to a certain level of development as a society in terms of
living standards and everything else, well then you should start looking at
within that society and country where things should be and how the
imbalances and the things [that] should be addressed." (Interview 11)

The above statement is an implied retrospective recognition that, despite a
longstanding official national spatial policy commitment, at least rhetorically,
to spread the benefits of economic growth more evenly across space, it was the
actual failure of BRD which drove Ireland's rapid economic expansion since
the turn of the century, motivated by a surreptitious preoccupation with
national rather than regional growth. So, to answer Wildavsky's earlier
question, within the contemporary conditions of neo-capitalism, it can be
rational to fail!

The NSS experience supports my research hypothesis as to the
primary purpose of BRD as a symbolic strategy of political appeasement. It
further corresponds with Peck and Theodore's (2015) observation, as
referenced in Chapter 2, that rather than being seen as a flaw, policy failure is
an essential feature of contemporary neoliberal policymaking, marking its
tendency to "fail forward" (Peck, 2010, p.6). Failure also provides

neoliberalism with a convenient scapegoat as to why planning's policy promises rarely deliver on their objectives, justifying the further capture and reorientation of praxis for pro-growth ends and appropriating geographically uneven development as a means to promote the universality of its own project (Gunder, 2016). This near-perpetual state of reform and counter-reform creates the very conditions of crisis instability that helps feed the self-perception of constant failure amongst spatial policymakers, generating a persistent self-governed desire to further ingratiate planning values to better meet the short-term political exigencies of governing ideologies (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2016). Thus, the procreant effects of power ensure there is no need to have to learn from past failures, with chronic 'underperformance' providing the justificatory basis for the continual reassembling and reiteration of policy renditions, "within narrow (financial, institutional, ideological) parameters as a means of engendering continuing adaption and development, in the context of repeated failure under neoliberal hegemony; managed through expert networks and the work of evaluation science" (p.225).

The key role of expert think-tanks and the influence of elite academics; driven by their ostensibly valued status, objectivity and credibility; in the transmission chain of ideas from academe to policy was once more evidenced by the highly influential role of the ESRI, not only in providing validation for the population targets (see Chapter 4), but also in reworking and rearticulating the mainstream economic geography theories underpinning the NPF:

> "The uneven distribution of economic activity has long been observed internationally and in Ireland. Research has shown that this distribution is neither random nor are geographic factors responsible for much of the observed spatial patterns. Physical geography (such as topography, location by the sea or along a river) only accounts for about 20 per cent of the variation of spatial distribution of GDP per capita with the remainder being due either to man-made agglomeration economies or to the interaction between man-made agglomeration economies and geography." (Morgenroth, 2018, p.73)

Simply interpreted, spatial advantage and disadvantage is due to the presence or absence of sufficient urban agglomerations of scale. Somewhat counterintuitively, it therefore follows that:

> "More balanced growth also means more concentrated growth." (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.11)

Agglomeration theory, which has become something of a 'New Regionalism' or 'New Economic Geography' orthodoxy in recent decades in disseminating authoritative narratives of its own inevitability (see Massey, 2007), was subsequently reinstalled as the preeminent discursive claim within the NPF, unveiling particular preanalytic conceptions of idealised spatial futures that "share in common a view that large-scale urban agglomerations need to be fostered to drive future growth" (Hincks et al., 2017, p.653), as was further expressed in the NPF:

> "The evidence suggests a continued trend towards clustering and the emergence of large urban centres as focal points of national and global trade. It is apparent that cities are the key regional drivers for economic activity… and that this trend is likely to continue." (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.56)

The power of agglomeration theory in providing the principal source of evidence for the NPF may be explained by the mathematised nature of the economics discipline, which provides a utilitarian veneer of innate impartiality, superiority and technicality (Bristow, 2005). As McCloskey (1983) asserts:

> "The metaphors of economics convey the authority of Science, and often convey, too, its claims to ethical neutrality." (p.508)

On the other hand, within a discourse analytical perspective it can be simply critiqued as a doxic strategy, constitutive of a particular understanding of social reality, providing the normative rationality for policy biases shaped by the prevailing epistemic nostrums of economic growth and competitiveness, coloured by its preferred state of affairs, and which, "in true virtuous circle

fashion, reinforces the social power of the discipline" (Schoenberger, 2016, p.5). Or as Lefebvre (2003) more candidly puts it:

> "The generalized terrorism of the quantifiable accentuates the efficiency of repressive space, amplifies it without fear and without reproach, all the more so because of its self-justifying nature, (ideo-logic) its apparent scientificity."
> (p.185)

According to Webb and Collis (2000), "the starting point for New Regionalists is almost always the concept of regional competitiveness" (p.858), which, à la its doyens Florida (2004)[31] and Glaeser (2011), celebrate the triumphant capacity of agglomerative city-regions as productive spatial-analytical categories of concentrated physical propinquity, economic synergies and institutional density that work as spaces of competitiveness to organise economies into regions to manage and maintain interregional competition in the global marketplace, and to best attract mobile international capital and employment to produce economic wealth:

> "You know, … it means that basically cities, large urban areas, are where it's at in terms of attracting investment and talent and all of that." (Interview 11)

As has also been discussed in Chapter 4, urban growth was extensively rationalised based on the need to 'catch-up' to European norms due to Ireland's low level of urbanisation and historic underdevelopment:

> "There needs to be a spatial policy focus on urban agglomeration so that Ireland's weak urban population percentage share can increase rapidly from its present 62% level. Densification also requires a new spatial growth model: one that is driven by core-periphery complementarity and centripetal agglomeration." (Submission A0490, p.2)

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[31] It is noteworthy that Florida was invited as a keynote speaker to the International Academy of Urbanism's *'Cork – A City on the Rise'* conference held in June 2018. The conference also resulted in the publication *of 'The Cork Papers', a collection of twenty essays on how to make Cork a leading European sustainable city'* (Brady, 2019) and which was referenced in a number of submissions to the NPF.

There are abundant statements throughout the documentary and interview data gathered for this thesis to illustrate just how deep this 'city-first' rationality systematically penetrated the social realities of actors:

> "So, even just to be sort of focusing on cities and city development to drive regions is something that, you know we now have permission to do, let's call it, in a system sense. So, that's what the NPF enabled. You know and it did, it really did sort of provide a focus and set up a challenge. It doesn't mean it will necessarily be done or will happen like that, no, we have to try and make it so because that's what we strive to do, and it has been agreed and it is a strategy." (Interview 11)

This contribution is representative of the pervasive and uncritical acceptance of the academic policy advice on the correlation between agglomeration, competitiveness and productivity as a widely accepted matter of fact, geared towards ensuring supply-side urbanisation of economic growth and to reinforce and intensify the specialised, competitive advantage of certain urban locations as fulcrums for regional economic performance, as again recommended by the ESRI for the NPF:

> "Scale economies inherent in larger urban centres or conurbations result in higher productivity, reduce the cost of providing infrastructure, and allow for a greater diversity of economic activities, which have been found to be growth enhancing. This would suggest that the projected development patterns, being focused on the large urban centres would be growth enhancing." (Morgenroth, 2018, p.9)

For Savini (2021), and as will be further discussed in Chapter 7, this mode of spatial coordination can be best defined as 'functionally polycentric', trapping regions into permanent dependence on global economic growth. Thus, as suggested by Lovering (1999), 'New Regionalism' simply amounts to 'theory led by policy' and, "smuggles in a *weltanschauung* which focuses attention on capitalist rebirth through technological and organizational revolution and ignores the other story which could be told of contemporary capitalism" (p.392, italics in original). That other story, as will be further developed below,

is that such spatial policies, where the only viable solution advanced as a route out of neoliberal failure is a neoliberal response, always inexorably fail (Nunn, 2020).

Place Boosterism

At the outset of the NPF preparation process, instead of the much-criticised designation of a slew of eighteen urban gateways and hubs distributed across the country (as had formerly been the approach in the NSS, for political reasons), the focus was to be on strategically selecting just five regional cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford (see Figure 3; p.34)[32]. This was recommended by the NPF Expert Advisory Group, "… as they have the largest populations, the best transport connections, the highest levels of economic activity and the critical mass of key services such as education and health. They are the key to regional and national success" (Dorgan et al., 2014, p.7). Again, the overriding goal was, not spatial redistribution, but an assiduous commitment to the primacy of national macro-economic growth:

> "The development of counter-poles to Dublin is likely to increase national growth, but given the size of Ireland and the fact that agglomeration economies only arise for urban areas of significant size, the optimal number of counter-poles is small."(Morgenroth, 2018, p.10)

As has also been discussed in Chapter 2, for Brenner (1998b), in contrast to the state spatial project of equalisation associated with Keynesian welfare states, reconcentration within decentred subnational city-regions is the hallmark of 'glocalisation', synonymous with the rise of post-Fordist entrepreneurial approaches to urban-spatial governance and the emergence of the

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[32] A number of 'Regional Centres' (Sligo, Athlone, Letterkenny (-Derry), and Drogheda-Dundalk (-Newry)) were subsequently added in the final NPF as a result of political criticism as to the absence of selected urban centres in the midlands and northwest. Indeed, it was decided to officially launch the NPF in Sligo, as described by one interviewee: "I think that it was more than just optics. I think that was trying to say this isn't just about Dublin. It's not just about the big cities. It is about the other smaller urban locations and the need to grow" (Interview 14).

'competition state', as further recommended in one pre-draft submission to the NPF:

> "We proposed the idea of Ireland focusing energy on developing a small number of globally connected regionally distributed cities with a local feel–so called 'glocal cities'—by densifying and modernising our urban models of planning." (Submission A0641, p.4)

Within this assessment, and as has been theorised above, cities are no longer perceived as being contained within national economies and urban hierarchies, but increasingly embedded ever more directly within the global economy. Indicative of the key role of the state in its own de-/reterritorialization as an 'accumulation strategy' (Jessop, 1990), the unstated objective was to restructure national productive capacities through enhancing place-specific socio-economic assets as favourable locational nodes for footloose transnational capital flows (Bristow, 2005; Jones, 2019):

> "The NPF should set the framework so that each region is enabled to develop real differentiators and magnets of attraction in order to realise its potential. It needs to redress the interpretation of balanced regional development away from redistribution of economic activity and population to achieve economic 'equalisation' across the country." (Submission A0660, p.4)

Turning the old planning maxim of 'survey before plan' on its head, the NPF strategy was predicated on the supposition that globalisation will continue to create a world of intense interregional competition:

> "The context within which we operate continues to change and it is important that Ireland continues to position itself for growth and success in an increasingly competitive global environment." (DHPLG, 2017, p. 7)

This presumed inevitability was further identified in a consultation submission by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) to the Draft NPF:

> "In a sense, therefore, the ICTU is concerned that the framework starts at the end rather than at the beginning. If public policy is geared to achieve ends that are predetermined without reference to the identified needs of citizens,

the risk is always that we will see wrong decisions and decisions that, even if apparently in tune with citizens' needs, have unforeseen impacts." (Submission B0180, p.3)

This distinct imaginary that the successful extraction of the benefits of globalisation rests on city-regional agglomerations also neatly corresponded with Ireland's national industrial strategy that internationally traded services, science and technology ought to be the most important sources of employment growth. Accordingly, as described by the Irish Business and Employers Confederation, we must therefore:

"Reimagine our city regions by preparing a blueprint for their long-term development. They must be adaptable and capable of responding to rising urbanisation, new technologies, service patterns and innovations over the next two decades." (Submission B0783, p. 4)

In recognition that "the same level or even type of growth can't occur everywhere, [and] some degree of prioritisation and some hard choices will be necessary" (DHPLG, 2017, p.2), the new discourse which emerged in the NPF as part of a moving map of growth-enabling policy experimentation, was a subtle shift to replace the concept of BRD with the idea of 'Effective Regional Development'. While the conceptual distinction was somewhat vaguely articulated, 'effective' was defined as reducing disparities through "playing to strengths [of regions] rather than assuming that a single model suits all areas" (ibid.). Or as described by one interviewee:

"… balance still seems to be on that, sort of, one size fits all and, there's enough for everybody. Effective needs to be building on their [regional] core strengths." (Interview 4)

This type of 'place-based', or 'place-sensitive', thinking on territorial development has been *de rigueur* in European cohesion and regional policy circles ever since the influential 'Barca Report' (Barca, 2008) and subsequently heavily advocated by a homophily of prominent academics (see, for example, McCann and Rodríguez-Pose, 2011; Barca et al., 2012). Reflecting the hotly

contested centripetal/centrifugal dualism that exists in international policy advice literature, this standpoint offers a counterhypothesis to the 'space-blind' perspective expounded by the World Bank (2009), discussed above, as inimical to European territorial cohesion[33], emphasising instead the diseconomies and negative externalities associated with over-agglomeration in capital cities, as again signalled by the ESRI for the NPF:

> "… economic activity in Ireland may already be too concentrated in Dublin, and the projections suggest that the dominance of Dublin is set to increase further, which implies that the dominance of Dublin reduces national growth." (Morgenroth, 2018, p.98)

The persuasiveness of this literature in forming discourse coalitions of like-minded policy actors to envision new state spatial imaginaries of polycentric city-regions as locomotives for national/regional economic performance can therefore be seen as adding another dimension to the city or place marketing literature to reposition sub-national spaces as a territorial precondition for competitive advantage, as further presented in the NPF:

> "The type of place-making set out above is also critical to economic prosperity as globalisation continues to have a concentrating effect. Employment trends indicate that increasingly city regions are the focal point for internationally mobile investment. High value added services are attracted primarily to urban areas, and cities are competing with other cities internationally." (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.56)

Importantly, the significance of supranational mediating institutions and policy research networks, such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2012) and ESPON (Parkinson et al., 2013), was crucial in lending weight to these 'place-based' discourses and, particularly, the policy transfer of affiliated concepts, such as 'second tier cities', which was

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[33] The 'place-based' approach is also strongly endorsed in, for example, the EU Territorial Agenda 2030 agreed at the informal meeting of ministers responsible for spatial planning and territorial development and/or territorial cohesion, 1 December 2020, Germany (Territorial Agenda, 2020).

very successfully mobilised to gain significant purchase amongst actors in NPF policy debates:

> "It is significant that a recent EU ESPON study which tested future spatial development scenarios in Europe to 2050, identified such a 'second tier cities' approach as offering the highest level of territorial cohesion and competitiveness at a European level as compared to alternative scenarios that focused on the largest principal cities (which most closely equates with the current reality in Ireland) and a scenario that focused on the smallest cities and large towns." (DHPLG, 2017, p.25)

As described by Parkinson et al (2013) the, "key policy issue is how to encourage second-tier cities to absorb some of their capital city's growth as capitals reach the limits of their capacity to accommodate that growth and the costs begin to outweigh the benefits" (p.1064)[34]. The basic idea is that the prioritisation of 'second tier cities' and re-orienting their function away from subordinate relationships at a national scale towards an approach based on endogenous self-reliance, smart specialisation and direct participation in European and global economies, can result in 'win-win' strategies to liberate growth and produce national economic (as well as democratic) benefits. The 'second tier cities' narrative therefore offered an ideal equivalent to the ESRI's 'goldilocks' analysis that too much and too little agglomeration is bad for national economic growth and, "the urban hierarchy in Ireland is characterised by excessive primacy and a lack of scale among second tier cities" (Morgenroth, 2018, p.100).

According to Brady (2016), in making the mainstream case for decentring the Irish urban system, "Parkinson's work presents strong evidence which demonstrates that decentralizing resources, powers and

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[34] Professor Parkinson was invited to present his research on 'second tier cities' at a high-level ESPON conference on national spatial policy in September 2014, partly organised by this author, entitled '*Creating the Regions of Tomorrow: Maximising Ireland's Reform Opportunity*'. Also presenting were Professor Edgar Morgenroth and Mr. Niall Cussen, former government Chief Planner and current Chief Executive at the Office of Planning Regulator, alongside a significant number of highly influential participants working in the field of national strategic spatial planning.

responsibilities throughout a number of cities rather than solely on the capital city produces a range of national benefits" (p.2219). On the other hand, Boland (2014) critiques Parkinson's analysis as symptomatic of the role that global policy elites and a choreography of experts, who share the same neoliberal epistemological bent, play in disciplinary capture and in promulgating growth-orientated spatial rationalities of national and regional competitiveness, stoking the "delusional transformative hope" (Hassink and Gong, 2019, p.2056) that peripheral regions' can gain a new development advantage despite the powerful path-dependent effects of pre-existing economic structures and spatial conditions.

Nevertheless, spurred on by this new policy zeitgeist of individualistic status competition to secure lucrative development niches in global interspatial competition, this newly stratified national urban hierarchy triggered intense growthist rivalries between selected urban centres, preoccupied with jockeying for position to maximise their growth targets, as evidenced by Limerick City and County Council's (LCCC) submission to the Draft NPF:

> "LCCC agree with the overall city region growth approach that is proposed in the NPF, but consider that capping our ambition, which is to establish Limerick as a dynamic Tier 2 City of a scale which can exert critical-mass leverage at an international level, is unacceptable. This submission requests that the framework supports the development of the Mid West Limerick City Region to act as a focus for concentrated investment and growth at a level which can contribute towards national development, economic competitiveness and deliver effective regional development." (Submission B0816, p. 3)

And similarly, by Cork City and County Council:

> "The recognition of Cork's role and potential as an international centre of scale to complement Dublin and the acknowledgement of its role as a medium sized European Centre of growth and innovation, critical to further enhancing Ireland's metropolitan profile is welcomed… Cork has the

available capacity at a crucial time nationally to relieve pressure on Dublin and drive growth in the southern region. More explicit recognition in the NPF that Cork is Ireland's only second tier city/city region, would be appropriate in this context." (Submission B0425, p.1)

Yet, while city-regionalism necessarily painted a rosy picture, always accentuating the sunlit positives of 'place-based' competition and highlighting successful cases and best-practices, it was inescapably embedded in a contradictory dynamic, the outcome of which always produced 'winners' as well as forgotten 'losers':

"That's the case right now as we speak; some places are selected for growth and the rest are not. So, we have five cities, and the rest of us, we struggle to compete." (Interview 15)

This is instructive of the contradictions and limits perpetually facing those creating new city-regional imaginaries, dialectically unleashing new contested forms of chronically unstable and uneven development patterns, and potentially damaging semiotic exclusions and failures, through which spatial conflicts are continually reproduced and fought out:

"A degree of honesty is required. If policy is geared principally to increased urbanisation, and the suggestion of alternative 'hubs' to Dublin is precisely that, then the depopulation of rural areas will continue." (Submission B0180, p.4)

Tempering these residual political antagonisms therefore necessitated the deployment of new scalar and institutional fixes as part of the incessant process of the shepherding and deferral of political dissent. Afterall, as Harvey (2011) has long averred, capitalism can never durably resolve its spatial contradictions, but only move them around geographically as part of an endless 'seesaw' of unbalanced development.

Shifting Scales

The ascendancy of city-regions as polycentric territorial platforms that accord with the logic of a 'place-based' perspective has been analysed as closely allied to the parallel discursive constitution of specific spaces as 'functional' governance scales. This has again been propelled by contemporary EU spatial planning discourses to, "capitalize on the economic growth in large cities and their metropolitan areas, as well as the attractiveness of major urban areas, which manifest their dynamic role and stimulate development in their territory of influence" (CEMAT, 2017, p.5; see also CEC, 2016; Milego et al., 2019). As has been presented in Chapter 1, regional governance in Ireland had been peremptorily reformed in 2015 in advance of the preparation of the NPF with the consolidation of three new Regional Assemblies, in lieu of eight former Regional Planning Authorities (DoECLG, 2012). The reasoning for this rescaling was explicitly city-regional as, "in the spatial context, economic activity and economic development need to be viewed from a regional perspective, having regard particularly to the location of gateways under the National Spatial Strategy" (DoECLG, 2012, p.23).

From the outset, the principal mandate of the new Regional Assemblies was clear, i.e. "perform a strategic role in relation to economic development" (ibid.). Their chief function was to produce new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) to supersede the Regional Planning Guidelines to, "provide regional level strategic planning and economic policy in support of the implementation of the National Planning Framework" (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.30). By intentionally foregrounding the words 'spatial' and 'economic', and simultaneously relegating other social and environmental policy domains to secondary status, it was subconsciously asserted what was to be the *sine qua non* of subnational spatial policy, with economic growth and competitiveness installed, from a distance, as the principal objectives. This nested governance hierarchy was to be further supplemented with new Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) as 'soft

spaces' of metropolitan planning vision and implementation around each of the five gateway cities which, it was proposed, would provide greater pragmatic resonance for the economic governance of functional urban geographies (Haughton et al., 2013). Vertically supervising this entire edifice was a powerful new national regulatory body, the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR), to compel amendments to regional, metropolitan and local plans, where necessary, so that, "we then have it in full technicolour, in terms of who is doing what" (Interview 7).

There is a surfeit of literature on the, so called, 'politics of scale' whereby scalar fixes are actively used as deliberate attempts to stabilise, albeit always provisionally, capital's uneven geographies which, as has been discussed, is always contingent upon the experimental reworking and partial disassembling of inherited geoinstitutional governance architectures and scales of policy articulation (Smith, 1995; Peck, 2002; Swyngedouw, 1997; Jessop, 2003). It is also worth recalling that this reform was occurring at a time when Ireland was just beginning to emerge from a prolonged recession in the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger property crash and in the midst of a Troika structural reform programme[35]. As described by Brenner and Theodore (2002), such moments of crisis destabilisation provide particularly intense opportunities for accelerated neoliberalised institutional searching to reset the conditions for growth (see also Brenner et al., 2010b). What deserves particular attention in Ireland's case, however, is not just the institutionalisation of the city-region scale *per se*, but how the invocation of city-regional imaginaries quickly circulated as a powerful pedagogical device that normalised city-regional agglomerations as a virtuous means to redress the regional imbalances brought about by increasing centralisation:

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[35] The Troika refers to the triumvirate decision group of the European Commission, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund in devising structural reform programmes during the Eurozone debt crisis in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008.

"Obviously, the argument is… that for regions and rural areas to thrive or to survive, they actually need a centre of reasonable critical mass to pin it down, to provide employment opportunities, etc. So, there's the idea that regional centres need to get to some critical mass to act as drivers, as you know, for larger rural areas, etc. And to have a broader range of functions, so that they're at one level they're acting as significant economic and social drivers, perhaps for parts of the country, larger parts of the country, which actually could suffer or are suffering decline at the moment. So, I think there's a validity in that idea." (Interview 21)

As described by Davoudi and Brooks (2020), the chief appeal of city-regionalism is that it legitimises specific metropolitan-based or functional spatial logics as the most suitable scale for planning governance, whereby the benefits of concentrated urban economies 'ripple out', 'trickle down' or 'spillover' to equalise economic development across larger scales:

"The focus on five city regions has the potential to help address the desire to spread development widely, in an attempt to deliver more equalised benefits to the entire population and leverage spare productive capacity within these connected central hubs." (Submission B0563, p.3)

Within the literature, critical to this normalisation is the use of spatial representations as a further tactical medium for diffusing political tensions (Olesen and Richardson, 2011). One of the key criticisms of the Draft NPF was that unlike its NSS predecessor, which included a series of impressionistic policy maps representing its key organising principles (e.g. networks, flows, gateways, hubs, corridors etc.), it excluded maps in favour of pictograms:

"The 'metropolitan region' and 'city region' are defined…, but there is no map to illustrate the 'city region' of Ireland's five cities. A very strong 'city region' approach is being taken…, but it does not show what the city regions

are. Giving a definition without mapping it is meaningless." (Submission B0443, p. 17)[36]

The absence of maps was likely prompted by the discordant experience of the NSS and as a conscious strategy to deflect political contestation, and to camouflage new geographies of exclusion whereby peripheral regions were left "picking up the crumbs" (Interview 12) or "ignored in a national conversation" (Interview 14). This was astutely apprehended in one pre-draft consultation submission to the NPF:

> "Any National Planning Framework policy that emerges from this process must… not seek to further create through stealth or omission the continuing and unfair dominance of the Dublin region." (Submission A0287, p.2)

This further accords with Olesen and Richardson's (2011) study of Danish spatial planning whereby a, "concern with handling potentially volatile spatial politics seems to have caused an increasing 'fear' of spatial representations" (p.371). Whereas, previously, the use of 'fuzzy' maps offered a useful way to blur spatial politics and provide temporary spaces of consensus, the current generation of European spatial plans prefer to avoid mapped visualisations altogether (Olesen, 2014). This highlights how spatial politics is not only part of strategy-making, but also infused within representations of space (Davoudi and Brooks, 2020). What is more, and again notably similar to the Danish case, is that depoliticisation is increasingly taking place through scalar displacement where planning responsibilities are being gradually devolved to formal plans at lower spatial scales in an attempt to remove contentious politics from the national stage:

> "Much responsibility has been passed to RSESs… Beyond the five cities, it is suggested the RSESs will cover the broader regions and rural areas, without

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[36] The only map included in the Draft NPF was an illustration of Ireland's Regional Assembly areas as presented in Figure 3 (p.34).

clarity about what will be committed for the regions, resourcing the RSESs and how they will ensure policy aligns with them." (Submission B0443, p. 2)

While ostensibly justified on the need for the NPF to focus on spatial development issues which are, "genuinely national in its scope and content and not usurp policies and decisions which are more properly for the new councils" (Dorgan et al., 2014, pp.3–4), this displacement simultaneously transferred more problematic issues to lower spatial scales as part of a wider political management of dissent and to achieve consensus through indeterminacy. Indeed, revealing of this intent was the retitling of the NPF from a 'strategy' to a looser 'framework', "from which other, more detailed plans will take their lead, hence the title, National Planning 'Framework', including city and county development plans and regional strategies" (DHPLG, 2017, p.4).

In order to rally political support, the absence of maps was eventually partially rectified in the final NPF through the inclusion of a single map (see Figure 10) illustrating each of the three regions with symbolic concentric rings radiating out from their selected urban centres to their peripheries. It is instructive that this is the *only* substantive map included within the final NPF document, invoking dynamic imaginaries of the horizontal gravitational sphere of influence of designated urban centres, cohesively and coherently levelling economic space and rendering certain spatial relations visible while, "normalizing and solidifying not just the city-regional imaginary per se (the what) as the scalar fix of capitalist crises, but also the city- and economy-first version of that imaginary (the how), which fits so well with the neoliberal political project (the why) in which the imaginary is implicated and by which it is invoked" (Davoudi & Brooks, 2020, p. 7).
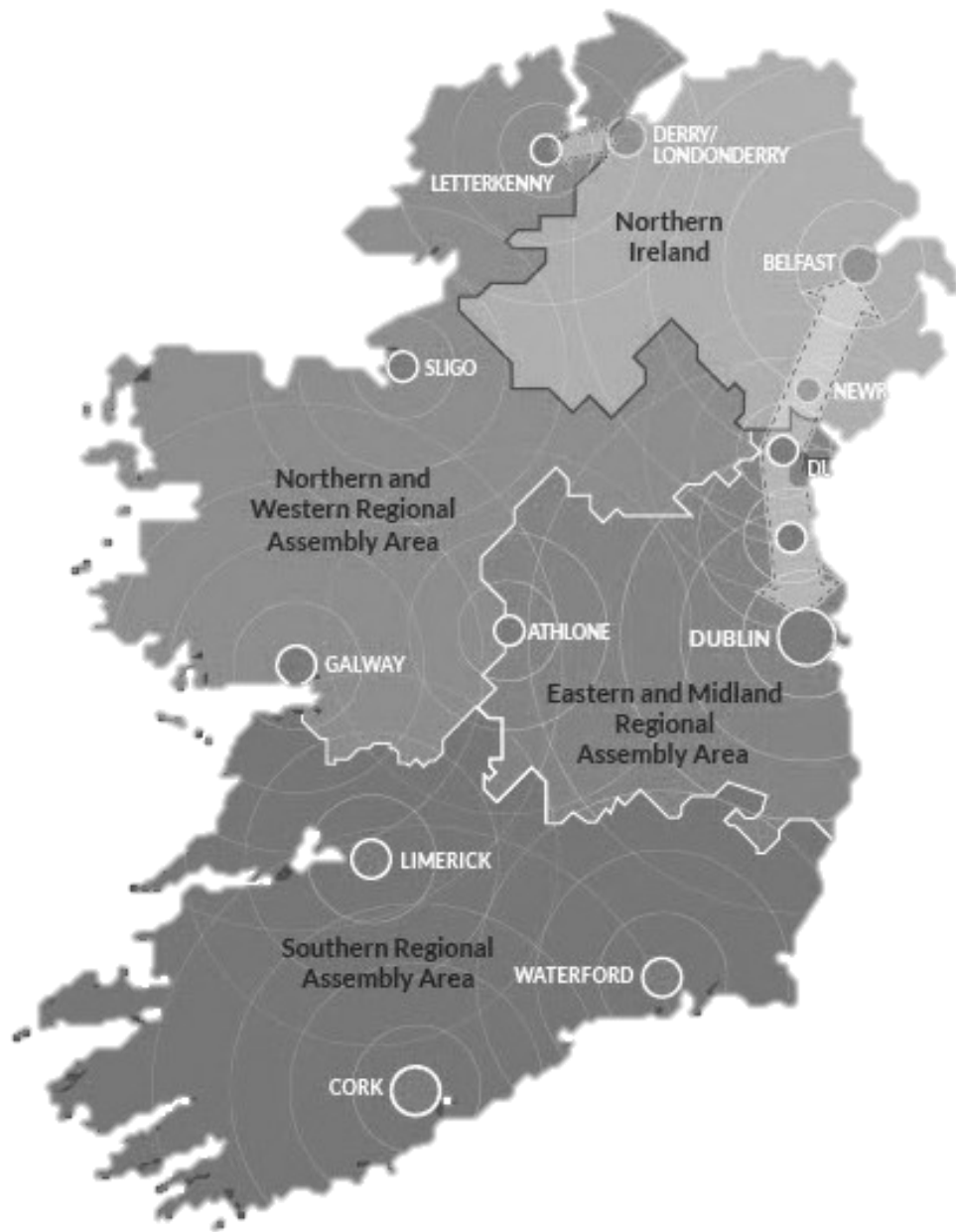
Figure 10: Designated growth centres and corridors in the NPF and Regional Assembly Areas (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.23)

Again, the analytical and cartographical practices of ESPON, and their hidden methodological assumptions (e.g. drawing arrows, fixing lines, colour-coding zones as cores etc.), are cited by Davoudi and Brooks as being particularly useful in producing and circulating maps and other visualisations of functional economic geographies which can be variously downloaded by policy practitioners, carrying persuasive power (ibid.). Predictably, establishing city-regional imaginaries within the social realities of actors did not however serve to fully exclude political contestation:

> "It is assumed that growth of the cities will lead to growth of their 'city region' but there is no explanation of how this will happen." (Submission B0443, p. 9)

Indeed, even the ESRI advised that 'spillovers' typically have very limited spatial extent and only apply to areas within reasonable commuting hinterlands of urban centres (Morgenroth, 2018). Moreover, while subnational governance was to become increasingly responsiblized for its own development fortunes, this was not accompanied by any greater decentralisation of resources and powers to achieve it:

> "Ireland is probably the most centralised political system in the world. In most other countries where there's effective regional planning it's largely the responsibility of regional and local level. In Ireland we have virtually no ability at local level or regional level to implement any change." (Interview 18)

In an implicit recognition of the probability of continued spatial imbalances, and to dampen potentially damaging inter-city competition, selected forms of upscaled equalisation were proposed through the promotion of 'urban networks' whereby, to compensate for their relative lack of metropolitan qualities, certain regional centres would function in concert to, "borrow and share strengths" (DHPLG, 2017, p.24). Citing the 'Northern Powerhouse' concept in the UK as a potential model, a new Atlantic Economic Corridor, incorporating each of the designated cities outside Dublin, was proposed as a,

"coordinated investment and development strategy to strengthen Ireland's 'next tier' cities and their associated regions." (ibid., p.25)[37]

In the final analysis, however, only the Dublin-Belfast corridor was visually represented in the NPF map as, "the largest economic agglomeration on the island of Ireland,… and plays a critical role in supporting economic growth and competitiveness" (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.110). This, as advised by the National Competitiveness (and Productivity) Council (2009), must always be, as it has always been, the ultimate overriding objective of Irish national spatial policy:

> "The National Competitiveness Council has previously warned against attempting to 'redirect' economic growth away from Dublin, advising planners instead to focus on the inherent growth potential of other regions. Above all, Government must secure Ireland's position in the world economy by supporting Dublin as the only city-region that can represent Ireland in the increasingly global race for investment, jobs, and talent." (Submission A0527, p.9)

By mandating a set of entrepreneurial spatial logics and vocabularies aimed at making sub-national governance responsible for their own development futures, the NPF can therefore be seen as largely a symbolic, salving strategy to disseminate harmonious representations of space, where everyone can be a 'winner', precluding more fundamental repoliticised debates on genuinely redistributive national spatial alternatives, thus covertly facilitating business as usual monocentric trends:

> "It is something of a misnomer to describe Ireland's future development patterns as a 'choice'—as identified earlier many of the most significant drivers are matters that are not subject to policy control—much less choice.

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[37] See Sykes (2018) for a useful related discussion on the performative work that spatial imaginaries do in divisive political processes in the UK context of geographically uneven development.

It is important that to ensure that the Framework [NPF] is seen as a document to facilitate and serve forces that will occur regardless of preference, policy or plan." (Submission A0572, p.21)

This corresponds with more recent critical studies of the 'neoliberalisation of strategic spatial planning', recited in Chapter 2, which highlight how the inherent mutability and vagueness of spatial planning's core concepts has left it extremely vulnerable to being appropriated by the *realpolitik* of the neoliberal agenda and conveniently used as a depoliticisation tactic to disguise the more pragmatic, short-term exigencies of economic growth, which is the chief reason why its policy rhetoric repeatedly fails to live up to its own pronouncements (Olesen, 2014). Or as Wildavsky (1973) again wryly observes:

"The plan need not be a means of surmounting the nation's difficulties, but rather may become a mode of covering them up." (p.140)

Smart Fixes

The preceding sections present an analysis that is instructive of the NPF, in support of my research hypothesis, as simply the latest episode in a permanently ephemeral re-regulatory project through which institutional ensembles, discursive praxes and governance scales are constantly reworked, in response to endemic failure. The objective is a restless search for new forms of neoliberal spatial governance to fictitiously 'balance' the vacillating core-periphery spatial contradictions and political tensions associated with planning's inveterate growth agenda and to maintain growth-orientated meanings amongst policy actors. As Lefebvre (1976) describes:

"The state intervenes in multiple, increasingly specific ways… It transforms virtually destructive conflicts into catalysts of growth… It preserves the conditions of a *precarious* equilibrium." (p.56; italics in original)

As will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 6, in furtherance of this renewed focus on city-regions, and with the increasing prominence of serious environmental issues, there was a coterminous reterritorialized effort to

expropriate associated imaginaries around 'sustainable', 'smart' and 'compact' growth, rendering the city-region as a pivotal site in connection with attempts to, not only address economic objectives, but also to virtuously address corresponding social and environmental challenges. As such, 'sustainability' and 'balance' were represented as essentially two sides of the same coin, with the latter providing sustainability's spatial facsimile for 'win-win' and '-win' outcomes such that there would be no losers against the triple-bottom line of social, economic and environmental advancement through the achievement of compact high density urban growth.

In the prevailing post-Brundtland zeitgeist, sustainability had been originally installed as Irish planning's transcendental uber-concept ever since a major reform of planning laws in 2000. This supplanted more prosaic notions of the 'common good' or 'public interest' as the central goal towards which planning policy should aspire. However, indicative of what Forster (2006) calls the 'parallel universe' problem, there was a pervasive failure to achieve any meaningful progress. In fact, it was just the opposite:

> "We have made mistakes in the past and we have allowed the country to sprawl and develop without a coherent plan, and to the detriment of many of our places and our people." (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.5)

The NPF's sustainability agenda supported the emergence of a renewed anti-sprawl urban 'growth machine' coalition which exercised very significant policy sway, with the national government lifting caps on building heights in cities and instituting a plethora of supply-side measures, such as fast-track development application processes, central government overruling of locally mandated building height policies and a relaxation in apartment design standards (Lennon and Waldron, 2019). Usefully exploiting the acute national housing supply shortage in the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger collapse and widely justified on pro-environmental grounds, this resulted in a huge boom in assetized build-to-rent apartment schemes, shared co-living developments, tourist hotels and high-end international student accommodation, while

simultaneously washing-out and disarming more critical perspectives as NIMBYs in local planning debates (Daly, 2020). This experience accords with much of the international literature which heavily reproaches 'smart growth' as to, "what it ideologically reveals as well as hides" (Hollands, 2008, p.303). Moreover, as argued by Næss et al. (2020), it simply represents the latest spatial fix to align rent-seeking interests with renewed conditions for international capital to pour into built environment formation:

> "We still haven't come up with a name for this new period, we had the Celtic Tiger and how that came to an end, we had the crash after that, but we are going through a startling growth period of inward investment and then all the demand for student housing and… build-to-let in the main urban centres. That's a phenomenon we're only now sort of starting to grapple with at the moment because the neoliberalism which is linked in with consumerism is delivering us false expectation of climbing up the ladder for the population at large, which is simply not achievable." (Interview 8)

Such phantasmagorial imaginations of compact, smart cities were, however, also delimited by previous deterritorialized spatial fixes and the socio-spatial realities of inherited, extensified settlement patterns that have, as discussed in Chapter 4, become a conservative political force in their own right. As a consequence, as described by Hajer and Versteeg (2019):

> "Politicians… feel the electoral pressure from the suburbs to keep traffic flowing and to leave the fiscal privileges of suburban homeownership untouched." (p.123)

An instructive example of this, in the context of the NPF, was the recommendation of the ESRI that investment in interurban motorways be deprioritised in favour of intra-urban mobility to facilitate densification and modal shift in specified regional cities:

> "To achieve the benefits from a city based pattern, growth in the second tier cities needs to be facilitated i.e. it has to be planned for and the appropriate infrastructure must be put in place. The aim should be to achieve compact

> high density development that is attractive, such that it will draw in internal and international migrants, and the scale and density will support the attraction of more economic activity. Thus, infrastructure development should be in the cities rather than between them. The latter facilitates sprawl and thus leads to reduced densities." (Morgenroth, 2018, pp.98–99)

This proposal proved highly politically controversial and was subsequently withdrawn from the final NPF (see Fitzgerald, 2018). In this sense, there is no *tabula rasa* and, despite idealised imaginaries of 'smart fixes' to the contrary, the sedimented, path-dependent effects of decades of counter-urbanised, or 'rurbanised', spatial patterns created hysteretic vectors which recurrently set the stage for endless planning failure, but which was rarely, if ever, acknowledged in NPF policy debates. Or as one pre-draft consultation submission to the NPF candidly put it:

> "With the present proposed plan for 'Ireland 2040' we are attempting to shut the barn door when not only have the horses bolted but the doors have come off their hinges." (Submission A0220, p.3)

Conclusions

In a revealing interview for this thesis, and perhaps indicative of planners' more general dismissal of the workings of power, one planner opined:

> "I think that you know that planners, look it was drilled into me… planners deal with the 'W's'. The 'what', the 'where' and the 'why', not the 'how'." (Interview 13)

The purpose of this chapter was precisely to address the 'how'. I have presented the empirical evidence, in support of my research hypothesis, that the application and pursuit of planning's growth imperative was sequestered in the power of BRD as a particular hegemonic storyline in the NPF concerned with attributing economic growth an unstated primary meaning within planning debates. Put another way round, as soon as the possibility that growth might not be spatially balanced is entered into the conversation, it is

to entertain the possibility of decline, which is impossible under the conditions of contemporary capitalist spatialisation. This explains why BRD, despite its unending failure to steer spatial outcomes in ways intended, has continued to play such an enduring role as an obligatory form of imaginary regulation, performatively circulating cohesive and coherent representations of space to ensure there is no dissolution of growth-orientated meanings:

> "This fetishized space, elevated to the rank of mental space by epistemology, implies and embodies an ideology—that of the primacy of abstract unity."
> (Lefebvre, 1991, p.355)

Placing the 'failure' of BRD at the centre of my analysis and problematising it with reference to critical political economy theory, is instructive. As discussed in Chapter 3, the strength of discourse analysis is in its capacity to reveal the central role of language in policy practice. Political economy inquiry, on the other hand, insists on explanatory, not merely revelatory, critique. This chapter therefore advances an alternative understanding of BRD, not so much as a failure, but as a continuously reinvented storyline to create a hermeneutically sealed 'growth first' policy universe through which meanings are positioned and marshalled. This reading directly contradicts the accepted interpretation of past BRD policy as simply a failure of technical realisation. In fact, from the perspective of growth, this 'failure' was entirely necessary.

BRD's malleability as a loosely defined, but hard to refute, 'feel good' concept is precisely what makes it such a potent storyline as a semiotic guardrail, allowing coalitions of actors—without sharing the same goals and often widely differing perceptions and understandings—to ceaselessly evolve its meaning within its broad parameters to manage its roiling contradictions and tensions. Specifically evaded was any consideration of genuinely political questions around geographically uneven development as an indelible structural problematic of capitalist urbanisation (Smith, 1990).

Indeed, throughout the documentary and interview data collected for this thesis, the deference to which BRD continued to be held by policy actors

was quite extraordinary, so much so that it was effective even for those whose interests have plainly not been served by it, delimiting their possibilities for alternative action. This accords with McLoughlin's (1994) observation:

> "The ignorance of regional political economy is one thing, but the *ignorance of planning experience* is even more remarkable." (p.117, italics in original)

This is absolutely not to say that planning, and planners, were unaware that their well-intentioned policies were being subverted, but left them, "blind to the more subtle mechanisms at work in political power" (Grange, 2014, p.56). In this way, BRD has become an inviolable feature of Ireland's national planning culture—an incantatory doctrine raised above political ideologies as "an 'objective', technical solution to commonly recognized problems" (Faludi and Van Der Valk, 1994, p.18) and where "planners (and the public at large!) are socialized into believing in certain ideas" (ibid., p.5). Consequently, and despite BRD's yawning implementation gap, it remains immutable over time as the authoritative set of rules by which policy actors must abide, acting as a vehicle for consensus. Even if actors do question it, they are expected to position their contributions from within the terms of what is open for discussion, unconsciously evolving the doctrine to incorporate new ideas to overcome emergent socio-spatial tensions and contradictions, maintaining and extending its paradigmatic dominance e.g. environmental concerns, compact growth etc (Olesen, 2021). On this basis, per Hajer's stepwise formulation described in Chapter 3, it can be concluded that both discourse structuration and institutionalisation occurred in the NPF (Hajer, 2006).

However, as has also been revealed, the enduring power of the BRD storyline has not developed out of nothing. There have been significant debates in geography scholarship as to how the field lacks impact in the real world of evidence-based policymaking, or what Weiss (1975) calls the problem of 'little effect' (see also Davidson, 2019). Yet, this chapter has shown that crucial to understanding BRD's depoliticised status is the role that academics and transnational research networks (e.g. ESPON, OECD, World Bank etc.)

played in co-constituting specific knowledge forms in an unstable, restless and reflexive search to legitimate and continuously transfigure BRD in response to its dialectical contradictions and failures, generating "more and more far reaching claims on political life" (Taylor, 2004, p.5). Thus, far from producing rarefied knowledge that is abstruse for the purposes of policymaking, the apparent irrefragable consensus between theory and policy around competitive city-regions and their array of surrogate growth-orientated spatial concepts (e.g. 'place-based development', 'second tier cities', 'functional urban areas' etc.), exposes just how readily academia frames what counts.

These concepts constituted a form of 'doxosophy' (Bourdieu, 1998b), saturating public discourse with ready-made phrases and soundbites, reproducing growth-orientated imaginary meanings that govern-the-mentality of normalised subjects, instead of helping to stimulate a more open debate (Hajer and Versteeg, 2019). As a result; and as Counsell et al. (2014) similarly conclude in their study of planning in County Cork during the Celtic Tiger; rather than a conscious tactic to ignore dissenting voices, planners simply operate within the dominant styles of thought rather than questioning them. This challenges the assumption that academics and policymakers engage with evidence neutrally, but rather use it selectively for quite distinct ends (Majone, 1989). Coppock's epistemological critique of what counts as knowledge therefore still rings true and, "one of the most urgent needs is for more critical appraisals of sources of information which we all too readily accept at face value" (Coppock, 1974, p.10). Or, as Flyvbjerg (2001) puts it, "power often ignores or designs knowledge at its convenience" (p.143).

All of this suggests that, although fundamentally Janus-faced, it will be very difficult to exorcise BRD's doctrinaire position from within the Irish planning cultural mainframe. However, from the perspective of my research hypothesis, now that I have unearthed the precise means by which planning's growth imperative is applied and pursued in practice, I have also dialectically identified a crack which could be used to advance the possibility for 'other'

knowledge to emerge. The corollary of my hypothesis is that it is precisely through entertaining the possibility that growth is an inescapably spatially imbalanced process, and the associated loss of meaning that supervenes, which offers opportunities to reorder the storyline in incommensurable, divergent ways. This points to the importance of more radical, activist academic inquiry, which is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 6: (De-)Growth Tensions

Introduction

The previous chapter presented an account of the Irish NPF case study as an instructive example of how the habituated planning discourse of BRD is deeply performative as the hidden carrier of growth-orientated meanings and how their doxic effects insinuate themselves into both official policy and academic analyses, sustaining growth-orientated imaginaries and normative expectations of the future.

This novel theoretical interpretation partially addresses the first objective of this thesis, as a necessary precursor for advancing a contribution as to how planning praxis might be changed. The next task is to uncover possible openings from within this discursive closure through which alternative post-growth planning discourses might emerge and gain traction. The argument developed in this chapter is that this is potentially achievable through answering the third research question of this thesis: *What are the limitations and contradictions of planning's growth imperative?*

In contrast to the role of academia in maintaining the growthist *status quo,* disclosed in the previous chapter, the express aim of activist-scholarship is to intercede in planning policy debates to help trigger critical reflection through consciously constructing encounters between practice and reflection with the objective of making planning both challengeable and changeable.

Using my research strategy and method developed in Chapter 3 to deploy degrowth as a conceptual weapon of critique, this chapter presents the results of an interdiscursive analysis through introducing the contradictions and limitations of planning's growth imperative into a series of active interviews with key planning policy actors.

Just as the previous chapter focussed on the core-periphery tension point as a novel means to expose the concealed locus of the NPF's growth imperative, the aim of this chapter is to radically problematise the corresponding growth-environment tension point such that policy actors might begin to recognise and reflect on their social realities in ways that could open up opportunities for alternative planning possibilities to emerge. This, it will be argued, is a critical staging post for understanding how actors can be equipped with the necessary agency to break free from the growth paradigm and to become designers of alternative post-growth futures.

I start with a description of how I introduced the deconstructive possibility of limits into actors' social realities, which is the opposite of what is planned and imagined. This inevitably precipitated the intervention of the normative concept of 'sustainable' development to resolutely suture the consequent loss of meaning. Nevertheless, through diligently probing the limits of the signifying system, it was possible to detect residual recognitions of the irreconcilable conflict between growth and the environment.

Developing the analysis presented in Chapter 5, one means of prompting such loss of meaning was in confronting actors with the inevitability of spatially imbalanced development, stimulating new openings for a post-growth planning reimagining to emerge. The chapter concludes with an analysis of whether sustainability's very semiotic emptiness holds out the possibility for it to be filled with new meanings and to embed alternative post-growth performative practices, which will be explored in the final Part III of this thesis.

Signifying Limits

On the 9th of April 2019, Ireland became only the second country in the world to officially declare a climate and biodiversity emergency (Cunningham, 2019). This was the culmination of several years in the aftermath of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 2015 Paris Agreement and successive IPCC reports where the global climate and ecological crisis had increasingly come to the fore in national political debates. On the face of it, the declaration of an emergency seriously challenged conventional planning policies which had always assumed continued economic growth was a positive force for societal development. As briefly presented in Chapter 5, a prerequisite for the NPF was therefore to tacitly fix the meanings of its key nomenclatures such that high urban economic growth could continue to be presented as mutually compatible with progressive social and environmental improvements, such that there was no conflict with the mainstream growth agenda (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012). As the dominant international orthodoxy for spatial planning, the concept of 'sustainable' development again offered the primary proposition to achieve this:

> "Continued economic success will ensure sustained improvement in living standards and quality of life for all of our citizens. It also provides the best possible platform from which to pursue key social and environmental goals, such as tackling disadvantage and responding to climate change." (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.80)

In other words, not only would economic growth not be sacrificed to achieve environmental goals, but growth *in itself* was presented as an imperative for accomplishing the NPF vision for Ireland, "to be the most successful, advanced competitive and environmentally sustainable society and economy in Europe" (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.27). Similar to BRD, this harmonious representation was strategically orchestrated in advance and mechanically reinserted into the NPF discourse to address the potential implications of increasingly prominent growth-environment policy tensions.

In truth, this was not difficult. The sustainability concept has become so ubiquitously commonsensical in mainstream international polity norms to now be almost beyond the requirement for any serious justification, effortlessly reaffirming its benign preanalytic command amongst policy communities as the basic starting point for analysis and debates:

> "… we would suggest that when referring to sustainable growth patterns, specific reference should not be made to environmental gains without also giving mention to social and economic gains. As there are three dimensions to 'sustainable development', these being economic, social and environmental, [and we] would ask that the NPF sets out the importance of achieving gains in all three dimensions because they are mutually dependent." (Submission B0765, pp.1-2)

As reviewed in Chapter 2, much has also been written about sustainability's 'other story', allowing actors to speak with enthusiasm of progressive socio-ecological change while continuing to rationalise, under the guise of normality, the reproduction of the mainstream growth agenda:

> "I think in fairness,… there was a significant shift between the NSS and the NPF, in terms of,… absolutely, we're still a growing country and there is that important output from the planning process that we know where they're going to be, and we've figured that out, and we've put it together, balanced it with a whole set of other objectives. But the NPF also had a couple more, I think, core messages also around what kind of place do we want it to be. The quality of life piece was much stronger. The environment piece was much stronger." (Interview 7)

In terms of its conceptual underpinnings, there was, in reality, very little substantive difference between the NPF and the NSS. As introduced in Chapter 5, published in the wake of the Rio Earth Summit, sustainability had also been installed as the key agenda setting narrative for the NSS but had manifestly failed to curb environmental harm. Hence, many academic authors have been very sceptical as to the prospects for sustainability to act, in any way, as a vehicle for the necessary policy shifts that reflect the seriousness and

urgency of the global environmental crisis. Instead this literature offers a compelling case to dismiss it as a mere simulative politics of 'empty gestures' grounded in particular ecological modernisation imaginaries that have cynically provided elites with a sophisticated rhetoric, meaning everything and nothing, to conceal the continued primacy of the neoliberal growth agenda:

> "In almost all respects, the main organizing principle of sustainable development is economic growth: creating it, managing it, distributing its costs and benefits on a national scale in particular territorialized states."
> (Luke, 2005, p.236)

The fantasy of sustainability imagines the possibility of an antecedent, harmonious nature, that is now in disequilibrium, but if properly managed through technological, managerial and organisational fixes can once more be redeemed (Swyngedouw, 2010b). In positing neoliberal assumptions as to the inevitability and desirability of market-based solutions as the central solution to the crisis, rather than examining their role in causing it, it is perhaps not surprising how little progress has been achieved. However, whilst recognising these very significant criticisms, key to the argument that will be developed in this chapter is that sustainability's very semiotic emptiness also holds out the possibility to revive a more radical interpretation, offering some hope for the emergence of a transformative, non-reformist planning praxis. Therefore, following Brown (2015), rather than completely dismissing sustainability as an irredeemably failed concept, closer engagement may open up possibilities for filling it with new meanings and thus new opportunities for political action. So, from a more optimistic standpoint, the key question is how we rearticulate sustainability's core concern, "as a means to displace the economic imperative from its throne of supremacy over that of social equity and the environment?" (Gunder, 2006, p.218).

In concrete methodological terms, as per my research strategy and method developed in Chapter 3, this may be achieved through engaging in

discursive struggle. That is to say, through the purposeful intervention of antagonistic discourses exterior to sustainability's relationships, what is excluded from discourse can be made visible, signifying its endemic failures and the undesirable futures it is producing. As no discourse is ever fully closed but is constantly being buffeted by other competing discourses in a ceaseless battle for hegemony, this offers the potential to emancipate possibilities for the development of a new critical stance amongst policy actors, and ultimately to a realisation that a fundamentally different approach is required. It is, as Foucault describes, "precisely to bring it about that practitioners no longer know what to do, so that the acts, gestures, discourses that up until then had seemed to go without saying become problematic, difficult, dangerous" (Foucault quoted in Miller, 1993, p.235).

The main challenge set for this chapter was to test the theoretical potential for such dislocation by bringing degrowth into direct confrontation with mainstream sustainability discourses and to explore whether planning could potentially be opened up to alternative meanings. For Brown (2015), drawing on Laclau's (1996) conception of sustainability as empty signifier, the only way in which that which is excluded from discourse can appear is through a failure of the very process of signification itself, resulting in a rupture of the normalised order of things. That is why, as discussed throughout this thesis, crises are considered rich sources of new knowledge in radical planning research as inflective moments which disrupt established significations, stimulating new discursive constructions. Following my research hypothesis, harmonious symbolisms, such as 'sustainable' or 'balanced' development, act as important means to preclude such semiotic discontinuities, contributing significantly to reproducing the established order of limitless expansion. Within degrowth theory, the antagonistic relation of degrowth as 'other' can therefore be usefully deployed as a discursive weapon to rupture the limits of the signifying system by naming the very limits to growth itself, thereby threatening to dislocate the discursive closure of the

entire system and preventing it from reconstituting itself as a stable, objective reality. It is through this process that real democratic possibilities emerge. This corresponds with Swyngedouw's assertion that vague, synthetic maxims, like sustainability, preclude a proper politics of genuine democracy, "that is a space where the unnamed, the uncounted, and, consequently, un-symbolised become named and counted" (Swyngedouw, 2010b, p.27).

The Catch-22, of course, is that what is 'outside' discursive relationships cannot be signified except through inclusion 'inside' the system. Antagonism occurs when there is something the system is simply unable to grasp. For example, when asked, most participants in this research had no understanding or familiarity whatsoever with the concept of degrowth which was entirely beyond their field of recognition. In fact, throughout the complete documentary archive gathered for this thesis, the term 'degrowth' appeared on just four occasions and was not meaningfully engaged with at all during the NPF preparation process. This, of course, is not unsurprising and accords with the persistent, forceful criticisms levelled at degrowth, discussed in Chapter 1. As Raworth (2018) tersely reminds:

> "Here's what troubles me about degrowth: I just can't bring myself to use the word."

Therefore, even the mere mention of the term during interviews, or equivalent terms which did not accord with growth-orientated logics (e.g. shrinkage, decline etc), typically generated discomforting askance, with interviewees keen to return the conversation safely within the horizon of their social realities[38].

Indeed, per Laclau's theorisation, it is precisely such failures of signification, where conventional modes of categorisation break down, that is the crucial precondition for the intercession of empty signifiers in the first

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[38] This was tested during the three pilot interviews, whereupon it was decided that a workaround solution was required to achieve the research outcomes (see Chapter 3).

place, to stand in for this gap in meaning and to ideologically suture disjunctured realities in ways that do not compromise the continuity of the social order. Empty signifiers do not therefore emerge out of nothing, but rather through dislocations within the existing discursive system. Brown (2015), for example, traces the emergence of the concept of sustainability back to the limits to growth critiques of the 1960s and 1970s, which served as a major source of disturbance to the prevailing paradigm of growth-orientated meanings, generating a defensive counterreaction from those seeking to maintain economic growth as the key organising principle of social life (see Chapter 2). In this way, the growth-environment tension effectively defines sustainability's field of signification such that discourses which pose a danger to its discursive closure, and which might expose its failures, are fully excluded through their inclusion.

To overcome this practical dilemma of operationalising degrowth as a method of critique, a workaround solution needed to be found to render visible the invisible limits of the signifying system and enrolling them as investigative method. While degrowth was generally entirely beyond the horizon of policy actors, and impossible to be signified from within the coordinates of the symbolic order, the climate emergency was certainly no longer:

> "… as someone, working in government I suppose the climate emergency, if you want to call it that, is certainly, it's understood now in a way that it wasn't even you know two years ago to be honest. So, I think there is an impetus for action, and I think… there is also a background and a general change in society anyway." (Interview 11)

The very idea of the climate crisis and the increasing political tensions around its interpretation and implications, drew attention to other priorities which were at least equal, or perhaps even more important, to growth, i.e. maintaining the existential conditions for human civilisation on Earth. Therefore, without explicitly needing to name degrowth, or the limits to

growth, the current parlous trajectory of human forced environmental change has dramatically thrown the future into doubt, foregrounding different socio-environmental futures, and raising the spectre of the need for fundamental societal change across paradigms, goals and values, with its concomitant implications for planning praxis:

> "And the reality—as I said recently to somebody—when I was in planning school in the late 1980s, nobody mentioned climate change—there was no climate change, in terms of a concept… the notion that somehow we're going to have to fundamentally reappraise the way in which we plan and design and deliver didn't percolate through until, effectively early noughties. So, I think it's certainly… we can be very critical in relation to the lack of progress—but the fact that we have a consensus on climate change is the single biggest issue we have to address, in planning terms." (Interview 7)

Therefore, in an attempt to repoliticise the debate on socio-spatial transformation, climate change could be usefully mobilised within the research process as a proxy for limits and as an obstructive force to interrupt the otherwise homogenous, consensus view that the linear, temporal progression of the future, according to the NPF, might not work after all.

Dislocating Realities

The novel, disruptive element of this research centred on the question as to whether or not interviewees considered the NPF's population growth targets, discussed in Chapter 4, could be reconciled with Ireland's coterminous target for an aggregate reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of at least 80% by 2050. Naturally, for ENGO interviewees the answer was typically unequivocal:

> "It would be hard to find a more outright conflict. So, the entire NDP [NPF] was predicated on a growth scenario, on a particular model of car based, consumer high employment level, multinationals being encouraged to come here really for Ireland's low tax regime and carbon neutrality was a nice distant vague thing that people just didn't give a moment's thought to." (Interview 8)

Even for some public sector planning interviewees, when both targets were directly articulated side-by-side, there was a dawning realisation as to their mutual incompatibility:

> "There's a huge conflict there. There's a huge conflict. The reduction of the emissions while you provide 600,000 jobs for a million people? Naturally, there's a conflict there. There has to be, even the carbon footprint that's going to result as a result of all this development. How is that going to be done sustainably? Where are people going to be based? Their traffic movements. Is it going to take significant public infrastructure to be built? Budgetary impacts, what's it going to mean on our national budget? We're going to have to spend billions on public infrastructure… So, the two things are definitely at loggerheads…" (Interview 16)

Therefore, and notwithstanding that climate change was recognised, at least rhetorically, as a supreme, existential policy concern and the 'single biggest issue' for planning policy to address, throughout the interviews there was a distinct lack of confidence amongst planners as to whether the greenhouse gas emissions reduction target could, or would, be achieved:

> "Well, I think certainly the NPF has attempted to square that circle, put it that way. Look, we're not very good and meeting, achieving our targets on greenhouse gas and so on, and I don't want to be over-optimistic, but the direction of travel is correct, yeah." (Interview 20)

This diffidence stands in marked contrast to the generalised buoyant enthusiasm, described in Chapter 4, as to the absolute necessity, even inevitability, of achieving the concurrent NPF population growth targets. This is despite the fact, as I have concluded, that these targets were entirely built on economic conjecture. Thus, irrespective of the acknowledged need to urgently reduce emissions, questioning this inherent conflict within an expansionist planning policy agenda was simply inadmissible in the discourse. In fact, outside of some ENGO contributions, throughout the NPF public submissions analysed for this thesis, the basic contradiction between growth and environmental targets was rarely acknowledged at all as a matter of serious

policy concern. Instead, growth was generally conceived as an ineluctable goal for planning policy, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions, despite its paradigmatic implications and contradictions, was relegated to that of a discretionary appendage, similar to other subordinate policy goals. Consequently, what was needed to address environmental challenges were incremental behavioural changes but at all times firmly situated within the narrow confines of established socio-cultural norms, values and patterns of growth-orientated societal development, as recounted by another interviewee when asked if climate targets were compatible with growth objectives:

> "I'm not sure. I think there's certainly… it's not something you can in a night and day go from where we are now, the transitional piece of this is very, very important. But I'm not so sure… that, if you like, the enormity of the lifestyle changes, the way in which we live and all of that, fully lands for people… I think most people at the gut level, they know that pretty fundamental change is happening in terms of the planet. So, it's taken 20, 30 years for that, if you like, scientific consensus, or scientific paradigm to be absorbed and internalised by most people. Now, I think the next thing that we're missing is, okay, what are the behavioural changes. And more importantly, what are the supports that we're putting in place to carry out those behavioural changes?" (Interview 7)

Despite this apparent semiotic closure, the advantage of deconstruction as method is in making the invisible limits of the discursive system 'appear', articulating what is excluded through exposing its internal contradictions and confronting actors with the essential obviousness of conflicting rationalities:

> "I know intuitively or conceptually the idea of chasing population growth versus trying to be more on the climate side. Because the old 2020 [climate] targets were only on track when we hit the recession." (Interview 20)[39]

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[39] Ireland was prescribed a 20% greenhouse gas reduction target by 2020 under EU law. However, only a 7% reduction was achieved. The only period in which sustained multiannual emissions reductions was experienced was during the recession of 2010 to 2014. However, following this, emissions quickly recovered their upward trajectory, lockstep with economic growth (EPA, 2021).

This innate understanding of the basic contradiction between growth and environment is revealing of an underlying inexpressible and unanalysable residue of subconscious meaning which is neither permissible nor sanctionable within official policy discourses. Thus, while the social realities of sustainability are constructed symbolically via a set of taken for granted ideological fantasies to ensure our existence appears harmonious and complete, it was not necessarily the case that actors completely failed to notice what is missing (Gunder, 2006). Probing this tension point further, by deliberately engaging actors in discursive conflict over the ascription of antithetical meanings, can be seen to expose repressed identities which challenged the hegemonic assumptions of growth-orientated praxis. For example, this was articulated by another interviewee when it was suggested that the NPF population growth targets were simply unrealistic, even dangerously so, in the context of climate change goals:

> "I don't know, I think we're in different times. I really do feel we are in different times, and I don't know why, I'm not giving to you that opinion scientifically now. But, I wonder, I do really wonder about those [population] targets, I do wonder if they will even be realised. I know they're projected on the basis of the ESRI's report, and we can all read that and have a look at that. But you could argue, were different scenarios, maybe they should have been considered. Who knew there'd be a [COVID-19] virus? We can argue also maybe the impact of very high-level climate policy hasn't been factored in… I was quite flabbergasted on a personal level when I saw that [the population growth targets], because I think, looking from 2018 forward, I was probably more of the opinion that there's much greater uncertainties out there in this world, and we are looking at the bigger climate issue. And we might be looking at a situation where we have to dial down this." (Interview 21)

This contribution is instructive of the ideological fealty that actors experience to the authority of pseudoscientific econometric growth projections (as produced by the ESRI, for example) and, notwithstanding the very robust

international scientific basis for global climate change projections and their potentially catastrophic implications for human life on Earth, the real social dilemma that actors faced in directly voicing discourses which might depart from them. Climate change thus invoked an imagination of a society interrupted by its own excluded future whereupon the incompatibility of two clashing discourses becomes readily apparent such that the presence of one threatens the other from constituting itself as an objective reality, revealing the impossibility of pure objectivity:

> "The whole issue of having our growth target solely on population is almost leading to this. If we were to fully adopt the environmental issues, would we have any development at all? That's the crux." (Interview 16)

Thus, while reality might appear objective, through disarticulating it with negating meanings, as theorised in Chapter 3, it can actually be shown to be just a contingent political choice where growth is constantly tacitly reasserted atop of social priorities to stop the dissolution of the symbolic order, furtively governmentalising planning rationalities and pushing alternatives out of our field of vision. This very phenomenon was epitomised by another interviewee when recounting what was considered plausible or realistic in the context of reconciling environmental and growth targets:

> "I think we've no choice but to make sure they're compatible. In fairness, I think the NPF has a number of national strategic objectives that are all about trying to almost force us to transition to a lower carbon-based society. So, it's about how you achieve that population growth." (Interview 14)

As discussed above, where pursuing growth is represented as choiceless, and non-growth in response to environmental imperatives unimaginable, this is where the 'fantasmatic narrative' (Telleria and Garcia-Arias, 2022) of sustainability intercedes to fill this void in signification by proposing an impossible union between incompatible elements, to reconstitute unambiguity and legitimate planning praxis in ways that obscure irreducible conflicts:

> "Yeah. I think you're absolutely right that there does seem to be disconnect between the two targets. I think as planners all we can do is make sure that in, I suppose achieving that population growth, we do it in a way that's consistent and not in conflict with the other targets we should be trying to achieve in terms of climate change targets." (Interview 14)

This illustrates how underlying discursive struggles which raised the spectre of limits are acknowledged, but bracketed, in a continuous attempt to fix meanings as part of a contingent political project played out within an uneven field of power relations (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). As discussed by Brown (2015), the recognised threat that climate change represents to the long-term growth interests of global capitalist elites results in the mobilisation of a technocratic sustainability regime to preserve their dominant interests rather than allowing them to be challenged through genuine democratic contestation (see Chapter 2). Within this discursive structuration, planners are thought to conceive of their role neutrally as being "realistic and pragmatic" (Interview 14) and engaged in a "very fine balancing act" (Interview 16) where compromising growth to environmental goals is simply impossible and outside the scope of prudent social relations:

> "I think that's what we did, you know,… and it does come back to that concept of the art of the possible and what's achievable in the timeframe we're talking about to make a difference." (Interview 11)

For Gunder (2010b), similar to BRD discussed in Chapter 5, this is the central fantasy of planning's ideology, underpinning a discursive illusion that positive-sum, techno-rational solutions can be found to impartially neutralise every antagonism, transforming an unwanted present by means of an imagined future and to deliver a sense of coherence and cohesion such that planners demonstrate a distinct unwillingness to give voice to their own underlying professional judgments or innate value-driven misgivings (Holston, 1998). It is as Rees (1999) succinctly concludes:

> "Not far below the surface in any discussion on global sustainability is a collective fear and loathing of the implications and potential consequence of taking 'our common future' and the ecological crisis seriously." (p.356)

Through this narrowly conceptualised sustainability lens, the NPF asserts its authority, even representing itself as a disruptive departure from business as usual, which must be implemented to achieve environmental objectives, as further alluded to by one interviewee when asked if emissions targets could be achieved:

> "Only if we change our ways and that's why, you know, the NPF was very upfront and out there as disruptive policies that business as usual couldn't continue, if nothing else because of Ireland's climate change obligations. So, the whole premise now of the NPF is if we don't do what's set out in the blueprint, we don't have a hope of meeting our climate change obligations, so the two go hand-in-hand." (Interview 20)

In a Laclauian sense, contemplating a future without growth therefore represents 'the Real', a traumatic void that sustainability ideology is constructed to paper over to avoid making a perceptible change of direction, concealing the essential contingency of social relations by holding together multiple, contradictory demands. On the one hand, sustainability signifies the achievement of an idealised future, where conflicts and problems disappear, while, on the other, points to the negative outside—the horrific 'other'—that threatens its achievement, giving symbolic unity to disparate struggles and claims within the existing order, and naturalising the various relations of domination within which subjects are enmeshed (Telleria and Garcia-Arias, 2022). It is for this reason that sustainability has continued to maintain such a firm discursive grip as a dominant identity-shaping paradigm for the NPF and as an instinctive reflex, triggered by planners' desire for continued legitimacy within shifting political-economic priorities:

> "From a planner's point of view, it is all about sustainability and that is where we have that, I suppose, influence." (Interview 14)

Cognitive Dissonance

Despite sustainability's dominant status as planning's transcendental ideal and deployed, albeit selectively, as an incontestable edict, most planners interviewed, still had very significant difficulty in defining and operationalising the concept in concrete terms:

> "But yet you say to Joe Soap on the street, 'Is this sustainable development?' And they'll go, 'I don't know'. They're not sure what it actually is. So, in that case I think the language needs to be a lot more basic, for want of a better phrase, so that there is an understanding of what is sustainable development and proper planning. What is it? What does it actually mean? It's just a term that we can use for, oh that house isn't sustainable or that motorway is proper planning, you know. What does it actually mean?" (Interview 16)

As explained by Gunder and Hillier (2009), this lack of specific meaning is not a flaw but, in fact, inherent to sustainability's very ideological power. By grouping together inimical concerns under a single banner (economic, social, environment) and articulating them as having equivalence from within the system, those who speak the hegemonic language have the power to (temporarily) fix its meaning, whereby one dimension (economic) is privileged over all other signifieds. Through this interdiscursive struggle, the real political agenda of sustainable development becomes obscured as one of achieving a balanced compromise between different goals, as implicitly recognised by one interviewee:

> "… global warming say, you know, protecting the environment are all key considerations. But if you put it in everything, you won't be able to, you'll be paralysed, that's my feeling… So, like it has to take a snippet of everything… A balance, that's what planning is, it's looking at everything." (Interview 5)

Gathering signifiers together and giving them equivalence is therefore key to sustainability's political function, whereby all concerns can be articulated as at least as important as each other (Brown, 2015). As the term has gradually been

'emptied' of its environmental roots, it has thus become the subject of radically diverse interpretations, ceasing to be about any one particular concern but instead a broader generalised concern for the future. Sustainability thus becomes the cause in itself, and the aspiration for a vaguely articulated harmonious alternative representing the concerns of diverse actors united by a shared lack of knowledge as to what it actually means, such that it could equally be about, for example, sustaining population growth needed for continuing economic expansion:

> "It's not just about the 'green' agenda. It's also about having a community. A community means population and that population needs to sustain itself." (Interview 13)

For some critical interviewees sustainability consequently amounted to little more than rhetorical sophistry to give the appearance of doing something to address environmental concerns but primarily wielded to legitimate the neoliberal mainstream which prevented anything concrete actually being done:

> "The other big thing about it of course is, and this is almost typical of a lot of government documents, it [the NPF] basically pays no attention to the needs of climate change. It has a grandiose chapter about sustainable development which it then proceeds to ignore and all this talk about motorway development linking up the major cities, you know, this kind of stuff. It's purely focussed on growth and rapid growth which I don't think is in any way sustainable in the context of climate change." (Interview 18)

Other interviewees expressed similar cynicism, concurring with the view that the use of the concept was merely a symbolic attempt to bring coherence to the NPF and to achieve both 'buy-in' and 'lock-in' amongst policy actors around how to deliver growth more effectively and efficiently, whilst shallowly taking on board other 'lower-order' issues:

> "Well, I think the, it's on one hand I think it's a pity the NPF wasn't developed through the low-carbon lens and the climate lens. I don't think it

was, I think it was driven through a kind of a population growth lens and that's where the conversation happened. It's only ever since… the growth of the green agenda that I think they're suddenly starting to focus on this climate change." (Interview 10)

In terms of the future of planning praxis in an age of crisis, this interpretation offers a sobering prognosis and confirms my analysis as presented in Chapter 4. Per Davidson (2010), the very mobilisation of sustainability *qua* empty signifier gestures towards the failure of signification itself wherein its inability to make any meaningful contribution to addressing environmental challenges is already accounted for:

"I meet a lot of them [planners] you know, is just, you know, [they] must take a major part of the blame, is just not being responsible, is not speaking up, is not facing up to the existential risks and impacts that we're facing… on first of all, you know the impacts and threats that we're facing ahead from global heating and climate collapse and biodiversity loss and then in stopping, you know, the actions and [facilitating] development that is making the situation worse." (Interview 8)

Such criticisms reflect the role sustainability plays in attempting to reconcile policies constrained by contrasting rationalities, i.e. that of growth and environment. As concluded in Chapter 5, planning is therefore always destined to fail because it is required to advance a compromise, optimised to neither sets of reasons, seeking to avoid conflict:

"But like, you know you cannot have a low carbon agenda and announce motorways in the same breath like, the two cannot go… There is no parallel exercise, you have to stop doing those types of developments… and so I think, from that perspective, I don't think we're going to currently achieve any of our targets." (Interview 10)

Sager (1994), drawing on Sigmund Freud, has adopted the term 'parapraxis' to describe this situation, where planning action appears increasingly irrational to different domains, as again described by an ENGO interviewee:

"Well very often you might say I've been a dissenting voice but in many ways all I've been doing is asking the planning system, you know, [to] deliver its own stated targets... So, I don't feel at all as somebody on the margins or to be some sort of dissenter, like some breakaway protestant sect. I just see the, you know, mainstream planning as failing to deliver on its own stated objectives. And they probably don't want to hear this." (Interview 8)

However, rather than being seen as a conscious strategy, the difficulty is that, within sustainability's hegemonic articulation, planners have no way of translating ecological anxieties into proactive policies that reflect the true magnitude of the problem, preventing the imagination of fundamental change:

"I don't think we can plan for such a thing to happen within the timeframes that are specified in all these documents. I think we'll fail... I cannot tell you otherwise because this is what I think. I don't see how you can change people's goals and values in 20 years or less—it takes at least a couple of generations, if not more." (Interview 15)

As discussed above, from the interviews undertaken, it is clear that many planners are internally conflicted and implicitly aware of the inherent growth-environment contradictions within their praxis and do wish to act. However, they are immobilised within a current social order that demands growth and do not have the discursive or conceptual resources available to them to develop a critical ethos to resist the current neoliberal politicisation of planning, as a necessary forerunner to achieve any tangible change. This was typified by one interviewee's response when asked if it was considered that, after three decades of use as planning's foremost concept, the sustainability paradigm could still be relied upon to deliver the necessary environmental improvements in response to the growing ecological crisis:

"Okay, although sustainable development has been around since the early 1990's... it hasn't been overly successful in reducing our environmental footprint... I think there's a greater recognition now that this isn't just about,

you know, throwing out fancy words about promoting sustainable development. It is now about action." (Interview 14)

This response represents both the failure of signification and shared fantasy upon which sustainability politics is based. The very existence of sustainability as empty signifier stands in for a society in which failures have been overcome and an indefinite continuation of business as usual through the exclusion of its own consequences. For Swyngedouw (2010b), similar to BRD discussed in Chapter 5, it is this policy obsession with sustaining a singular, harmonious nature which is the very thing that forecloses asking serious political questions about why sustainability fails and for advancing possible alternative socio-environmental futures. Amongst interviewees, this typically resulted in a form of, what Foster (2014) refers to as, 'implicative denial', where the facts and the interpretation of the ecological crisis are accepted but the policy implications of what would logically follow are suppressed as simply impossible, such that there was no coherently available way forward:

> "Yeah, we have to act on that crisis… And yet we're targeting, we're now planning to target something which is… at loggerheads with that objective. Yeah. So, how we target it, how do we offset that target? And unfortunately, this whole notion of offsetting stuff, it's something I'm not that comfortable with either like, you know. So, we can provide a huge factory but it's okay, we'll plant a thousand trees, it's okay, you know. The impact that is there cannot be resolved by planting trees or paying a sum of money… to offset their carbon footprint, I don't think that works." (Interview 16)

Planners thus find themselves trapped in a 'narrative loop' of denial where attempts to decouple urban growth from its ecological impacts ultimately depends on new economic growth, perpetuating the actual source of the problem. Yet for Brown (2015), while the hegemonic articulation of sustainability has been the outcome of a contingent interdiscursive struggle to fix its meaning in favour of prioritising economic growth, the limit of the signifying system and what is excluded from discourse is always entirely arbitrary and could be signified differently. As can be seen from the above

analysis, there is always an excluded 'excess' which 'spills out' from under its discursive limits which continuously threatens its ideological coherence. It is this excess that provides the ground upon which new meanings could potentially be constructed and thus a possible avenue for radical planning to insert possible alternatives (Laclau, 1990).

Defended Futures

Even though the NPF may have been hegemonised and institutionalised by the dominant sustainability paradigm, the 21st Century human predicament can be seen as beginning to seriously fray at the edges of the mainstream consensus and the conditions under which an indefinite continuation of current meanings are rapidly diminishing:

> "But I do think there is a growing sense of awareness and unease in people's minds, that in some way they don't fully understand, or it hasn't been fully communicated to them—yeah, this stuff on climate is really, really serious and our very existence is now being increasingly called into question." (Interview 7)

In his recent work, Hajer (2018) proposes that, while social constructionism is helpful in explaining practice, planning's teleology is fundamentally about futuring and it pays too little attention to the ways in which discourses can also be performative of the future. After all, Healy (1997a) long ago described planning as essentially, "a system of meaning embodied in a strategy for action" (p.277). Xue (2021) similarly counsels that degrowth-oriented planning scholars must place more emphasis on enacting scenarios for the creative disruption of imagined futures which, as opposed to static unilinear blueprints, could be used as a means to facilitate real democratic debate and to broaden the horizon of future choices. Planning's distinctive positionality *vis-à-vis* the future was well depicted by one interviewee:

> "In fact, planners are one of the few paid professions who work from some point way off in the future, back to the present. Even economists who do

long term projections end up with three-year projections—that's not even short-term for planners… so there are difficulties we have as a profession trying to even have a discussion with people, because our space and our time concept is very different." (Interview 21)

As presented in Chapter 4, the NPF was developed on the basis of a single demographic scenario, driven by the ESRI's econometric modelling, and simply transcribed that projection into growth targets that did not allow for the consideration of any alternative futures, as identified in one pre-draft NPF submission:

> "Ireland 2040-Our Plan [the NPF] is based on one projection of future population and jobs growth which is continually presented as a certainty. Given the time period to 2040, the certainty of projections is very limited. The NPF strategy should include a number of possible scenarios for future growth, low, medium and high." (Submission B0443, p.3)

One of the key difficulties in discussing and conceptualising future scenarios, is the emphasis often attributed to the past and the notion of 'path dependency' which, as has also been touched upon in Chapter 5, acts to limit both the mental and material plausibility of alternative imaginaries:

> "But I'll admit …, having been involved in this issue for 20 years now at least, more, the scale of the change and the timelines that are required is kind of daunting. It's daunting because we're trying to change systems that by their very nature are slow to change and difficult to change. Settlement patterns are very stuck and set by what's happened in the last 40 years, hard to undo those…" (Interview 6)

Another key limitation, identified by planner interviewees, was the absence of supportive institutional contexts and governance cultures to undertake such futuring exercises:

> "Yeah, well I think if you consider the fora, like the fora for a very long-range planning beyond, as I said, beyond academic circles it's really, really difficult to get anyone's attention to you know to be empowered and resourced to do that, I would suggest." (Interview 11)

This reflects how planning has mostly ceded its utopian responsibility for imagining the future, instead yielding to dominant economic representations which, as we have seen in the previous chapters, present the future as a cultural fact which is deeply performative of what people routinely expect as possible (Isserman, 1985; Pinder, 2002). Therefore, whose vision of the future is being created remains an essential question to be asked and important knowledge for developing the capacity to transcend it. Metzger et al. (2015) thus conclude that planning has chiefly become an instrument to displace the political rather than creating an open space whereby dialogue on possible futures can play out and where the long-range impacts of alternative policies can be considered. This was articulately captured by the same interviewee when describing the complete pointlessness of developing alternative scenarios which do not accord with the growth agenda:

> "I think though it would, in the context of what we have done in the last few years it would just be academic, I think to be honest with you... that is the narrative that's there with a very significant growth agenda and a developmental plan. So, you can see why from our perspective maybe we wouldn't go there... But realistically I think just given our trajectory as a society, our global openness, our, you know, what is invested here, 'the fundamentals' as we're saying, you know, I don't think it's a sort of a realistic and I don't think it's sort of, you know, low growth us perhaps, you know, as much as... might be realistic in that sense." (Interview 11)

This contribution pithily summarises the obsequiousness of the NPF to the wider growth paradigm as opposed to actually doing its job and preparing society for a range of possible futures:

> "I just think this NPF is all about growth, it's all about setting up these Regional Economic [and] Spatial Strategies which are all designed to implement this rapid growth over the next 20 years." (Interview 18)

The NPF was therefore reduced to a pragmatic rather than a visionary process, reproducing fortified cultural imaginaries that empowered planning policies

that prioritised 'the fundamentals' of economic growth while simultaneously disempowering a more far-sighted planning concerned with imagining 'impossible' long-run socio-ecological trajectories. This depoliticisation was recognised by another interviewee whom, even while acknowledging the ideological straitjacket imposed by the growth imperative, considered that an investigation of alternative scenarios would have been a useful exercise and thus a possible tool for social change:

> "… 'the fundamentals', obviously growth and population growth has driven an awful lot of the assumptions of the NPF. But even taking different growth scenarios, you could still apply different alternatives to each of the scenarios. And so, you could have growth scenario A, alternative 1, 2 and 3. B, 1, 2, 3. C, 1, 2, 3. And had a more open discussion on that. Now, you would be throwing it out to the political wolves, and I know they were trying to manage this thing through, so they got something out of it. But that certainly would have been a very valuable exercise, in theory." (Interview 21)

One of the advantages of the climate modelling produced by the IPCC, is that it produces authoritative visions of longer-term planetary stress scenarios that are increasingly implausible from within conventional growth-sustainability planning politics. For example, scientific studies have modelled the probability of maintaining average global temperatures at 2° Celsius above pre-industrial levels in the 21st Century at less than 5% (Raftery et al., 2017). This, as discussed in Chapter 2, is considered to be the threshold of dangerous climate change whereby a number of 'tipping points' could likely be triggered. However, notwithstanding the respected global profile of these models, the consequences of this 'uncomfortable knowledge' (Flyvbjerg, 2013) continued to remain generally excluded within planning policy debates, principally due to political imperatives:

> "But it's only now, I think that, that is becoming a reality, that discussion, and there is still a sort of a, well look it's beyond any political cycle and you know, the implications for people's property or for migration policy… is

> phenomenal and catastrophic for society. So, let's not worry too much about
> it, you know?" (Interview 11)

As also discussed in Chapter 2, within psychoanalytic literature, there is currently an ongoing debate as to whether such catastrophic representations catalyse affective responses which challenge reassuring *status quo* narratives or trigger psychological defence mechanisms which diminish such challenges (Hoggett, 2011; Yusoff and Gabrys, 2011; Adams, 2014). As Castree et al. (2013) interpose, apocalyptical imaginaries, "toss us onto a metahistorical playing field without a clue as to how to play the game" (p.321). The difficulties in engaging with such dystopian forecasting were well-identified by one interviewee:

> "I haven't really thought about those questions, you know… I mean if were
> ending up just all growing food to feed ourselves then we won't need any
> towns. But that's a long way on. I think the world would be long gone before
> that. People will treat that as science fiction until the cities get flooded, you
> know. Nobody is going to engage in that type of talk until we've got a crisis."
> (Interview 18)

This corresponds with Morton's (2013) characterisation, discussed in Chapter 1, of climate change as a 'hyper-object' which makes it difficult for actors' to recognise the need for action against the backdrop of a gathering, creeping macro-crises. Nevertheless, as has been discussed above, such envisioning of climate discontinuities could potentially be used in this research in an attempt to estrange growth assumptions and to lure planners outside the familiarity of conventional mindsets, so as to further examine the prospects for alternatives. The possibility of such an approach was recognised by one interviewee:

> "… any good strategy should have a risk assessment done… and one risk
> assessment should be the scenario where there is a climatological incident,
> and it causes huge ramifications. Now, what that looks like, there are so
> many scenarios, you know, we don't know I suppose what we're, we're… I
> suppose, we're pushing all the cattle off the cliff and we're continuing to do
> so because it's always the way we have done it. Do we stop and say, well

actually you know, maybe there's a way of doing it differently?" (Interview 10)

A quasi-dramaturgical approach was therefore used as a staging technique with interviewees confronted with a 'worst-case' sea level rise scenario (see Figure 11). This was selected as it had been popularised at the time of the interviews in a high-profile television documentary, *'Will Ireland Survive 2050?'* (Will Ireland Survive 2050?, 2019), which included three-dimensional visualisations of each of Ireland's major coastal cities, all of which are slated for significant population growth in the NPF (see Chapter 5), under extreme climate change induced flooding:

> "I think that the graphic illustration of, that almost Armageddon, that was produced my Met Éireann [The Irish Meteorological Service] was, you know, nothing makes people stop like flooding." (Interview 13)

Figure 11: Photomontage of climate change induced coastal flooding on O'Connell Street in Dublin city centre (O'Sullivan, 2019)

While the implications of such a scenario were recognised as potentially far-reaching and disturbing, it did not typically engender any meaningful reflections amongst planners on what alternative spatial futures might be conceivable and that challenged urban focussed growth in each of the selected

cities. Instead, some interviewees preferred to emphasise the uncertainty within the science:

> "Again, that's where… in the science, or the empirical evidence is far from certain, in relation to that. We know that [if]… we don't make huge changes, … there's a certain amount of climate change that is going to happen. There are going to be increases in sea level, and so on. How far it goes, depends obviously on when we finally cop ourselves on and make profound changes in the way we live… [but]… It's not reliable. It's not reliable. It's more of a projection template. And the ranges are huge. So, as a basis for deciding whether or not, for example, we rejuvenate Cork's docklands or not. There is not enough to go on." (Interview 7)

In fact, the IPCC projections of sea level rise are recognised as reliable and robust, ranging between 60 centimetres and 1.1 metres by the end of the century, any of which would have very serious ramifications for Ireland's low lying and flood prone coastal cities (IPCC, 2019). This refutation of a precautionary approach is indicative of how difficult it is for planners to imagine alternatives to hyper-urbanised futures, instead finding themselves required to operate within dominant socio-technical imaginaries where:

> "… it's accepted that these are key assets and that's why we're planning for growth in them and you know, I think it's accepted that these are places that will need to be defended and you know, solutions to address these issues found and invested in." (Interview 11)

This applied not only to the need to defend material urban futures from environmental change but also key beliefs and mindsets around the perceived inevitability of the globalised market economy and property values as the basic organising principle for social life:

> "I remember I was talking to someone in the Dutch Government… and I was kind of asking this question in terms of you know, 'Are you not threatened? Your country is below sea level', and they said something like, 'Actually, we can build up protections to about five metres firstly', which is a lot of sea level rise, you know, it's a lot. It's 100 years plus and they said, 'The reason

> we can do it is because the value of the property behind that sea wall is so huge it actually makes economic sense as an investment'." (Interview 6)

The problem was not, therefore, a lack of awareness. Even when confronted with a catastrophic climate scenario which, as portrayed by one ENGO interviewee, could trigger "runaway sea level rise that requires abandonment of coastal cities…[and] a wartime sort of regime [of] having to build sort of refugee camps around Portlaoise or in one of our towns in the midlands…" (Interview 8), it was very difficult for planners to break free from their 'mental models' of expected globalised urban futures and to engage with a spectrum of possibilities outside the usual boundaries of business as usual pragmaticism, such that there is no real alternative:

> "What was the alternative? Building two and three metre walls up along the coast… So, I think it goes back to fundamental hard decisions that are required. I think it's radical but I do think that we're so dependent on the multinationals in Dublin. We're so dependent on the corporate tax that comes from these multinationals, I think we're afraid to antagonise or pardon the language, piss these people off. They're the real decision makers in my mind." (Interview 11)

This sense of being "completely dependent on the market" (Interview 16) and in hock to the short-term exigencies of international capital was also pervasive throughout the interviews undertaken. Environmental voices who explicitly challenged the mainstream view, raising the long-term spectre of limits, thus often generated a defensive, even hostile, reactions from planners, keen to return the debate to within the parameters of the sustainability consensus:

> "Now, I think there's also… a duty and a responsibility on some of those stakeholders to recognise that context and recognise that they are in a selling position. There are some voices out there, not becoming too specific in relation to them. They're just in a feedback loop, and it's all horrific, and it's all terrible, and everybody is going to not make it. I think if we're going to have these voices, it has to be a conversational voice, rather than a confrontational voice. And I think this is where some of those voices are

losing, and the risk of losing the consensus maybe that's building. Because, they're going to law all the time. They're shouting their environmental mantra, and they're sometimes not really conversing and engaging, in terms of real debate. And they don't get what they want, whatever it is, they go to law." (Interview 7)

As discussed in Chapter 1, this is a reference to the legal challenge taken by Friends of the Irish Environment against the NPF on the grounds of, "not only not containing any meaningful climate targets in terms of transport and spatial planning but actually making the situation worse" (Interview 8). This can be seen as a further example of how, in defending mainstream discourses, those who seek to challenge the consensus in ways that cannot be contained with its discursive limits are given outsider status as interlopers and contrarian within planning debates. Another noteworthy psychological mechanism encountered during the interviews for defending urban growth futures from environmental limits was that Ireland could even be a net 'winner' from climate change, whereupon, under severe planetary breakdown, there was likely to be a desire for people to get to locations that "are more secure, stable and safe" (Interview 6) and it was considered Ireland was probably likely to be one of those:

"… if we're going to consider those sorts of things is that, well, maybe Ireland won't be the, you know, the biggest loser, say, from global climate change. Maybe it will, but the science needs to be looked at in terms of you know, the probability of, you know, the North Atlantic drift, for example, shutting down. That would be fundamental for Ireland, obviously, but let's say we're not, we just have a more volatile climate with wetter you know, more moisture in the atmosphere and you know, the sorts of things that we're witnessing now but maybe just accelerated or heightened, you know, there is a reality in that maybe we will become one of those places that more people will want to be in because large parts of the planet will become more uninhabitable." (Interview 11)

This is instructive of an extreme form of socially driven Promethean optimism (Costa-Font et al., 2009) whereby the potency of certain acute global environmental risks are deflated and climate scenarios cognitively renegotiated in ways which are less painful to, and even an opportunity for, imagined urban growth psychologies:

> "I do think, and this is coming from a climate perspective, the broadest sense is that we can't just close the doors and we're likely to be a desirable location for people to come to and you've got to manage that but it's a managed, it's not a managed, as I say, just 'Fortress Ireland' type thing. No, not Japan, they, I suppose, have a cultural view on that that you kind of, you don't want, they're looking at a managed decline. And you don't do what happened in Germany recently where you open the gates and you lose all your public support. But I don't… I think it's a reasonable assumption in a climate changing world where we are part of a global order that's not 'fortress like' in its migration policy." (Interview 6)

Different Spaces

The discourse of limits, with its sense of impending crisis, and whilst effective in identifying growth-environment contradictions and raising concern amongst policymakers as to the problems that need to be resolved, contrary to degrowth theory did not therefore immediately result in the emergence of any alternatives that might inspire transformative change. As reflected by one interviewee:

> "I think there's a lot of evidence that really fear isn't a good seller of things, you know. I think that really what we need to sell anything to somebody is give them what they want, you know." (Interview 17)

This leaves open the question as to what type of planning might be able to embed transformative practices and that might shift the impossible into the realm of the possible. As discussed above, the idea that growth might be forfeited was certainly not up for discussion. Nonetheless, with increasing selective urbanisation and uneven economic geographies, described in

Chapter 5, there was an acceptance that regional population decline could be an inevitability:

> "We should not stop planning for growth, but we should plan for all scenarios, including where growth doesn't happen, or it happens in one particular area and completely chokes that place, like it happens now in Dublin. Whereas the rest of the country sits and looks like it's a different world, a different story—it's not our life." (Interview 15)

However, planning for no or low growth, or even decline, whilst considered a longer-term possibility, was not considered a proximate prospect:

> "I think we're probably several iterations away from that. I think the conversation I would like to have the next time… would be that you know in some places we might have to decouple growth from the reality, you know, like they have to accept maybe in some of these instances that achieving stability or just a degree of you know, ticking over maybe changing the dynamic of the population just to bring in some newer people to maintain population would be a good thing and it would be achievable and more realistic than planning for growth." (Interview 11)

This was a clear recognition that the reality for some regions, particularly peripheral rural regions, was that they are shrinking and, with an increasingly selective urbanisation, were likely to continue to shrink (Daly and Kitchin, 2013). However, this was considered too politically taboo to raise in political debate:

> "Okay, the difficulty in Ireland is if you start talking about things like decline or shrinkage or an acceptance that that is going to happen, politically we're in trouble. Okay, so well planners I think can recognise that that is a reality. That is, it's already happening and that we have to try, and I suppose insert policies into our development plan to, I suppose, recognise that. Politically you're not going to have that debate, you're not going to have that discussion. There's not going to be acceptance politically that we're going to tolerate things like decline and shrinkage and that not every place is going to grow on the foot of the NPF." (Interview 14)

Reflecting the analysis presented in Chapter 4, and the fetishisation of the 'Rural Ireland' idyll in political debates, the unacceptability of broaching planning futures that do not accord with a growth agenda, even in the context of increasingly urban-focussed growth policies, was palpable, as reflected by an ENGO interviewee:

> "I was on, you know, public meetings around the country, on local radio a lot and absolutely hysterical stuff [was being said] that we were like Cromwell, we were trying to turn the country into a safari park, in many cases just for arguing [that] a local authority comply with its own development plan policy." (Interview 8)

These insights support the analysis presented in Chapter 5 that fictional expectations of 'balanced' futures were simply a harmonious discursive representation to appease political dissent and to contain the consequences of increasingly geographically uneven development. As further expressed by one interviewee, it would be hugely problematic to say to local councils, "Oh, by the way, we're leaving you out on the growth business and we're going to see you as, like, the Oregon of Ireland" (Interview 6), to which sentiment another interviewee reflected, "They'd be going 'What?' you know, and the councils will go 'that's not happening, we have to do this, we have to get a Google [i.e. a big technology firm] down here', that's everyone's ambition" (Interview 5). Nonetheless, the spatial and political dilemma for how to plan for shrinking regions in the context of selectively planned urban growth was clearly recognised:

> "I've often wondered why every projection, and politically as well, you might be aware, that any development plan that ever showed a decline in population, that did not get through the council. Even hopeful projections were put in because it's political. So, yeah, it may be that somebody has to talk tough and say, the population here, folks, is going to be a managed decline, and that could be what happens." (Interview 18)

As apprehended by another interviewee, the idea of 'planned shrinkage' did potentially open an opportunity for peripheral regions to look at their future planning differently and to recognise that:

> "We're actually the extinction piece in this. And it would be extremely regrettable for the planning process to not acknowledge and deal with that sense. So, absolutely. The growth paradigm is not applicable to those locations; the qualitative one bloody well is." (Interview 7)

The theoretical inference being drawn here, in support of my research hypothesis, is that it is precisely through casting off 'balanced' representations of space and recognising and accepting that growth is a spatially uneven process, and where there are always 'winners' and 'losers', that offers the conceptual overtures for different knowledge to emerge which introduces fundamental departures from the presentism of growth-orientated planning dictates. This demonstrates how important harmonious representations of space, such as the BRD storyline, are in maintaining the growth agenda and in precluding the emergence of alternative meanings. However, while there was an acceptance that, "that's a conversation that can be had as long as there is a clear path" (Interview 10), there was also a recognition that discursive framing was really very important:

> "You need to find a different word from shrinkage — that might be an aspect of it in a demographic sense. But we have a differentiated territorial planning approach that recognises that [in] some areas there is a growth piece coming at it." (Interview 7)

One alternative put to interviewees was that, rather than focussing on a select number of large urban centres, a different strategy could be to shift to a bottom-up perspective that challenged the vertical, hierarchical structuring of spatial relations, emphasising instead relocalised and decentralised planning strategies organised around Ireland's historic inland network of small rural market towns and villages. As discussed in Chapter 2, and as will also be advanced further in Chapter 7, such an approach would generally align with

degrowth's advocacy for localism, self-sufficiency and autonomy within bioregional principles, and might also be more resilient in the context of adapting to climate change, e.g. coastal sea level rises, etc. (Xue, 2021). Some interviewees agreed that a deepening of space-sensitive approaches around scale and place offered potentially promising avenues to enact authentic possibilities for change:

> "I think that we haven't given enough emphasis to small villages and towns, and how they can really become part of more sustainable solutions. I think that small towns and villages have great potential to rediscover the whole idea of local society, local economy, and maybe local environmental management… So, maybe it's a little bit like the Tesco, every little bit helps, rather than suggesting we're going basically baldy-headed for five cities."
> (Interview 21)

However, for others, urban focussed growth was so deeply ingrained within societal values and expectations that it was, "a big jump to reimagine a world where we have smaller hubs" (Interview 10). As such, consideration of downscaled, decentred alternatives was constrained within an urbanised psychosocial *gestalt* which taught actors how to think about themselves and their goals:

> "Again, I come back to the issue of critical mass. Our regional cities are just too small at the moment, and they have to be significantly grown."
> (Interview 20)

According to Hajer and Versteeg (2019), one of the reasons that actors find it so difficult to imagine possible alternatives that break with the mainstream is that they lack concrete imaginaries of alternatives. Interviewees were therefore asked if the practical examples of 'ecovillages' or 'Transition Towns', based on the idea of smaller-scale and decentralised human settlements, could provide tangible opportunities for planning learning and as concrete pedagogical models towards achieving alternatives to growth-centred planning. Again, such ideas generally accord with a degrowth perspective (Xue, 2014). For most

interviewees, and again confirming the analysis in the literature presented in Chapter 2, these initiatives were considered peripheral and of very limited real-world relevance to mainstream praxis:

> "Well, the only ecovillage, or what's called an ecovillage, in Ireland is the Cloughjordan one and that is not a replicable model because that's really a group of outsiders, more like a housing co-op, buying an area of land and a lot of them are, you know, are travelling [commuting] to a larger urban centre twenty kilometres away in Limerick. The amount of bottom-up community sustainability transition initiatives that we're seeing so far have been extremely disappointing." (Interview 8)

For other interviewees, though, there was a distinct absence of government support for scaling up and disseminating such initiatives, such that they might have greater influence on mainstream praxis:

> "…how come that wasn't embraced as an initiative and a pilot and supported by the government? There is no support for change… none whatsoever…" (Interview 19)

As such, there was considerable scepticism as to whether such localised initiatives could have any impact in inspiring alternative planning praxes, in the absence of changes in wider governance and conceptual cultures:

> "Well, apart from what I've said already, without basic structural changes in the way we govern ourselves I just can't see those things happening. They become, you know, it's like your pilot project which were always used by government. Say we're going to have a pilot project and see how this works and ten years later, it's well, what happened to that pilot project? …It was just a way of delaying having to make decisions on things. But to give the impression that you're doing something about it." (Interview 18)

A key perceived challenge with these niche, localist initiatives, therefore, was their capacity to upscale which, according to Xue (2021), has been attributed in the literature as a key shortcoming of such movements and their inability to

challenge the systemic structures which need to be changed at a significant social scale:

> "I think when it comes to it, if we have a view about the development of this sustainable development model it has to be more inclusive. It has to be bringing a whole variety of different strands together and I think that includes the Extinction Rebellion, Transition Towns, ecovillage type… But it's not exclusively that. You know, it is I think, they have to inspire a kind of a wider transition… And that doesn't mean you're dissing what Transition Town is saying, absolutely not, they've a lot of lessons they can share… So yeah, by all means include them, but it's not the only narrative, it's not the only story." (Interview 6)

Nevertheless, despite their perception as very much fringe initiatives, there was a sense that, "they're starting to maybe emerge more now with the whole climate change conversation that's going on… or are engaged [with] a bit more by government" (Interview 9). Or as one local authority planner suggested:

> "I think that they're perceived as ideologies. That there's a certain type of person or individual that wants to live in a… it's almost like a commune or a community that you buy into an idealism. I think that there's very much that sense of *meitheal* [40] and community reliance and resilience. I don't know. I have never really stood back to think too much about Cloughjordan. I remember I watched a documentary about it, last year/eighteen months, and it still really hasn't got off the ground properly in terms of, it's incomplete. That was my lasting memory of it. I do think we should start and try to do different things. So, yeah, I think it's a good point that you're making that there's not enough, I suppose visionaries within the profession." (Interview 13)

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[40] *Meitheal* is an old Irish Gaelic term that describes a type of communitarian ethic for how neighbours come together to assist in the saving of crops or other tasks.

Breaking Barriers

Overall, the results presented in this chapter suggest that while planners appear to be cognisant of the contradictions and limitations of the growth paradigm, and open to change, they remain incarcerated within a discursive system which limits their agency to articulate the role that they might play in recalibrating socio-spatial futures for an age of crisis. The political governance structures within which planners operate were often identified as the chief impediment:

> "To a certain degree like, you're right, climate change is important, and the NGOs are calling for radical change but the overall … governance area isn't set up for big change, it's the system. There's a lethargy in bureaucracy which is probably necessary in order to prevent kind of radical change happening too quickly. People have a vested interest, and they are set up and they are very difficult to change once they are set up, it's accepted. I'm not saying that radical change [isn't necessary], … but it's still difficult to embrace that and change it overnight, you know." (Interview 5)

Corroborating my research problem, described in Chapter 1, growth was such an exalted and inviolable institutional goal, that planners found it difficult, if not impossible, to voice opposition (Beauregard 1989). There was also an awareness of the political ideological constraints which implicitly coerced their agency:

> "But I suppose again it comes back to the professional body. If we were all part of a professional body, we sign up to a charter almost of that body, and if that is strong in what it's promoting, again, what does the IPI [Irish Planning Institute] promote? It promotes growth." (Interview 16)

Therefore, planners were, more or less, institutionally compelled to act as agents in support of growth, seemingly unwilling and constrained in giving voice to their own independent moral or ethical judgments. Instead, as discussed above, they viewed their role of advancing the 'common good' or the 'public interest' as chiefly one of impartial dealmakers and technical

intermediaries pragmatically negotiating between conflicting interests, rather than attempting to intercede with their own values to transform relations of power:

> "I think it's a like, it's an awful thing as a planner but the idea, the notion that if you're making as many people as unhappy as you are happy, you're doing a good job. And I don't look at that as a badge of honour or a good thing but there is an element of truth to it as well." (Interview 11)

This aligns closely with Fox-Rogers and Murphy's (2016) study of how difficult it is for planners to actively take positions in direct opposition to the short-term interests of economic power, and significant among the reasons is that it may seriously undermine their career prospects:

> "Is it poor leadership? I don't know. Is it because Ireland's too small? So, people won't chance wrecking their careers or saying something if they're dependent on money coming in. We do not seem to speak out when we should…" (Interview 19)

It is therefore probably unrealistic to expect individual planners to take a stand alone on ethical principle in their everyday practice, especially when they have no way of knowing if others might share their principles (Thacher, 2013). For example, practising what Grange (2016) terms 'fearless speech' is challenged and complicated by multiple professional, institutional, political and societal barriers, and requires saying, "something which is dangerous to himself and thus involves a risk" (Foucault, 2001, p.13). This was demonstrated by one planner interviewee when recounting his time as a young planning graduate in a large planning authority:

> "And the most important thing is like when I was in planning in [a County Council], like I came up with these great ideas, I can't remember who it was that said it to me, they said '…you'll never change the system, the system will change you'… And that's the type of thing that sticks with you for the rest of your life… But it's true… What's the point? …I'm just going to frustrate myself, so you just work within the system — that is the system, and

the systems don't change, you know, overnight, they slowly evolve." (Interview 5)

Praxis therefore becomes a constant trade-off, where planners progressively adapt their principles to fit with the broader political-economic structures:

"There are principles that you have to stick by but there are other issues that you have to adapt to where you are and that's for survival. You can't go in every day taking on a [local council] chamber over planning issues, you won't survive." (Interview 13)

As such, these results suggest that there was a distinct lack of confidence within the profession, which has largely become silenced and unwilling to put forward alternative ideas or independently problematise truth claims:

"I think that there's a tiredness in the profession, maybe that's unfair. That people got battered after the Celtic Tiger, you got battered during it because you were so busy. Then you go and get a lot of the blame… there hasn't been that many people that have put their heads above that parapet for an alternative view." (Interview 16)

Again, this accords with my own earlier study (Daly, 2016) of Irish planners as an adherent cadre of docile professionals whom, as part of the ongoing neoliberalisation of planning, have become reduced to a process orientated and technical, rather than political, discipline, impervious to radical influence and devoid of utopian or creative content:

"I worked in planning for ten or twelve years and I probably, out of all of the people that have inspired me in any of my working practices, I have never come across a planner yet who is, you know, whose vision for planning and doing something has made me go, 'Jesus, I want to be that person!' You know, and that's not blaming the people or the profession but it's certainly, in Ireland, I think there's a huge lack of creativity within the planning profession… I think the planners you find in local authorities are the ones who, who are process orientated because to get to the top of a process orientated tier you have to be compliant with new legislation." (Interview 10)

As a result, as further recounted by another interviewee, as the values and actions associated with planning are rarely simply a matter of individual personal choice, planners do what they think good planners should do:

> "I don't question my own values; I implement the values that are supposedly the correct ones." (Interview 5)

Undeniably, the driving forces of the growth paradigm are deeply cultural, emanating from the overpowering socio-political structures within which planning praxis operates and, as described in Chapter 4, performatively closing down the space for the imagination of non-growth centred alternatives:

> "I think it's more basic than that. I think at a cultural level, planners would very often be attracted to or drawn to being involved in big development projects and interacting with these developers. And there's a certain buzz that comes around, say, working with a whole variety of stakeholders, and there's millions and millions of euros of stuff happening in a particular location, and you have a significant whip hand in relation to shaping that." (Interview 7)

While this may paint a bleak picture for the prospect of culturally repositioning planners' as a vanguard of transformative change, Hajer and Versteeg (2019) emphasise the dangers of focusing on path-dependent structural constraints faced by practitioners, instead emphasising less deterministic positions where past experience loses its value as a guide to the future. The contribution of this chapter highlights how, through problematising growth-environment tensions it can be made apparent that the current system cannot be sustained and that there are limits to growth:

> "I think that's been the demise in a lot of other European cities or European countries and cities, that there's just this open, open thing that they just keep growing, growing, growing… but unfortunately capitalism is… a growth-based system." (Interview 6)

This opens up the possibility for revealing suppressed potentialities as to planners' role as agents of progressive change and the further articulation of possibilities beyond the growth subjectivities imposed by current politics and which can lead to fundamental questioning of the limitations and contradictions of growth-orientated praxis:

> "The fundamental is, and it's always been a question, why are we always predicated on growth? And the question really should be more about sustainable development, rather than some attachment to a concept of growth. Now, sustainable development can be growth, but development isn't always about growth…" (Interview 21)

Through disclosing the insoluble incongruencies of current growth-based praxis, realism itself thus becomes a question of politics, whereby a lack of realism is that growth can continue indefinitely (Latouche, 2010b), as illustrated by one interviewee when asked whether post-growth planning might be considered in future versions of the NPF:

> "I think that is a, it's a valid way to look at things. And I think it's something that you know, we will, I think we will have to introduce into the discussion, debate, consideration for the future iterations." (Interview 11)

For Oomen et al. (2021) therefore, and as has been demonstrated in the preceding chapters, just as mainstream socio-technical imaginaries of 'balanced' or 'sustainable' futures are performative of pro-growth futures, providing actions in the present with meaning for how to go on, the imagination of juxtaposed discontinuities can also begin to be affective, giving meaning to the possible reorientation of practice. This was reflected by one interviewee when asked whether the NPF gave enough weight to environmental perspectives in the context of growth:

> "I think it's already enshrined in the NPF, a big chunk of it is about protecting the environment and biodiversity. It's just not to the fore. The big chunk is about growth, and the other part is at the end. So, it should be brought forward, somewhere to the beginning of the document. Saying that,

growth and this should not be incompatible. So, we have to find a way to get both done, maybe slower growth and higher protection. Maybe one day we'll reach some kind of equilibrium which we're actually getting away from… but it should be reversed somehow, in terms of how you communicate policy. Because the way it is right now, everybody sees… 1.1 million [population], 600,000 jobs, 500,000 houses—yoo-hoo, the future is great! No, it's not, it's miserable, because it displaces so much flora and fauna, that we'll all suffer." (Interview 15)

This contribution illustrates how planners, whilst still unsure as to how to resolve the inherent growth-environment tension, remain culturally contingent actors whom, when actively engaged in critical self-reflection, can identify a semiotic crack, a need for learning and for reframing policy practice in ways that might not necessarily reproduce an ideological commitment to the prevailing social order. On the contrary, there was a recognition that growth was not sacrosanct and, "that almost growth-centred and we'll figure the rest out afterwards, maybe idiom, more classical or traditional planning and development models in Ireland, was kind of leading us on the road to nowhere, literally" (Interview 7). This was similarly expressed by one planner interviewee:

> "I can't recall who actually said it but there's a quote that, 'Everything that is normal now was once thought crazy'… Like the alternative view has now become the mainstream view." (Interview 16)

Thus, it was not the case that there is a complete lack of awareness amongst planners as to their role in maintaining a growth society. This suggests that previous studies which conclude that planning is unwilling or incapable of reflecting critically on the facilitative role it plays within the development process may be overstated, whilst understating the profession's agency and capacity to respond effectively to socio-ecological challenges (cf. Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2016). For example, one interviewee, when asked as to whether a sufficient recognition was given to the need for changed planning cultures

that radically disrupt our thinking in response to environmental challenges, answered:

> "Probably not. But I think attitudes are changing and I think it often comes down to the personnel in local authorities and personal interests and so on, that some local authorities are much more progressive in thinking, you know, outside the box and thinking of alternatives, and so on, so what we're getting is pilots around the place. But not mainstream yet." (Interview 20)

Thus, contrary to the analysis presented above, this suggests that there does remain scope for individual 'lone wolf' planners to abandon political neutrality and wield more autonomous influence through pointing at future consequences of current policies and practices, and tabling critiques which could be used to enliven political debate around planning outcomes:

> "In other words, if I didn't live in a democratic place… if I was some form of dictator and I could put in any policy I want, of course the development plan is going to look a lot different." (Interview 14)

How this transformative potential becomes incorporated into everyday planning practice, however, remains the fundamental challenge. Some planners, for example, did report using small ethical, insurgent interventions with potentially wide-ranging effects in their everyday praxis:

> "I did my best to get them into the draft plan, sometimes inconspicuous and sometimes more visible. Well, I think I got away with at least 30% — everything else was knocked off by [the elected] members. This erosion has continued over the… plan cycles. So, I'm pushing for it again in the next cycle. So, that's why I'm saying, it's not a quick change; it can be achieved, but it takes time for people to accept these changes. It's possible." (Interview 15)

This shows there are opportunities for planners to be progressive, even working within the current institutional order. As advised by Chomsky (2002), and as will be further advanced in Chapter 7, "it's completely realistic and rational to work within structures to which you are opposed, because by doing

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so you can help to move to a situation where then you can challenge those structures" (p.345). Nevertheless, such activism typically results in only marginal reforms when the problem demands systemic, fundamental change:

> "What you asked there, do you consider that planning policy and practice will need to be significantly altered? — Yes! It has to be significantly altered. But the length of time to implement these alterations will be dictated by politics, as it has been in the past. And politics puts a break on any kind of well-meaning alterations or changes." (Interview 15)

This clearly raises questions as to what new planning subjectivities might be able to transcend the current professional commitment to maintaining the growth agenda and could best serve a true democratic society in an age of limits. Real transformation takes time and dedication and therefore risks losing momentum in the absence of consistent discursive resources available to practitioners that would enable planners to better exploit their 'inside' institutional position in formulating, designing and building structurally new countervailing ideas that could help trigger broader and more transformative political changes. It is apparent from the above analysis that, while there is a residual openness and willingness to consider new ideas "so that we give voice to those new perspectives or perspectives that have been around for a long time, but just have never quite broken through" (Interview 7), some planners lamented the absence of such proposals coming from the public sphere which may support them in this endeavour:

> "Well personally we're hoping to see those kinds of submissions coming in. Okay. We prepare development plans. We want to see people putting forward things that we may not have thought of and that we should be trying to incorporate in our development plan." (Interview 14)

This corroborates the analysis presented in Chapter 4 as to the near total institutionalisation of uncritical growth-orientated perspectives in the public submissions to the NPF. For one interviewee, a key shortcoming was the perceived deficiencies in academia which, it was suggested, were far too

focussed on internal communication via peer-reviewed articles, and where research results were unavailable to planners on the ground and that:

> "Nobody hears about. And lastly, usually professional planners, because we have so much focus now on peer review or peer whatever it is, publication, all that kind of stuff. It's the publication route that is driving the universities in their rankings and so on—not actually whether this stuff makes any difference to what people are doing on a practical level." (Interview 7)

Whilst this perception somewhat contradicts the conclusions of Chapter 5 as to the extent to which academia tacitly frames what counts as planning knowledge, it does point to the nature of relationships between academia and the wider political and policy system, and the deficits in actively proposing and mobilising counter-discourses which might become performative of a more desirable and better future state, and which offer hope from which to work towards alternatives:

> "In the research community, I don't know, is there many people standing up and saying we've got a climate problem? You know, we've got sustainability issues? There's a small number, you know… But ultimately, it's a political system problem... It has to come from there and then it's implemented because I don't think we're going to get the kind of change of thinking you're looking for coming out of the research community in an effective way in terms of influencing government." (Interview 18)

This implies that academics, in order to move past this impasse and to equip planners with the critical resources to propose alternatives, must look for new knowledge that is able to embed transformative practices. The analysis presented in this chapter has shown that a radical acceptance of discontinuity, and the consequent loss of meaning that follows, might be the best place to start. Once we realise that we don't *need* growth, that we already have enough, we are free to think much more rationally about how to respond to the crises we face and to struggle for the institutions that will allow us to live within limits. This is the intriguing idea behind degrowth (Kallis and March, 2015).

Conclusions

As discussed in introducing the research problem for this thesis in Chapter 1, there have been multiple studies that have critically problematised Irish planning praxis, and planning more generally, highlighting the need for planners to become more aware of their potentialities as agents of transformative change, rather than in support of power. However, as of yet, few studies have actually attempted to move past critique and to test how this might actually be achieved in practice.

The problem is, of course, that neoliberalism has been so incredibly successful in colonising actors' *habitus* that growth has become the basic departure point for all debates on possible socio-spatial futures, proscribing alternatives. Research therefore tends to constantly diagnose praxis rather than advancing possibilities as to how it might be different. Consequently, how planners can actually become aware of their own self-constitution, exposing themselves as subjects through desubjugating processes of radical self-questioning such that new forms of agency might emerge, remains something of an enigmatic gap in the literature (Grange, 2016).

As a possible way forward, degrowth scholars advocate its methodological utility as a form of, "negative dialectics, a dialectic of misfitting" (Holloway, 2010, p.9). The aim is to decolonise, to defamiliarise, imaginaries, unveiling the impossibility of understanding, let alone solving, our current planetary crises from within the same growth-orientated doctrines that caused them in the first place. Once we accept this, it changes how we think about the problem and, "raises the unsettling possibility that much of even our present cultural worldview may consist largely of shared illusions!" (Rees, 2003, p.31). As similarly claimed by Hickel (2020a):

> "Sometimes new ideas can make you see everything differently. Old myths fall apart, and new possibilities come into view. Difficult problems melt away, or become much easier to solve. Things that once seemed unthinkable suddenly become obvious. Whole worlds can change." (p.40)

However, even for Varvarousis (2019), from an empirical perspective, within degrowth theory, "*the decolonisation of the imaginary* remains little more than a political slogan" (p.494, italics in original). There exists a major epistemological deficit that makes, "degrowth a theoretical framework that is able to provoke but unable to explain or suggest how actual societies can change direction and follow another pathway" (ibid.). In response to this identified lacuna, in Chapter 3 I have theorised a novel research strategy and method which builds upon an already familiar cache of corresponding radical thought from within human geography and discourse analytical literature, but which to date has typically been overlooked as a possible counterpart for methodologising degrowth as a weapon of critique. Here, Lefebvre's transgressive political and intellectual project stands out as an obvious spatial complement:

> "The project has meaning only by virtue of an impossibility: the impossibility of the existing social relations being adhered to indefinitely. The project finds out what this impossibility makes possible and, conversely, what the 'real' obscures and blocks at present." (Lefebvre, 1976, p.36)

Nevertheless, despite the conceptual value of degrowth in pushing against-and-beyond growth, the result of my analysis confirms that the critics are correct that mobilising it as a negation in academic research faces a very considerable practical dilemma. Too many people intuitively interpret it as being against 'progress', whereupon it quickly loses its power (Alexander, 2013). This is where the intercession of a discourse analytical perspective can help in bridging this epistemological gap through identifying and deconstructing planning's taken for granted signifiers which, "gives social cohesion a particular force and makes it very difficult to break" (Holloway, 2010, p.52).

In this chapter I have sought to further test my research hypothesis through focussing on capitalism's hidden growth-environment fault line and the 'perfectly ordinary' and reiterative representation of sustainable

development that holds actors' meanings in place, obliging them to act in certain coherent and cohesive ways. The results of my analysis tally with many other academic studies that current attempts to situate the ecological crisis within sustainability cultures simply defends the mainstream ideological commitment of planning as an accomplice of neoliberal spatial governance and its one-world universalism (Blühdorn, 2007). This thoroughly depoliticises planning, transforming its actors into, "radicals you can take home to mother" (Miraftab, 2009, p.20).

However, my analysis has also shown that, through introducing contrapuntal values and principles, practitioners can be made aware of the contingency of their social realities and by which their understandings of praxis are performed and enacted. Intentionally confronting policy actors with a deconstructive ontology can begin to unhinge notions of development from past experiences of growth and expansion; de-essentialise economic logics; loosen the discursive grip of unilinear growth trajectories; and undermine planning cultures and practices that imagine indefinite growth as a possibility in the context of global biocapacity (Gibson-Graham, 2010).

Pulling back the veil and naming these limits and contradictions incites people to think differently, revealing that the ideological closure of growth-orientated 'objectivity' is not always so total. Instead, there remains a residual openness to new possibilities and an increasing realisation that many features of current planning praxis simply sustain the unsustainable. As such, it is possible to detect narrow breaches, or cracks, through which planning might transition from being a system maintainer to a vanguard of transformative socio-spatial change:

> "…I think there's so much of what needs to happen is a change of consciousness… people are you know, almost at this incredible crisis point in human history… So, the fact is, it's an imminent collapse of the neoliberal capitalist system. So, in a sense the solution I think has to be community… I think people have been taught very well to be a sheep almost… To be passive

consumers is where we've been kept very well. People have been divided so everybody sits on their own…" (Interview 17)

Expanding the analysis presented in Chapter 5, one means of emancipating these repressed identities is to expose the endemically uneven core-periphery realities of capitalist spatialisation, currently obscured by BRD, and to directly confront planning policy actors with the asymmetric inevitability of growth.

The result of this semiotic dislocation yields some potentially valuable and surprising results for radical planning scholarship whereby a recognition of the unavoidability of spatial imbalances can be seen to offer possible openings through which praxis could start to relinquish normative expectations of future growth and to embrace, rather than deny, post-growth planning possibilities. This corresponds with the literature on shrinking cities, opened in Chapter 2, whereby through submitting to the irrevocability of decline, new possibilities for a post-growth planning reimagining emerge. Such opportunities only come about from a crisis a meaning—a crisis that is currently blocked by the everyday banality of 'balanced' and 'sustainable' spatial representations which continuously seek to regulate rationalities in ways that are decisively non-threatening to the existing social order:

> "The universal pressure to conform comes from the social cohesion of capitalist social relations. We can make a protest, we can scream, we can throw stones but then the totality of capitalist social relations seems to flow around us and suck us back into the system." (Holloway, 2010, p.53)

This chapter therefore responds to Gibson-Graham's encouragement for an experimental, rather than critical, orientation to research as a means for bringing new ontologies of becoming into being (Gibson-Graham, 2008). Whilst my results provide some hope for the possibility of advancing an alternative post-growth planning, the manner in which it might materialise in the real world and gain traction, and what might make planners act, continues to remain underexplained and thus an important project for further theorisation.

The argument developed in this chapter is that through engaging in an interdiscursive analysis, the very contingency and indeterminacy of planning's harmonious watchwords hold out the possibility for them to be filled with new meanings. The key question then becomes how do we discursively reconstitute planning's hegemonic discourses to reprioritise socio-ecological concerns in ways that could potentially be performative of new realities? This might be the starting point for developing a new legitimacy for planning in an age of limits, with its attendant possibilities for amplifying non-reformist, grassroots political action. This is the subject of the penultimate chapter in Part III of this thesis.

Part III: Possibilities

Chapter 7: Post-Growth Performativities

Introduction

Now that this thesis has unpacked the discursive underpinnings of planning's growth imperative, the next question, per Flyvbjerg's (2004) phronetic approach to planning research, is what, if anything, should we do about it? As Berry reminds:

> "Anybody who goes on so long about a problem is rightly expected to have something to say about a solution. One is expected to 'end on a positive note', and I mean to do that." (Berry, 2008, p.45)

The purpose of this chapter is therefore to answer the final research question of this thesis: *How might an alternative post-growth institutional planning praxis be advanced?* In keeping with my activist-scholarship standpoint, it comprises the primary theoretical contribution of this thesis, seeking to transcend mere critique and to advance a proposition for how a more emancipatory post-growth praxis could be conceived and, more importantly, emplaced.

It is acknowledged that the case analysis presented in Part II comprises an idiographic study which cannot necessarily be generalised. However, as we have also seen, the extent to which supranational discourses, primarily emanating from a pan-European scale, are performative in reproducing growth-orientated planning praxis is empirically compelling. Therefore, the chief hypothesis of this thesis is that changing our discourses has the power to

change how we allocate meaning, altering our social realities in potentially transformative ways, with the capacity for more general application beyond the specific Irish case. This chapter therefore addresses the second and third objectives of this thesis and sketches a theoretical contribution to the advancement of an alternative post-growth planning discourse and, consequently, to the real-world realisation of degrowth in praxis.

I commence with a Lefebvrian excursus, and particularly his utopian concern with post-capitalist change, as offering a theoretical complement for spatialising degrowth and to interpenetrate the commonality with the literature on urban shrinkage. Against the discourses of 'balanced' and 'sustainable' development, deconstructed in Part II, I next propose two counter-discourses of 'differential' and 'regenerative' development as discursive mediums to help performatively embed degrowth imaginaries in the production of space, and for the possibility of institutionalising a transformative post-growth planning paradigm in practice.

Theorising Alterity

Seeing Cracks

The results of my empirical analysis presented in Chapter 6 show that, while hegemonic planning doctrines remain powerful, and exert a strong hold on spatial imaginaries, they are not impenetrable (Davoudi et al., 2018). Cracks remain through which alternative discourses for transformative planning action could potentially emerge from within a regime that presents itself as closed. Although Holloway (2010) cautions that the potential of these cracks to translate into something system-changing should not be overstated, they do however represent small, tentative openings as hopeful starting points to begin to familiarise different possibilities, where ethically minded scholars can play an important role. However, the manner, in which these discourses might become visible in the policy world remains the key challenge. Hence, we first

need to sketch the bounds of a theoretical schema that could potentially help in guiding us in this task.

It is here that I wish to reintroduce Lefebvre, signalled at the end of Chapter 2, and his indefatigable optimism of both the intellect and the will for imagining and achieving revolutionary change in human societies, and the potential for cross-fertilising his radical urban philosophy with degrowth as a novel theoretical basis for both spatialising degrowth and degrowing planning. Heretofore, I have chiefly used Lefebvre's critical penetration as a systemic diagnostic and critique, as negation is always the first task of emancipatory research (Wright, 2010). However, as has been discussed in Chapter 3 as the key insight underpinning my research hypothesis, less often deliberated, especially within planning theory, is that central to his grand project was his openness to the city as a "possibilities machine" (Lefebvre, 1976, p.16), producing a rich corpus of work that seeks to retheorise the fundamental role of space for imagining creative alternatives to capitalism; dormant or repressed within current conditions; through, "conducting endless experiments which go beyond philosophy and theory to arrive at practice and action" (Schmid, 2008, p.43).

To briefly recapitulate, we have seen in the preceding chapters that growth and urbanisation are structurally coupled, providing an essential motor force for propelling capitalism where spatial development is less a product but an independent driver of capital accumulation. As a consequence, aggrandizing planning narratives for reproducing the basic socio-spatial preconditions for regional competitiveness are performatively hegemonised as the natural order of things, institutionalising a powerful growthist common sense within spatial governance (Ferreira, 2021). The result is a largely culturally incurious planning profession which finds comfort in adherently adopting the technocratic discourses of 'balanced' and 'sustainable' development; where pro-growth, pro-urban concerns remain uncontested;

dynamically stabilising meanings and severely inhibiting planners' ability to imagine the possibility of alternatives (ibid.). It is as Lefebvre (1996) describes:

> "Planning as doctrine, that is, as ideology, interpreting partial knowledge, justifying its application and raising these (by extrapolation) to a poorly based or legitimated totality." (p.47)

Nevertheless, while Lefebvre stresses that the production of space is always preceded by discourse, he also cautions against overestimating the social and political importance of language:

> "The Word has never saved the world and it never will." (Lefebvre, 1991, p.134)

Instead, as introduced in Chapter 3 and subsequently explored throughout Part II, he invites us to see the world dialectically whereby, as a consequence of its absolute qualities, abstract space always conceals within itself innate vulnerabilities arising from the ineradicable tension between the use of space for social purposes, on the one hand, and the domination of space as a productive and commercial force, on the other (Merrifield, 1993). For Lefebvre, it is from within these immanent moments of destabilising contradictions that leaks a fugitive residue of prospective subversion, providing supervenient glimpses through which a transformed social life could potentially open up (Pinder, 2015). This 'differential space' — literally the right to difference — is a space that doesn't look superficially different but is radically open, and openly radicalisable, often emerging from subaltern, place-bound initiatives within the transitory, intimate spaces of the city (Soja, 1996; Merrifield, 2000). In short, Lefebvre's distinctive theoretical contribution is that space comprises the locus where these hidden contradictory forces become traceable, inadvertently leaving it susceptible to the emergence of tangible manifestations of grassroots resistance which prioritise the use value of space over and above its exchange value, irreducible to economic imperatives and incapable of being subsumed into hegemonic ways of thinking (Merrifield, 1993). It is from within these

differential spaces that, for Lefebvre, hope springs eternal for the possibility of post-capitalist change.

Whither Utopianism

At the core of Lefebvre's emancipatory thought is an irrepressible commitment to the rehabilitation of a utopian spirit for theorising the possibility of a completely different world:

> "… today more than ever there is no theory without utopia. Otherwise, a person is content to record what he sees before his eyes; he doesn't go too far—he keeps his eyes fixed on so called reality: he is a realist… but he doesn't think! There is no theory that neither explores a possibility nor tries to discover an orientation." (Brenner and Elden, 2009, p.178)

Within contemporary positivist philosophy, which for Lefebvre is nothing more than the absence of thought, the very idea of utopianism has long been maligned, dismissed as unworkable and, as illustrated in Part II of this thesis, subsequently fading from the agendas of policy practitioners. In its place, Bletter (1993) records "a creeping, incremental pessimism" which might be described as, "the absence of hope about the future" (p.47, quoted in Pinder, 2002, p.229). Such cynicism poses a serious problem for a progressive politics committed to challenging the injustices and harms of the existing social world, weakening the prospects for transformative change (Wright, 2010). Lefebvre, however, railed against this generalised, fatalistic retreat:

> "Utopist! And why not? Since I do not ratify compulsion, norms, rules and regulations; since I put all the emphasis on adaptation; since I refute 'reality', and since for me what is possible is already partly real, I am indeed a utopian; you will observe that I do not say utopist; but a utopian, yes, a partisan of possibilities." (Lefebvre, 1984, p.192)

Lefebvre therefore instead sought to radically transform the way in which utopianism is understood through conceiving it, not as a fixed and final destination, but as a provocative, transgressive project whereby reaching for

the impossible is always a crucial precondition for extending and reconstituting the possible. "We've discredited utopia," he insists. "One needs to rehabilitate it. Utopia may never realize itself; and yet it is indispensable for stimulating change. Utopia is a function and a capacity, even, above all, if it doesn't realize itself. The dream of an egalitarian society, a society of abundance, is within reach though it eludes us… But it resides there nonetheless as a means of stimulation" (Lefebvre et al., 1959, p.512; quoted in Merrifield, 2006, p.163).

Unlike transcendental utopias of fully worked out idealised societies, common in planning thought, Lefebvre's utopian philosophy is therefore always, "an *approach toward*, a movement beyond set limits into the realm of the not-yet-set" (Bammer, 1991, p.7, italics in original). Harvey similarly maintains that:

> "Emancipatory politics calls for a living Utopianism of process as opposed
> to the dead Utopianism of spatialized urban form." (Harvey, 1996, p.436)

For Pinder (2015), what makes such utopianism-of-becoming vital is that it stands foursquare against the present-day poverty of imagination and short-term realism of political pragmatism that assumes systemic change can never happen (see also Levitas, 2013; Purcell, 2013). Lefebvre was thus acutely aware of the dangers of pursuing both idealised utopianism, which remains aloof from practice, and petrified realism, mechanistically reproducing existing power relations. He understood that while a world that is socially, ecologically and economically desirable will necessarily differ markedly from the one which we currently inhabit, this future will have to be built from the present (Bennett et al., 2016). Consequently, what he calls our 'urgent utopia' involves a style of radical thinking, or 'militant optimism' (Bloch, 1995), that refutes reality's dull compulsion and is instead persistently orientated towards mediating between ideals and empirics for the discovery or recognition of new meanings in which actions, movement, relationships, process and emergence are emphasised as part of a genuinely open, adaptive democratic praxis. Such

a conviction might permit the formulation of a strategy from which new institutions for transformative political empowerment could potentially be built, but always without the certainty of achieving that aim (Schmid, 2008). "It is a way", Purcell suggests, "that we can both ground ourselves in the realities of the current society and yet still refuse to accept the existing boundaries of that society" (Purcell, 2014, p.320).

Surplus Impossibilities

The revolutionary potential of differential space, as conceived by Lefebvre, therefore lies in the theoretical and practical task of detecting counterhegemonic ideas, desires and demands emerging from the niches, spaces, cracks and peripheries of capitalist society that can help make the familiar strange and incite people to think and act differently through interrupting the routinised, taken for granted norms that currently make them impossible. His ideals were conceived very much from the margins and aimed to empower outsiders to get inside, which necessarily involves the deliberate orchestration of conflict between homogenising powers and differential capacities (Fuchs, 2019). Such transgressions, "appear as Geiger-counters causing the process to appear in all its contradictory and dialectical totality" (Lefebvre, 1976, p.14). Indeed, for Lefebvre (1991), "the possibility of working out counter-projects, discussing them with the 'authorities' and forcing them into account, is thus a gauge of 'real' democracy" (p.420). "Their lasting effects", Castells (1983) insists, "are present in the breaches produced in the dominant logic, in the compromises reached within institutions, the changing cultural forms of the city, in the collective memory of neighbourhoods, and, ultimately, the continuing social debate about what the city should be" (p.72).

Thus, ever-present within Lefebvre's utopian philosophy is always a qualitative 'other', a third possibility, that consciously names concrete differences from the existing relations of production in ways that foreground the heterogeneity of use values over the homogeneity of exchange values,

"through disordering, deconstruction and tentative reconstitution of their presumed totalization producing an open alternative that is both similar and strikingly different" (Soja, 1996, p.61). As Lefebvre himself puts it:

> "Revolutionary activity ought, among other things to follow this qualitative leap—which also constitutes a leap into the qualitative—to its ultimate consequences." (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 357)

Happily, as has been propounded throughout this thesis, this is precisely the *raison d'être* of degrowth, which is a call for an altogether qualitatively different world through pointing to the impossibility of the continuation of the existing one, and exposing the irrationality of a system that makes that seem possible. Degrowth does not imagine a harmonious end-state, as such a state can never exist, but is an active process of struggle against the hegemonic desires upon which capitalism rests and that "opens up new imaginaries, spaces, and key words" (Kallis and March, 2015, p.362) for the production of genuinely different socially just and democratic futures, entailing a sweeping transformation of the historical circumstances and institutions in which we currently live (Mayert, 2016). "In this spirit", Schmelzer et al. (2022) write, "recognizing the incompleteness of our knowledge, the vulnerability of life, and the desire for co-creating the future, it is important to avoid indulging in the euphoria of expert led planning, presenting utopia as a blueprint" (p.180).

Degrowth, as has been reviewed in Chapter 2, does not therefore offer a monolithic programme, but a broad set of principles and ideas, or what Bloch terms a 'utopian surplus', embracing the need to think and act beyond the present by making it perfectly clear that we must abandon the goal of exponential growth (Bloch, 1995). In its place we must nurture agonistic debate, "for the naming of different possible socioenvironmental futures" (Swyngedouw, 2010a, p.229) as a means to defamiliarise the present and imagine potentially realisable alternatives; which are simultaneously within and beyond current conditions; as a prerequisite for building the political

power for inspiring others to take them up, strengthen them and help bring them about.

"Lefebvre", however, "warned us long ago that the ruling class will always try to suppress and co-opt contestation, will always try to convert romantic possibility into realistic actuality" (Merrifield, 2006, p.XXV). Hence, as has also been discussed in this thesis, while critics often take issue with degrowth as impossibly idealistic, rather than take it seriously, this is precisely because it is a radically impermissible semantic negation that repels appropriation from within capitalist logics, unapologetically pointing directly at the problem and upending the ecomodernist tropes of late 20th Century polity. As Merrifield (2000) describes:

> "True differential space is a burden. It cannot, must not, be allowed to flourish by the powers that be. It places unacceptable demands on accumulation and growth." (p.176)

Accordingly, far from representing a misguided flight into quixotism, degrowth signifies utopia in the best Lefebvrian sense of the term as a practical, creative praxis for wilfully asserting a maximal right to difference that recognises the inevitability of conflict and struggle to imagine and demand a different possible world, and to foster it in whatever way we can, even if that world is impossible under present conditions:

> "The right to difference implies no entitlements that do not have to be bitterly fought for. This is a 'right' whose only justification lies in its content. It is thus diametrically opposed to the right of property, which is given validity by its logical and legal form as the basic code of relationship under the capitalist mode of production." (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.396–397)

Decelerating Space

From the perspective of this thesis, the appeal of Lefebvre is that at the heart of his heterodox theoretical project is the centrality of the spatial problematic which places the control of space at the forefront of transformative political

action as, "no social revolution can succeed without being at the same time a consciously spatial revolution" (Soja, 1980, p.215). Currently, as discussed by Purcell (2014), central to contemporary urbanisation is that, "in almost every city in the world, the property rights of owners outweigh the use rights of inhabitants, and the exchange value of property determines how it is used much more so than its use value" (p.142). The production of space is thus dominated by an expropriating system of private property relations— homogenised, functionalised and compartmentalised as alienable commodities exchangeable in the marketplace. This gives rise to a reductionist planning practice and ideology that brooks no differences, or what Lefebvre calls 'habitat', driven by the primacy of property rights which seek to efficiently manage commodified space to maximise its exchange value by dividing it up into discrete specialised zones at various spatial scales (Purcell, 2013). "All of which prizes open, and hacks up, urban space itself, transforming the countryside to boot, reforging everything and everywhere on the anvil of capital accumulation" (Merrifield, 2006, p.67).

Lefebvre's celebrated revolutionary slogan of the 'right to the city' rejects this dominant claim, instead reaffirming that the city belongs to those who use it through the self-empowered demands of diverse citizen movements and grassroots ensembles that spontaneously seek to produce space from below in ways that privilege use value over exchange value, community over separation and recreation over consumption:

> "When a community fights the construction of urban motorways or housing-developments, when it demands 'amenities' or empty spaces for play and encounter, we can see how a counter-space can insert itself into spatial reality: against the Eye and the Gaze, against quantity and homogeneity, against power and the arrogance, against the endless expansion of the 'private' and of industrial profitability…" (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.381–382)

Key to Lefebvre's utopian philosophy is that, as citizens reappropriate what is rightfully theirs and use and occupy the spaces of the city without restriction,

the effectiveness of their collective power to self-govern their own affairs can be increasingly revealed to them through a shared sense of cooperative purpose and solidarity, in the process reorientating the city away from its role as an engine of capital accumulation and towards a genuinely humanising urbanism (Purcell, 2014). Consequently, it is only through engaging in a pedagogy of endless grassroots experiments, of counter-plans and counter-projects, and their struggles of appropriation and reappropriation that strive towards a different world of liberated self-realisation and self-determination, that the process of societal revolution can be initiated and as a starting point for a real democratic awakening for transforming the rules of urban-spatial governance (Brenner, 2016). Lefebvre refers to this society as 'the urban', as distinct from 'the city', and a radical attack on the basic fundaments of capitalist social relations whereby private ownership ceases to govern the production of space and the need for current top-down bureaucratic state institutions, such as planning, progressively wither away:

> "The right to the city is not users claiming more access to and control over the existing capitalist city, a bigger slice of the existing pie. Instead it is a movement to go beyond the existing city, to cultivate the urban so that it can grow and spread." (ibid., p.151)

It is therefore the prevailing system of private property rights, driven by the commodified needs of property relations through which capitalism dominates the production of space, eliminating all differences, abstracting land from its social use value and alienating people from meaningfully coming together to participate in making social space as their own, that is for Lefebvre the chief impediment to imagining a possible different world beyond growth and beyond capitalism.

Realising Pedagogies

As introduced in Chapter 1, Lefebvre's dialectical utopianism has been hugely influential within radical planning scholarship to estrange hegemonically

imposed conceptions of urban realities and to open up new vistas of meaning for the organisation of space that embody emancipatory ideals for a different conceptual determination (Davoudi, 2018). "Such a spirit can return us to the provocative power of the field. It can help to raise urgent issues about the taken for granted world, and to open up perspectives and actions on a vital question… 'What sort of city for what sort of society?'" (Pinder, 2002, p.219). However, while critiques of the capitalist urban process are extremely well developed and there have been extensive writings extoling planning to imagine what Chatterton (2010) refers to as the 'urban impossible', there have been very few, if any, actual attempts to develop practical proposals. Instead, perhaps for fear of sliding into neoliberal acquiescence or repeating the regrettable dystopian outcomes of past state-directed masterplans, scholars have tended to shy away from utopian thought, restricting their analyses to critically theorising at the level of contradictions and crises, and the political openings they potentially portend.

Moreover, one of the major frustrations frequently levelled at Lefebvre is that he never escapes the terrain of philosophical critique and thus provides few clues as to how differential space might actually be realised in practice, except that it will arise from the simultaneity of contradictions within abstract space (Smith, 1990). Most enigmatically, 'the urban', for Lefebvre, is something that is already existing in the city, partially obscured within the representational spaces of everyday life, offering ephemeral glimpses of a transformed world but which we are not epistemologically attuned to apprehend, leaving it always tantalisingly out of reach (Purcell, 2013). The net effect has been a paucity of ideas about how we might intervene to thwart the perpetuation of what Harvey (2000) refers to as "degenerate utopias" (p.168), where private property and exchange value reign supreme, such that planning imaginaries are permanently trapped within the torpor of the current unsustainability regime.

Nonetheless, our task as political thinkers and actors, or what Lefebvre calls our 'urban strategy', must always be to adjust our senses towards 'the urban' to reveal these recondite, fledging practices that resonate with the right to the city and their not-yet-realised transformative potential so as to, "extrapolate them using theoretical reflection to produce, in thought, a more fully developed version of them, a virtual idea… that shows us what kind of world they would produce if they were allowed to flourish and pervade the city" (Purcell, 2013, p.319). To put this into practice, he proposes his regressive-progressive method of 'transduction', moving "from the (given) real to the possible" (Lefebvre, 2008, pp.117–118) in an effort to bring to light these diverse oeuvres of inchoate resistance discernible on the horizon but struggling to emerge (Purcell, 2013).

Of course, Lefebvre was not at all starry-eyed about the immediate prospects of a breakthrough, conceding that the problematic will likely outweigh our understanding for some considerable time to come requiring, "patience; principles; pragmatism; wisdom; courage; humour; and, above all, protracted struggle through political action" (Leary-Owhin, 2019, p.37). However, as a point of departure and catalyst towards this utopian project of political awakening, what is always most pressing, he insists, are concepts and categories to build theory, requiring both a hypothesis and a definition:

> "The path I shall be outlining here is thus bound up with a strategic hypothesis—that is to say, with a long-range theoretical and practical project. Are we talking about a political project? Yes and no. It certainly embodies a politics of space, but at the same time goes beyond politics inasmuch as it presupposes a critical analysis of all spatial politics as of all politics in general. By seeking to point the way towards a different space, towards the space of a different (social) life and of a different mode of production, this project straddles the breach between science and utopia, reality and ideality, conceived and lived. It aspires to surmount these oppositions by exploring the dialectical relationship between 'possible' and

'impossible', and this both objectively and subjectively." (Lefebvre, 1991, p.60) [41]

Analogous to Lefebvre's utopianism, what Latouche refers to as the 'concrete utopia' of degrowth is, as has been discussed in Chapter 2, also simultaneously a political project, in the hopeful sense as espoused by Bloch, and a theoretical project which, in a quest for coherence, takes as its foundation real-life practical experiments that seek to prefigure a more symbiotic, autonomous societal metamorphosis premised on decentralised, eco-communitarian values, exemplifying a conscious relocalisation of politics, culture and meaning[42]. Rather than locating utopia in an abstract future, the purpose of these grassroots experiments is to bring the future into the present as a basis for, "a practice through which movement actors create a conflation of their ends with their means. It is an enactment of the ultimate values of an ideal society within the very means of struggle for that society" (Maeckelbergh, 2009, p.2; quoted in Zanoni et al., 2017, p.580). Degrowth's utopian affirmation is therefore not only to be found in negation but in the synthesis provoked by that negation to show that, "if we want it, we can have another world that is at once desirable, necessary and possible" (Latouche, 2010b, p.42; see also Kallis and March, 2015).

However, while degrowth frequently celebrates the 'spaces in-between' of cities, organising outside mainstream auspices, as important sites of trial and error in an effort to open up unrealised possibilities in the present and for teaching autonomy as a collective struggle (e.g. slow city movements, urban agriculture, cooperative housing etc.), the key knowledge gap which

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[41] As discussed by Leary-Owhin (2016), Lefebvre does not recommend any specific methods for transduction but rather advocates using existing available qualitative methodologies that can be employed alongside the more conventional epistemologies of deduction and induction. This reflects his generalised dissatisfaction with reductive empirical methods that either go out of fashion or often provoke rival epistemological disagreements. This informed my own approach to the research strategy and method for this thesis, and particularly my inductive research strategy, presented in Chapter 3.

[42] In fact, in a striking resonance to Lefebvre's own idealisation of the intimacy of French rural village life, Latouche's '*Utopie Méditerranéenne*' similarly proposes developing a degrowth imaginary philosophy that reflects atmosphere of southern European village (Latouche, 2014b)

this thesis seeks to address is the perennially unresolved tension between small-scale interstitial strategies 'from below' and the need for broadscale ruptural strategies 'from above', i.e. how these fringe ideas, which are too frequently "veiled and disjointed" and possessing "only fragments of a reality and a science that is still in the future" (Lefebvre, 2003, p.17), can in practice begin to influence policy decisions in the corridors of power (Purcell, 2013; Mocca, 2020). As Lefebvre himself describes:

> "Transgressions can point towards such a project, but they cannot realise it; they leave it in the realms of ideality (as opposed to reality) and of desire, which turns out to be 'mere' desire, i.e. verbal desire." (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.34–35)

Scalar Interchange

Ultimately, for these alternative proposals to break through and help bring about systemwide transformation, it is recognised that they must be translated into higher scales and wider strategies of action, fundamentally repoliticising and democratising the core governance institutions of the capitalist state and, most importantly, to withstand against the constant threat of co-optation, marginalisation and regression, requiring the active, strategic interplay of both bottom-up and top-down strategies:

> "If the delicate beginnings of the transformation to a degrowth society are to be given a chance of generalization and expansion into other social and economic areas, a mutual fertilization between micro-practices and macro-politics is necessary." (Adler and Schachtschneider, 2017, p.10; translated by Schmelzer et al., 2022, p.263)

As recounted in my introduction in Chapter 1, while planning is increasingly recognised amongst scholars as a crucial scalar praxis for promoting (or impeding) degrowth, as of yet there has been very little theoretical work on the complex task of how to convert its niche ideas into the essential logics of a different planning praxis and to generate new regimes of land use governance which can, in turn, further bolster grassroots experiments in enlarging the

terrain of the possible. Xue (2014) similarly makes a plea for a greater interplay of multi-scalar spatial strategies, combining both centralised planning and local participation as essential for a degrowth transition, but again without specifying how this might be achieved in real terms. In the absence of such scalar intercourse, it is likely that degrowth inspired planning practices will continue to remain disjointed, supressed on the peripheries of conventional thought, and thus fail to have any impact on transforming wider spatial imaginaries.

In exploring this lacuna, Savini (2021) has developed what is perhaps the most sophisticated contribution yet towards developing a degrowth planning paradigm, arguing that a key reason for this current deficit is the lack of sufficient critical understanding of the political economy causal dynamics that perpetually bind planning to growth. This doubtlessly reflects, as has been progressed throughout this thesis, a wider deficiency within degrowth literature of an explicit engagement with Marxist theories of geographically uneven development (Schmelzer et al., 2022). For Savini, planning's growth dependency is perpetuated by three distinct and mutually reinforcing features of contemporary praxis: (i) functional polycentrism that spatially divides up territories, driving intense competition between city-regions; (ii) the maintenance of development land scarcity to facilitate this competition; and (iii) land use zoning to spatially organise the exchange value of private property to maximise land productivity. In short, the essence of growth-dependent planning is that, in its reliance on private market development to generate public gains through capturing a small proportion of the value uplift, rising property values are deemed to be a prime indicator of success, creating a strong incentive for praxis to encourage further profitable market-led urban development (Rydin, 2013).

Against this, Savini proposes three countervailing propositions for a degrowth planning paradigm, arguing for: (a) a regional spatial imaginary of polycentric autonomism; (b) a paradigm of finity in urban development; and

(c) the notion of 'habitability' as a central principle of transformed socio-spatial organisation (see Table 4). Ultimately, within Savini's theorisation, and sailing remarkably close to Lefebvre's right to the city, fundamental to a degrowth planning paradigm is a counternormative praxis which explicitly aims to interrupt competition by valuing existing urban qualities, thereby decelerating the exchange value of private property, concluding that:

> "To reimage a century-old land property system is the utmost task of degrowth planning research." (Savini, 2021, p.14)

Dimension of focus	Growth	Degrowth
Territorial organisation	**Functional polycentrism** to maintain intra-regional competition.	**Polycentric autonomism,** giving rise to socio-ecological autonomy within regional federations.
Development paradigm	**Scarcity** aimed at capturing value through land development.	**Finity**, establishing sufficiency by setting absolute standards.
Approach to land use organisation	**Euclidean zoning** based on property rights.	**Habitability** as a principle of socio-spatial organization built on balance and relation.

Table 4: Overview of growth critique and degrowth prefiguration of planning as presented by Savini (2021, p.10)

The challenge remains, however, the seemingly insoluble problem of *how* to translate these ideas into everyday praxis. According to Schmelzer et al. (2022), a precondition for a degrowth society is that all relevant social institutions must be redesigned in such a way that they can function without economic growth. But, at the same time, you cannot build such institutions in a society in which capitalism dominates social organisation and its processes of reproduction. Given the fact that the amassing cache of degrowth literature has yet to provide a compelling answer to this dilemma, the most natural response is perhaps that there is not much that can be done! However, per Lefebvre's utopianism, it is our task to assiduously propose solutions and,

however imperfect, a strategy for a post-growth world will have to work through incumbent planning institutions, requiring hardnosed, practical proposals:

> "The meaning of the revolutionary process is to 'change life.' But life cannot be changed by magic or by a poetic act, as the surrealists believed. Speech freed from its servitude plays a necessary part, but it is not enough. The transformation of everyday life must also pass through institutions. Everything must be said: but it is not enough to speak, and still less to write." (Lefebvre, 1976, p.124)

Pragmatic Revolution

In response to this dilemma, for Wright (2010) the central mission of all emancipatory politics must be attempts to build such institutions, not through rapid revolutionary change, but through the ordinary democratic processes of voicing alternatives that incrementally weaken the limits of existing institutional orders which cumulatively improve the chances of realising specific ends:

> "The best we can do… is treat the struggle to move on the pathways of social empowerment as an experimental process in which we continually test and retest the limits of possibility and try, as best as we can, to create new institutions which expand the limits themselves." (p.270)

Latouche (2010b) similarly addresses this need for political pragmatism which, for him, does not mean that we have to abandon non-reformism provided the, "inevitable compromises at the practical level do not degenerate into compromises at the intellectual level" (p.66). From a Lefebvrian standpoint, this means never settling down or getting comfortable within these institutions but always striving towards the horizon of an urban society. Recall that Lefebvre saw the right to the city not as an end goal, but as a utopian process of political awakening which will, "unfold over the long haul, by hook or by crook, steadily and stealthily, pragmatically and politically" (Merrifield, 2006, p.141). "That possible world," Purcell (2014) reminds, "is a long way off,

and it is also, at the same time, right in front of us" (p.152). As has been discussed, our major political assignment is to seek out these differential spaces that already exist within the cracks of capitalism's spatial, temporal and institutional interstices, where counterhegemony is currently alive and active, and in a democratic, heuristic manner, to try to help enlarge the domains within which these strategies could potentially unfold (Purcell, 2013). "In doing so", Wright concludes, "we not only envision real utopias, but contribute to making utopias real" (Wright, 2010, p.270).

As the key contribution of this thesis, one concrete utopia which has thus far remained by-and-large unexplored are shrinking cities already experiencing post-growth development trajectories. Lefebvre highlights that differential space is possible because under capitalist conditions urban space is periodically discarded, raising the possibility for citizens to seize new rights to the city from below and to produce differential space from abandoned abstract space (Leary-Owhin, 2012). Prospects for post-growth reform of current planning institutions must therefore be understood, not simply in terms of their relationship to the process of social reproduction, inhibiting anti-capitalist possibilities, but also in terms of their susceptibility to endemic failure, creating the contradictions and gaps of meaning which, at least periodically, open up new action spaces through which collective struggles for transformative possibilities are possible (Wright, 2010).

As has been reviewed in the literature presented in Chapter 2, over the past half century, as a consequence of the shifting spatial contradictions of capitalist growth dynamics, many industrialised Western cities have undergone wrenching economic restructuring, resulting in an enforced devaluation of private property alongside attendant failures in urban-spatial governance and leading to subsequent experimentation in post-growth planning alternatives. It is from within these moments of urban crisis that counter-hegemony can become especially powerful as "sites of epistemological production" (Baptista, 2013, p.591) and providing a potential

avenue of pedagogical exploration for degrowth research (and action) with a view to disembedding planning praxis from the totalising effects of current growthist planning doctrines which, rather than reproducing the urbanisation of capital, could instead be employed to propagate downscaled, vibrant and resilient planning discourses of deceleration, regeneration and redistribution (Savini, 2021; Xue, 2021).

Discursive Atrophying

What is *still* unclear, however, is the perennial question of how we might upscale this niche knowledge to have a ruptural influence on broader institutional regimes of praxis which remain strongly dependent on reproducing continuous growth for their very stability and functioning, making them highly resistant to change. In other words, while the desirability of institutional change is undeniable, its viability and achievability remain outstanding (Wright, 2010). To tackle this question, within Wright's theory of social transformation we must first develop a systematic diagnosis and critique of how this reproduction occurs in the first place and the structural bounds that allows it to become persuasive. I have already elucidated at length my theoretical understanding, arriving at my hypothesis, of the performative centrality of discourse as the key mechanism in stabilising growth-orientated institutional routines. I hope that I have shown that our present planning institutions are not simply passively reproduced but require the vigorous application of variable supportive discourses to be sustained over time. This includes the key role of academia in co-producing highly compliant, generative spatial imaginaries, resulting in the crisis of imagination that praxis currently suffers. It follows that the viability and achievability of a post-growth planning praxis relies, not necessarily upon the specifics of reformed techno-political institutional arrangements, but also upon the extent to which it is possible to formulate alternative (re)generative discourses through which the institutional limits of other possibilities — what is excluded from discourse — can be weakened and changed.

This is absolutely not to say that institutional design is unimportant, nor that discourse is the only route to social transformation. Neither is it to downplay the urgency of change. However, while many anti-capitalists share a common insurrectionist imaginary of a rapid institutional overthrow, this would likely face either an immediate political reversal by powerful actors whose interests would be threatened[43] or have to resort to non-democratic means. Moreover, our growth-dependent societies would be simply unable to quickly adjust, likely causing great social trauma. As such, it does little to advance, or add credibility to, the pragmatic task of revolutionising our planning institutions which have evolved, not as a result of calculated strategy, but through a slow, aggregated process of interdiscursive struggle such that they now find themselves locked into a large socio-technical system that has emerged over time (Hajer and Versteeg, 2019; see also Chapter 2). This is not to abjure non-reformism, but to see it in a particular dialectical way as a voyage of exploration and the cumulative destabilisation of the underlying structures of social reproduction. At the end of the day, Wright observes:

> "If one can convincingly show that capitalism ultimately destroys itself and therefore that some alternative will have to occur, …then it is not too much of a leap of faith to believe that such institutions could be created in a pragmatic manner." (Wright, 2010, p.65)

In any event, as has also been discussed at length in Chapter 2, the future is inherently unknowable and, as such, it is neither possible nor desirable at this juncture to seek to set in stone universal institutional proposals under unpredictable socio-ecological conditions whereby the past is no longer a reliable guide to the future. As no one has a crystal ball, this would be a pointless exercise which would simply perpetually condemn planning to address yesterday's problems (Davoudi, 2012a). Rather, in a world of imperfect conditions for social change, and the relative incapacity of public

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[43] The political establishment reaction in the UK in proposing new 'anti-protest' laws in response to Extinction Rebellion is an instructive case in point (Serhan, 2022).

policy to comprehend the future, our real utopian task must be to try to make visible alternative meanings, turning what was once heard as noise into a discourse capable of "the possibility of a different sort of repeating" (Butler, 1988, p.520) such that it might gain authority, become persuasive and ultimately performative. Through this process, people can potentially come to 'suspend their disbelief', instead charting a range of possibilities for institutional change under different socio-ecological conditions capable of dynamic change, rather than designing institutions which could potentially be maladaptive (Wright, 2010; Hajer and Pelzer, 2018). This would at least permit us to plausibly move in the direction of achieving our utopian goal of transformational social empowerment in a genuinely open, democratic and adaptive manner, through gradually weakening the institutional limits that currently make it impossible, requiring planning discourses which have, "an ability to anticipate how societies, economies, and ecosystems are linked across scales, and an understanding of how to shift these coupled systems toward more desirable states" (Bennett et al., 2016, p.442).

The net unresolved question, which is the primary aim of this thesis, is how these reimagined futures can become performative and, most importantly, to endure and spread such that the social imaginary can get to work in transforming our institutions to challenge growth-orientated planning norms and to generate an alternative post-growth praxis. In what follows, building on Savini's theorisation, I will set out my corresponding proposals as to how we might discursively install a counterhegemonic common sense within planning praxis which potentially allows for the creative disruption of imagined futures as means to progressively decelerate spatial policies away from growth and to guide the pragmatic, exploratory task of post-growth institution building, emancipated from the dominance of individual private property rights.

Against the governing polyphonic discourses of 'balanced' and 'sustainable' development I propose two counter-discourses of

'differentialism' and 'regenerativism' as a theoretical contribution to help performatively embed contrapuntal degrowth values and principles in the production of space, and for dynamically imagining transformative pathways for spatial organisation in the face of unprecedented, unfolding social and environmental calamities (see Table 5). Note, unlike Savini, I concentrate exclusively on the first two dimensions of focus—territorial organisation and development paradigm—reflecting the strategic spatial scale of interest of this thesis and, per the performativity of all discourses, it is (hopefully!) up to others to take them up, refine and redefine them at lower spatial scales.

Dimension of focus	Growth Discourse	Degrowth Discourse
Territorial organisation	**Balanced Development:** functional agglomeration, urban hierarchies/networks, place-based, market competitiveness, spillovers etc. (See Chapter 5)	**Differentiated Development:** bioregionalism, watersheds, reinhabitation, commons, municipalism, decentralisation, relocalisation, permaculture etc.
Development paradigm	**Sustainable Development:** smart/compact/green growth, urban containment, win-win-win, decoupling, efficiency, techno-/eco-modernisation etc. (See Chapter 6)	**Regenerative Development:** ecocentrism, planetary boundaries, limits, rightsizing, circularity, sufficiency, reciprocity, resilience, community etc.

Table 5: Growth discourse (polyphonic) versus degrowth discourse (contrapuntal)

Differentialism

Autonomising Scale

In the interests of furthering epistemic pluriversalism and to overcome the representational injunctions of language, my first proposition is the substitution of the reiterative discourse of 'balanced' development with the idea of 'differentiated' development. It is acknowledged that this is a term which is not altogether unfamiliar within regional development literature, albeit primarily from a neoclassical perspective to maximise the comparative advantage of regions (see, for example, Tödtling and Trippl, 2005). However,

it is also important to learn from the degrowth experience that new concepts should not be so far outside the technocratic purview of actors to be instinctively dismissed and, similar to any empty signifier, it is up to us to fill it with new meanings in the constant battle for hegemony.

Differentialism, in my conception, implies a fundamentally new approach to socio-spatial organisation which rejects the capitalocentric chimera of a harmonious equilibrium, instead invoking a regionalist approach to autonomy. Even naming the term liberates the potential for alternative sociotechnical imaginaries that spatial futures are, not homogenous, but different. Per my research hypothesis, presented in Chapter 3, progressively disabusing ourselves from labouring under the misapprehension that growth can be made spatially balanced is an essential precondition for the emergence of other shared metaphors and storylines, particularly in peripheral regions where growth dependent planning is never going to be able to achieve desirable change, and for non-growth dependent modes which allow for the possibility of more inclusive, ecological and democratic socionatures to become institutionally authoritative (Swyngedouw 2004).

Underpinned by principles of deep democracy, autonomy is fundamental to the imaginary of degrowth, not only in the right for self-governance but also in a cultural deliverance from an imperious ideology of growth (Savini, 2021). As discussed above, the constant struggle for, and right to, self-management of civil society, or what Lefebvre calls *autogestion*, requires the real decentralisation of political power to independent local units (Purcell, 2014). Within a degrowth perspective, as self-sufficiency is always a precondition for autonomy, this also entails striving for the relocalisation of material provisioning necessary for socio-ecological reproduction. And because real local autonomy refuses to cede power to a monopolising cadre of top-down bureaucratic officials, such as planners, practicing *autogestion* also requires a thoroughgoing grassroots participatory reawakening as part of a new contract of citizenship which is, "perpetually negotiated and enacted,

relentlessly practiced and *earned*" (Merrifield, 2006, p.140, italics in original). "Hence", Savini (2021) concludes, "material sufficiency and political autonomy overlap within a territory" (p.10). Questions of scale thus become central to any transformative socio-spatial project as, "how [utopia] gets framed spatially and how it produces space become critical facets of its tangible realization" (Harvey, 2000, p.177; quoted in; Kallis and March, 2015, p.365).

Consequently, as Lefebvre explained as far back as 1966, "the problem of autogestion shifts more and more away from enterprises towards the organization of space" (Lefebvre et al., 1976, p.123; quoted in Merrifield, 2006, p.141). The challenge for planning praxis is how to produce revised scales of action that might best catalyse imaginaries to open up opportunities to maximise this process of political reawakening such that people increasingly come to realise their power to self-determine their own affairs, transforming the rules of spatial governance, "to push back, with their full technical expertise, creative capacities, professional influence and political imagination, against the rules, constraints and ideologies imposed by neoliberal, market-oriented systems of urban governance and the forms of socio-spatial injustice they produce at various spatial scales" (Brenner, 2013, p.45).

Within degrowth literature, the region is often posited as the optimum scale. Latouche (2010b), for example, maintains that regionalising the economy facilitates more democratic participation, encourages solidarity, incentivises sustainable production and consumption, and reduces dependency upon external capital flows in the world market. As an antidote to the functional polycentrism which, as we have seen in Chapter 5, organises space as atomised archipelagos of city-regional competitiveness, frustrating communities' political and material independence and divorcing people from their locality, Savini's tripartite prefiguration proposes an alternative imaginary of polycentric autonomism whereby, "regional space is not anymore the driver of an economic growth that in turn trickles down to localities, but is a mode of

coordination between localities that allow maintaining and preserving autonomy" (Savini, 2021, p.12). Nevertheless, there is little specification within the literature as to how such polycentric autonomism could become the basis for self-designed spatial organisation and particularly how to incorporate the evolving dialectical double movement of statist and anti-statist communitarian politics.

Reinhabiting Place

An ever-present feature of degrowth's relocalised imaginary to rescale spatial organisation driving spatial competition is the idea of a bioregion, classified as, "a unique region definable by natural (rather than political) boundaries with a geographic, climatic, hydrological and ecological character capable of supporting unique human and non-human living communities" (Thayer, 2003, p.3). Again, bioregionalism is not exactly a new concept within planning theory. Over a century ago, Patrick Geddes, often referred to as the 'father of modern town planning', and later his celebrated understudy, Lewis Mumford, were both preoccupied with the scale of political and economic coordination for fostering regionally adapted cultures and participatory approaches to civic action which emphasised the integration of people, environment and livelihood. Their prescient works have offered much in originating a bioregional approach, heralding contemporary significance, although they have now mostly faded from planning consciousness (Geddes, 1915; Mumford, 1938).

Drawing upon his training in evolutionary biology, and in ways that would have surely found favour with Lefebvre, Geddes was the ultimate transdisciplinary thinker, spending a large part of his life developing a methodology for seeing human being as an integrated whole:

"There is a larger view of Nature and Life, a rebuilding of analyses into Synthesis, an integration of many solitary experiences into a larger

> Experience, an exchange of the narrow window of the individual outlook for the open tower which overlooks college and city." (Geddes, 1992, p.32)

His theory of technics fused technology, ecology and citizenship in a manner which was simultaneously fiercely critical of the socially and ecologically predatory age of industrial capitalism; in centralising power and undermining regional economies; and an agenda of positive evolutionary change whereby the subjugation of humanity and the environment would eventually give way to a new 'eutechnic age' of decentralised, self-reliant regions corresponding to underlying biogeographical realities that prioritise locality, accountability and conviviality of place over efficiency, expansion and profit (Sale, 1985; Young, 2017).

Bioregionalism should not, as many critics would have it, be confused with balkanised autarky or environmental determinism, and neither is the intention to mythologise a nostalgic conception of 'local' (see Cato, 2011; Church, 2014). Instead, per Murray Bookchin, it can be more aptly thought of as a fully networked multipolar confederation of municipalities—an 'Ecopolis'—comprising a complex set of overlapping territories organised with a high degree of material and political autonomy that can take up the administrative role of the state no longer focusing on economic growth so as to, "decentralize, restore bioregional forms of production and food cultivation, diversify our technologies, scale them down to human dimensions, and establish face-to-face forms of democracy" (Bookchin, 1980, p.27). An early progenitor of such bioethical reimagining of state spaces to prefigure new municipalist experiments of commoning practices that could challenge state regulated capitalism to prevent enclosure and ensure autonomy, was Friedman's idea of an 'agrimetropolis'. This would function as a heterarchical system of decentralised eco-agglomerations for 'agropolitan' political organisation, loosely federated within an overarching redistributive state (Friedmann, 1985).

Mindful of both the deep practical challenges of transitioning to a bioregional approach, that will be very far from simple to bring about, alongside criticisms that not all moves towards decentralisation are necessarily progressive, contemporary scholars principally view bioregionalism, not as a science, but as a contribution towards an overall ethic of scale which seeks to 'think global, act local' through cultivating an ecotopian philosophy, or new cultural sensibility, that challenges every aspect of our present-day value systems and the norms and policies of institutions that shape our daily life (Alexander, 1990). That is, as an antidote to our present-day metabolic rift, where globalised identities are so deeply divorced from the environmental consequences of human action and experiencing a diminished perception of the self-jeopardising trajectory of our present-day imperial mode of living on Earth's life-sustaining processes, bioregionalism offers a model for a form of human 'reinhabitation', in both geographical terrains and terrains of consciousness, that can unite people in incrementally enacting an ontological shift in their material relationship to both human and nonhuman life, beyond their evaluation as mere commodities (Lockyer and Veteto, 2013).

The basic proposal is that, in as much as the sources of environmental degradation chiefly originate from globalised political economies, people are more likely to meaningfully act to change those relations and practices when their direct personal experiences and surroundings are bound up in the process, rather than heteronomously from above. Bioregionalism is thus a call for a form of participatory political praxis for true regional planning that continuously strives to push political autonomy down to the district, village and household levels where citizens can identify in real historical, cultural and material terms with their unique socio-ecological features of place. This shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric worldview challenges citizens to relearn their place in space and to become a permanent culture totally invested in its long-term evolution ('good ancestors'), based on collective self-interest,

symbiotic conservation and direct democracy, enfranchising opportunities for all sorts of pluriversal possibilities (Lipschutz, 2005).

Watershed Frontiers

Bioregional conceptualisations therefore do not employ totalising meta-utopianism but instead remain fluid, dynamic and negotiable, entailing a radically holistic view of complex overlapping life spaces, focused on dissolving boundaries to establish unity, reflecting Berry's insight:

> "There is, as maybe we all have noticed, a conspicuous shortage of large-scale corrections for problems that have large-scale causes. Our damages to watersheds and ecosystems will have to be corrected one farm, one acre at a time… And so the first temptation to avoid is the call for some sort of revolution. To imagine that destructive power might be made harmless by gathering enough power to destroy it is of course perfectly futile." (Berry, 2008, p.45)

Such a holistic approach would necessitate, not only a gradual change in planners' attitudes towards nature, but also in how planning boundaries are drawn, in systems of production, in consumption patterns and in institutions and decision-making processes. Similar to both radical planning and degrowth scholarship, bioregionalists also frequently draw inspiration from indigenous 'cultures of habitat', particularly North American, as evocative models of long-term earth care and spiritual expressions of living-in-place, but equally do not seek to imply a reversion to parsimonious past living standards or that we need to unlearn centuries of scientific knowledge and technological advancement (Berg, 2009).

While such idealism may seem overly romantic, a more tangible cardinal of bioregionalist thought is the concept of using watersheds for rescaling socio-politico-ecological boundaries. Indeed, Geddes was the first to suggest that watersheds offered an appropriate regional planning scale and consciousness (Parsons Jr, 1985; Wahl, 2017). As described by Snyder (1995):

"Bioregionalism calls for commitment to this continent place by place, in terms of regions and watersheds. It calls us to see our country in terms of its landforms, plant life, weather patterns, and seasonal changes—its whole natural history before the net of political jurisdictions was cast over it." (pp.246–247)

During the interviews for this thesis, respondents were asked if using river basin districts; as delineated, for example, by the EU Water Framework Directive (CEC, 2000; see Figure 12); to reorganise regional planning scales could potentially re-immerse spatial governance cultures in local ecological dynamics, empowering communities to govern by principles that might push societal attitudes towards greater environmental understanding and more resilient patterns of urban living, planned and designed to the specifics of local ecosystems. The idea was surprisingly well received by some respondents:

"I think that's a very important sort of concept that we need to champion in planning. That, as well as development, it's about change, and increasingly managing change in that sort of context. And I would agree with that, I think… it's better that that starts at a local level, that we empower local authorities to start looking at that within their county… Obviously, the science and the detail often comes from others, whether it's ecologists or engineers or whatever, but yeah I think there is a need to look at these things more in the round than they are and that's the point I was making around integration and synthesis." (Interview 11)

In further probing this possibility of understanding socio-spatial organisation and politics using naturally defined ecosystemic boundaries, other respondents pointed to the irrationality of the current arbitrary political jurisdictions as a critical barrier in addressing regional challenges:

"I think it's definitely and interesting concept. You got from me earlier in the interview frustration with the way that we're currently organised. Like if you take the NPF, going back to the NPF at the start. They drew a line really from Galway to Dublin and there's nothing really tangible or visible in it for that area of the North and Northwest, in particular. Like Leitrim has no
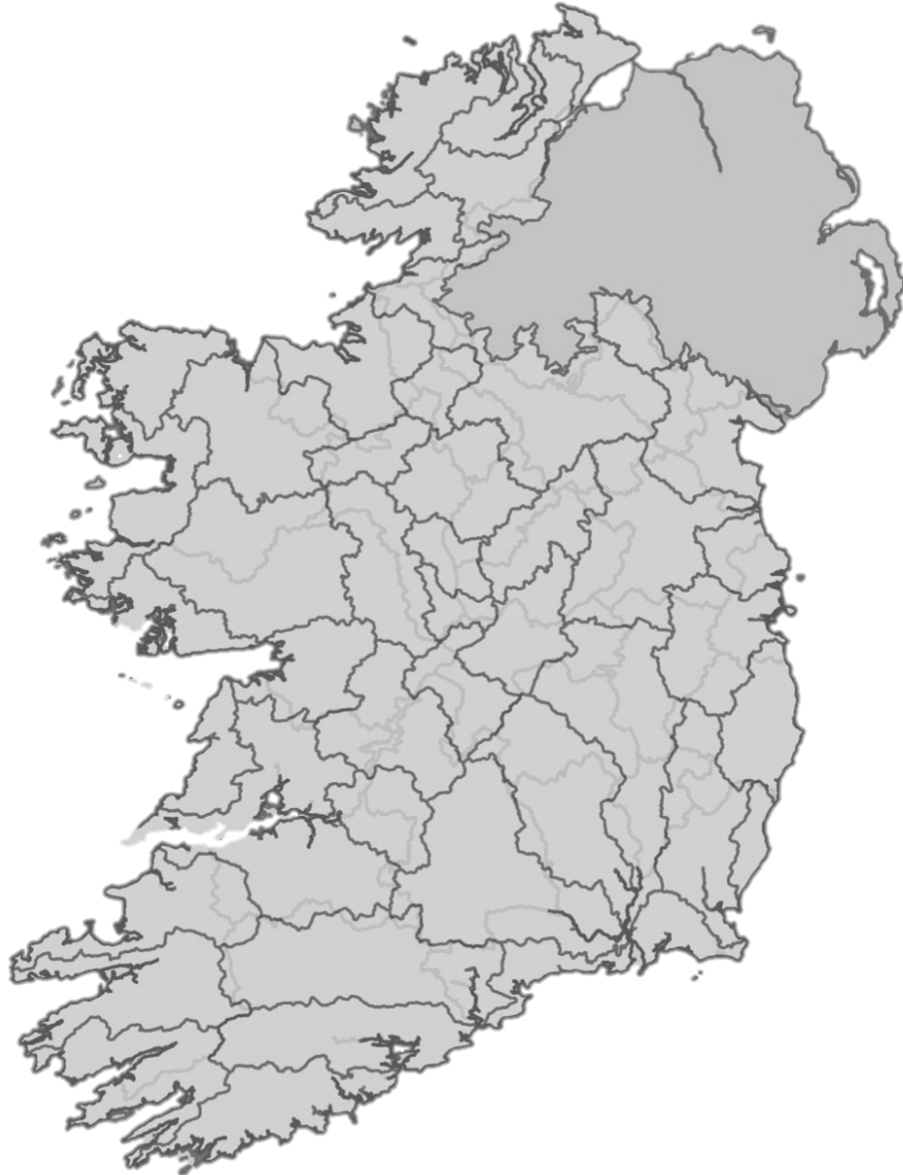
Figure 12: Ireland's river basin districts superimposed over local authority county boundaries (see Figure 3 (p.34) for comparison – How would planning praxis differ if these became the scalar basis for spatial governance? (Source: https://gis.epa.ie/)

affiliation whatsoever to Galway. There's no benefit from Galway, equally Cavan. When we sat down during the SEA[44] discussions for the region and Monaghan/Cavan were quite unapologetic in saying that they weren't too concerned with… the levels of sea level rise because it doesn't affect them.

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[44] Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a formal process required under EU law for assessing the environmental impact of land-use plans, including through the evaluation of alternative strategies.

> So, having Cavan/Monaghan in with Mayo and Galway seems absolutely incongruous. What's the alternative? I don't know because we're still too based on County Council [jurisdictions], that sense of county… That once we deviate away from it, it's almost that it's disloyal to your county." (Interview 13)

Other respondents similarly cautioned that, to change culturally sedimented political jurisdictions, particularly in Ireland where social attachment to county is often very significant[45], and to replace it with a bioregional identity based on irregularly shaped parcels dictated by the undulations of watersheds that fundamentally reconceptualise that local sense of place, would be a major transformation and likely to be resisted:

> "I'm not so sure that the watershed is the best kind of unit for planning, when you're dealing with politicians… So, maybe we should look at settlement structures and base regions around cities, since they are governed by local governments and politicians, at least they see a sense in that." (Interview 15)

This scepticism tallies with the evidence presented in Chapter 6 that rescaling spatial governance around Ireland's network of small towns and villages was considered politically unfeasible. Lipschutz (2005), for example, has written on how any alterations of structural relationships, rules and practices within 'resource regimes' always involves the thorny subject of redistribution of property rights and the ways our individual and collective identities are bound up in these regimes. Nonetheless, whatever the practical realities, it is increasingly clear that a more (bio)regionally inspired approach which fosters the institutional capacity of communities to reconstitute the commons, the norm before our hypermobile globalised age, and empowering citizens to

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[45] This was indeed typified in the pre-draft public consultation submissions to the NPF, where approximately 2,640 identical submissions were received opposing a proposal to extend the Waterford City jurisdictional boundary into the neighbouring County Kilkenny: "In many levels County Kilkenny has a proud heritage, to which its citizens identify on many levels, be it cultural. historical, sporting. county or provincial. A boundary change would result in thousands of people who identify with one county being forced to re-evaluate their personal identification, not only with their county, but their province." (Submission 0160, p.1)

govern their own destinies based on a more ecological worldview is what we must return to if we hope to (re)inhabit the future (Thayer, 2003).

Commons Consciousnesses

Given these socio-political complexities, it should come as little surprise that there are few concrete examples of bioregional planning praxis. Leaving aside the political challenges of achieving self-determination on the part of communities within a loose hierarchy of bioregional life spaces, Friedmann identifies two other factors which are critical for realising true decentralisation, namely, the need "for a fine-grained planning of ecological balances and the built environment" and, "the need to base development planning on tight feedback loops, accurate disaggregated information, and appropriate methods of coordination" (Friedmann, 1985, p.162).

The case of the 'Buffalo Commons', discussed in Chapter 2 and often presented as a prototype bioregional experiment does, however, offer some concrete pointers for overcoming these practical challenges. Initially, the proposal was to de-privatise the plains through government intervention to make them again the commons and, "the world's largest historic preservation project, the ultimate national park" (Popper and Popper, 1987, p.18). Unsurprisingly, this sweeping vision was not well received and staunchly opposed (Ewert, 2002). In response to these trenchant criticisms, the proposal was gradually redefined and reconstituted primarily as a metaphor for a, "large-scale, long-term ecological-economic restoration project" (Popper and Popper, 1999, p.491). This revision did not seek to erase private property rights but, instead, to inspire a spirit of greater cooperation amongst local stakeholders that transcended political boundaries, more sensitive to local concerns (Ewert, 2002).

The 'Buffalo Commons' experience shows that the imposition of a zero-sum, top-down scientizing approach does not work, but when care for land as a living system becomes the central ethic of policymaking, and all

participants can potentially equally prosper, a bioregional consciousness can gradually emerge to catalyse a sea change in regional perceptions and participation for the long-term stability of shared ecosystems such that, "there is, in principle, no reason why bioregional governance cannot coexist with, supplement or, eventually, supplant contemporary units of government" (Lipschutz, 2005, p.112). "Hence," Lipschutz adds, "it makes sense to first draw lines on the basis of those political economies; bioregional lines can come later" (ibid., p.110).

An instructive example of how a bioregional worldview could potentially open up opportunities for applying a transformed cultural ecology of place, and which operates more in the sphere of practical reality than in academic ideality, is the case of ecovillages. As has also been discussed in Chapter 2, these intentional, on-the-ground and solution-focussed attempts at ecocultural change are offered as educational models to redesign local social and natural environments using integrative, innovative settlement design principles and commons-based, participatory processes towards low-impact, high-quality regenerative lifestyles (Lockyer and Veteto, 2013). However, as we have also seen in Chapter 6, the potential of Ireland's only ecovillage at Cloughjordan to offer such a living laboratory grounded in an ecotopian imaginary to transform the way planners conceive and carry out their roles was typically pejoratively dismissed as a fringe project with little real-world application. This is illustrative of how even considering a countercultural approach to planning which assumes a different system of values to that which dominates market economics is typically uneasily perceived and excluded from mentalities, as identified by one interviewee and member of the Global Ecovillages Network[46] who was actively involved in trying to establish an ecovillage:

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[46] www.ecovillage.org

> "But when I actually came to do the ecovillage project, I sort of thought from [a] planning [perspective], the Republic of Ireland would probably be the easier. Again, this was five years ago before they changed all the planning laws, and the Republic went from having this lax planning legislation to nearly the strictest. So, literally within five months of me coming up with this idea I was suddenly faced with this, and… everybody just told me, see '…what you want to do in this current new planning legislation, it's impossible'…" (Interview 17)

This reflects how, as has been described in Chapter 5, in the aftermath of the collapse of the Irish Celtic Tiger, planning policy was significantly rescaled and reordered in an attempt to reset the conditions for growth, further excluding the possibilities for alternative thinking, as suggested by the same interviewee:

> "It's stuck in a paradigm that is provenly disastrous for our natural world. But the difficulty I think, everyone knows what the solutions are… but the reality [is] we can also see the horror show for what it is and I think what we need is something that's in between, you know, what are the transition steps and I think the likes of Cloughjordan, the Transition Town movement, we need to see more of these showing viable alternatives, pioneering alternatives… planning isn't going to change overnight if we wave a wand, you know, from where it is. But what I think planners need to do is maybe bring in something… like an experimental development, …we need the Government's support in this, … more than anything we need people to actually be empowered to realise this is a better way of doing things than this current system." (Interview 17)

Contrary to the current system, bioregional thought offers the potential to demand major shifts in planners' ethics and values, to overcome nature-culture dualisms and to foster and strengthen these grassroots experiments so as to, "make ideas that are compatible with degrowth hegemonic, creating the conditions for a social and political force to change political institutions in the

same direction" (Kallis, 2018, p.138). Indeed, as pithily mused by one local authority planner interviewee:

> "So, the likes of the ecovillage… A few guys with beards looking for a nice place to live, like grand, whatever! And all of a sudden… this is the way we should be going." (Interview 16)

Such a shift in consciousness for the adoption of a bio-communitarian ethic is compatible with other degrowth niche ideas, also largely excluded from the mainstream regime, such as permaculture design principles and Transition Towns for equipping planners with the means to undertake an incremental transition to spatial governance connected to the specifics of local ecology and a vision of a radically new and permanently rooted localisable culture. Permaculture is both an ecotopian imaginary and practical methodological toolkit for putting a bioregional worldview into practice, guided by ethical principles of earth care, people care and fair share to mobilise collective action, ideas and skills which foreground the rediscovery of ecosystems as foundational to economics and society (Holmgren, 2002; Roux-Rosier et al., 2018).

While permaculture has largely developed in real-world settings disconnected from academia, more explored in the literature is the corresponding idea of Transition Towns as practical attempts at practice-orientated biomimicry design principles for relocalised human settlements through community-led, bottom–up institution building (Lockyer and Veteto, 2013). Nevertheless, despite the world's first Transition Town emerging from Kinsale in County Cork in 2005[47] and having some localised successes in catalysing community–led responses, these ideas continue to remain firmly at the margins of mainstream planning and their capacity to persuade actors to abandon growth as a policy objective remains very limited (North and Longhurst, 2013). In fact, throughout all of the submissions to the NPF

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[47] www.transitiontownkinsale.org

gathered for this thesis, neither ecovillages, permaculture nor Transition Towns were once mentioned as providing credible (re)generative possibilities for planning praxis.

Regenerativism

Retrofitting Sustainability

As Wright reflects, "while it may be naively optimistic to say 'where there is a will there is a way', it is certainly true that without 'will' many 'ways' become impossible" (Wright, 2010, p.4). The purpose of the preceding section is not in any way to suggest that utopian struggle will be straightforward (it certainly will not be), nor is it to engage in discursive determinism, but it is to propose that without different discourses, transformative institutional change will be impossible. Whether or not differentialism can eventually provide for, as Bookchin advocates, "an ever-developing, creative and reconstructive agenda as well as an alternative to the centralized nation-state and to an economy based on profit, competition, and mindless growth" (Bookchin, 1999, p.177)), new planning discourses will be required that can help create spaces of negotiation between grassroots pragmatism and transformative imaginaries:

> "Pressure from below must therefore also confront the state in its role as organiser of space, as the power that controls urbanization, the construction of buildings and spatial planning in general… and its ability to intervene in space can and must be turned back against it, by grass-roots opposition, in the form of counter-plans and counter-projects designed to thwart strategies, plans and programmes imposed from above." (Lefebvre, 1991, p.383)

However, if we want to use this theoretical perspective to advance self-educating, culturally liberating paths to bring about a transition of our inner selves, we need a better sense of how routines can be broken such that new imaginaries of desirable futures can break through (Laclau, 1996; Barr and Pollard, 2017). This brings me to my second proposition. As has been discussed in Chapter 6, and per my research hypothesis, the normative

orthodoxy of sustainable development proscribes, "a fundamental rethink of spatial organisation required to shift from urban systems that damage and degenerate ecosystems to ones that renew and sustain the health of ecosystems on which they ultimately depend" (Girardet, 2013, p.23). However, what if, rather than asking if development is 'sustainable', we were to instead ask if it was 'regenerative'? Could such a subtle change in discourse help fill sustainability with radically alternative meanings and thus opportunities for the emergence of a post-growth planning praxis?

Again, regeneration is not a novel discourse within the lexicon of planning practitioners. As has been discussed earlier in this thesis, the idea of regeneration to revive ailing urban districts as a consequence of the oscillating continuum of capitalist spatial dynamics has long been commonplace. However, the idea of regenerative cities, first proposed in an eponymous report by the World Future Council (2010), seeks to go further by addressing the symbiotic relationship between urban systems and natural ecosystems to create a fairer, restorative relationship between cities and the production and consumption of their regional and planetary hinterlands (Girardet, 2013). In ways that resonate with Lefebvre's concept of 'planetary urbanisation' (see Shaw, 2015), a regenerative approach calls for a new urban epistemology and for planners to undergo a profound paradigm shift in consciousness grounded in a political ecology worldview which, in an ever-changing, impermanent and inherently complex and unpredictable world can think beyond simplistic conceptions of a static, harmonious balance between economy, society and environment, and instead towards a circular model based on whole-systems and co-evolutionary adaptive capacity (du Plessis and Cole, 2011). Orr (2005) describes such a 'sustainability revolution' as, "… nothing less than a rethinking and remaking of our role in the natural world. It is a recalibration of human intentions to coincide with the way the biophysical world works" (p.xiv).

Initiating policy frameworks appropriate for such a regenerative relationship in many ways overlaps with the idea of 'resilience', popularised in recent years in reaction to crises and which, albeit unsuccessfully, has been sporadically proposed as a new paradigm for reframing planning (Davoudi, 2012a). This failure demonstrates the challenges in sustaining a communion of physical and mental domains inherent in a regenerative approach; at both individual and collective levels, and across scales of space and time; and against the, "hegemony of thought and practice that ontologically separates humans from nature, rationalizes the externalization of the social and environmental costs of production and consumption, justifies extreme inequality, and sees solutions only in a continuation of the same systems that generated the problems in the first place" (Lockyer and Veteto, 2013, p.1).

The path towards a regenerative city must therefore, for Girardet (2013), be institutionalised by municipal authorities through dedicated departments in support of holistic, cross-sectoral decision-making processes. However, he also acknowledges that creating regenerative governance structures which can catalyse a new circular, homeostatic understanding of urban metabolisms from their current operation as inefficient, wasteful linear input-output systems remains an outstanding challenge. This currently falls outside the usual remits of most urban policy makers and is typically also beyond the horizon of the general public. To develop such a consciousness, we will need to advance a greater understanding that there are real biophysical limits and that, "*urban* boundaries in an urbanising world have effectively become *planetary* boundaries, that every city needs to preserve and help regenerate its natural resources base, and that there are tangible benefits to be gained in the process" (ibid., 22, italics in original).

Naturalising Limits

As has been discussed in Chapter 2, limits, or rather self-limitation, is also central to the imaginary of degrowth as an essential precondition for the just

distribution of resources, and thus self-sufficiency and autonomy in the transition to a 'post-scarcity' world (Bookchin, 1971). Savini (2021) therefore advocates for a paradigm of finity in urban development to set boundaries on urban growth through, for example maximum development volumes and limits to land use. By establishing absolute limits, the power of the market to commodify urban resources can be disciplined, decelerating competition for land and allowing its social use value to be restored. This justifies its transfer into, for example, social cooperatives and community land trusts orientated towards maintaining and regenerating the habitability of place and preventing the overexploitation of natural and human resources. Implicit within a finity perspective is a social and ecological redistributive polity for the emergence of communities of practice, and to sustain their independence, enabling new (bioregional) forms of territorial organisation, solidarity and abundance.

While the idea of setting limits to urban growth jars with Western-induced cultural norms, it is slowly entering the mainstream. For example, city-scale ecological boundaries have recently been adopted in Amsterdam using Raworth's global concept of the 'Doughnut' and downscaling it as a tool for exploring with local stakeholders what it would mean to produce a thriving, regenerative and inclusive city for all citizens within these limits (Raworth, 2020). The pioneering 'City Doughnut', which was eventually incorporated into the officially adopted Amsterdam circular economy strategy in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, is also being trialled in other cities throughout the world by way of international collaborations, such as the Thriving Cities Initiative which works with urban municipalities pursuing such transformational pathways (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020; see also Rogers et al., 2023)[48].

In fact, the COVID-19 crisis and the limits imposed by public health confinement was an intensely generative period for degrowth urban thinking

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[48] www.c40.org

and the urgent need for deep change in the spatial organisation of the city. The *Degrowth Urban Manifesto* published in 2020, for example, seeks to give the city back to its people; radically reorganise transport and mobility; (re)naturalise and decommodify the city; and, rather than densify, dramatically increase space dedicated to biodiversity and public housing with a focus on cycling, walking and public transport[49]. This similarly reflects new ideas emerging from post-growth planning thought which emphasises solidarity, wellbeing, connectedness, empathy and a lifestyle based on principles of sufficiency (Lamker and Schulze Dieckhoff, 2020). A notable real-world example is the agenda of the Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo for providing alternatives for using urban space, radically reducing space for private cars and advancing communal place-making initiatives, such as urban beaches (Hidalgo, 2015). A further illustration is the concept of the '15-minute city' which, indicative of how limits challenge power relations, of late has become a lightning rod for far-right conspiracy theories (Wainwright, 2023).

Possibility Machines

These types of practical interventions, which are not aimed at problematising the present but experiencing the possibility of alternatives, are demonstrative of the liberation of limits (Hajer and Versteeg, 2019). However, long before the crisis limitations imposed by the pandemic, degrowth's notion of optimal scale, or rightsizing, has been a consistent theme within the world of shrinking cities where scholars and practitioners have been making significant inroads in bringing alternative approaches to the forefront of planning praxis (Weaver et al., 2016). As discussed in Chapter 2, in shrinking cities which have forsaken the policy goal of achieving their former scales, rightsizing involves a clear break from planning's pro-growth policies, emphasising instead social justice and grassroots participation, "to create the conditions for an urban

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[49] https://degrowth.info/blog/manifesto-for-the-reorganisation-of-the-city-after-covid-19

environment in which 'small is beautiful', and economic *growth* is subordinate to socio-ecological *development*" (ibid., p.128, italics in original).

The idea of rightsizing has often been credited to Schilling and Logan (2008) and their palliative proposal to disassemble, re-evaluate, reorganise and reimagine abandoned urban space through, "(a) instituting a green infrastructure program and plan; (b) creating a land bank to manage the right-sizing effort; and (c) building community consensus through collaborative neighborhood planning" (p.452). While disassembling strategies to deurbanise abandoned city space are often amongst the most eye-catching shrinkage planning policies, from the perspective of post-growth planning, of greater interest are concomitant re-evaluating strategies, "to downzone intensely used spaces to accommodate less environmentally impactful activities, and, in the process, de-densify the urban landscape" (Weaver et al., 2016, p.136). Downzoning involves the redesignation of land slated for development for lower impact uses such as green space, community agriculture or other forms of renaturalisation. De-densification, on the other hand, takes advantage of the perforated land use transformation already underway by encouraging remaining residents to independently reshape their neighbourhoods through relaxed zoning codes and land use regulation (Hollander et al., 2009). A prominent example of such small-scale, incremental de-densification often adopted in many US shrinking cities are so-called 'side lot' programs, where existing residents are encouraged to adopt vacant properties and use them in creative, resourceful and low-intensity ways (Beauregard et al., 2012). This mirrors degrowth's critique of standardising land use regulation, specifically zoning codes, sustaining land scarcity and frustrating communities' capacities for self-organising more cooperative, collective and informal habitability (Savini, 2021; see Table 4 above).

The third broad class of rightsizing strategies concerns the reorganisation of market-first urban governance principles with an emphasis on building social capital, alternative ownership models and bottom-up

neighbourhood self-governance. As mentioned, the experience of shrinking cities is that empowering communities with the autonomy to develop their own localised solutions to the problems of vacant and abandoned property, allows for more experimentation and innovation for 'retrofitting suburbia', better adapted to local conditions (Holmgren, 2018). However, because alienability is the dominant property tenure, community members occasionally take control of abandoned properties and engage in 'guerrilla' responses to collective action problems without formal legal sanction (Dewar and Thomas, 2013). To protect communities from the risk of subsequent repossession, many scholars advocate for alternative land ownership models based on common property regimes that explicitly recognise the validity of community-based claims (Weaver et al., 2016). Significantly, this has led to evolutionary political attempts to formalise such adaptive efforts through community land banks—public, non-profit entities created to acquire, manage, maintain and repurpose vacant and foreclosed buildings and land (Alexander, 2005).

The Genesee County Land Bank (GCLB)[50] in Flint, Michigan, for example, a quintessential post-industrial shrinking city, is one of the best-known exemplars. Originally emerging from unofficial community action two years before the state of Michigan formally passed enabling legislation[51], the GCLB is charged with finding new, meaningful uses for abandoned properties, encouraging citizens to gain control of land and generating use value at the grassroots level (Schindler, 2014). The land bank has special powers to acquire and strategically assemble vacant property to, for example, create affordable housing opportunities, limit property speculation and, rather than simply acquiring property for eventual disposal to the highest bidder,

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[50] www.thelandbank.org
[51] Land Banks were eventually recognised in federal legislation through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 2009.

use land to fulfil long-term community aspirations to enhance local quality of life (Schilling, 2009).

With their focus on managing land in perpetuity, and in ways that protect its socio-ecological use value, many land banks incorporate characteristics of community land trusts. Schilling and Logan (2008), for example, have highlighted the pivotal role of land banks in shifting the function and consciousness of cities towards living, regenerative networks of nature which can provide a range of passive ecosystem services, such as water conservation, micro-climates, habitats, wastewater treatment and flood management. In the context of Detroit's persistent abandonment, for instance, concerns about poverty and food security dominate. With an abundance of available land, the *Detroit Land Bank Authority*[52] and the *Michigan State Land Bank Authority*[53] in association with non-profit, food sovereignty associations, such as *The Greening of Detroit*[54] and the *Capuchin Soup Kitchen's Earthworks Urban Farm*[55], allow communities to reappropriate vacant lots, transforming them into a patchwork of community gardens and urban agriculture offering, "the promise of food, natural systems, and citizen engagement" (Lawson and Miller, 2012, p.17). As a result of these initiatives, Detroit is well on its way to becoming a pioneer of 'agriculture urbanism' including, for example, through partnership with Wayne State University's *Sustainable Food Systems Education and Engagement in Detroit* programme which provides systematic advice on biointensive techniques alongside *Detroit Agriculture Network's* cooperative

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[52] www.buildingdetroit.org
[53] www.michigan.gov/leo/bureaus-agencies/landbank
[54] www.greeningofdetroit.com
[55] www.cskdetroit.org/earthworks

farm stores which provide multiple venues for growers to sell their produce, simultaneously promoting local commerce (see Figure 13)[56].

Figure 13: Urban agriculture in Detroit (Maclean, 2014)

Towards Ecopolis

While some scholars tend to dismiss such prefigurative projects and practices as being more symbolic than material, they do offer illuminating examples of; where city agencies are overwhelmed and under-resourced; communities' grassroots power to return to the idea of the commons and shift the perception of vacant land as abandoned space to having a purpose beyond what are conventionally defined as more productive higher and better uses (Lawson and Miller, 2012)[57]. Conscious of not reifying a return to austere urban living conditions of the past, for Mayer (2020), agriculture urbanism can thus inspire hope, providing important insights for how to build non-market, post-carbon,

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[56] www.detroitagriculture.net

[57] See, for example, the OpenLands Project (www.openlands.org)

post-neoliberal urban futures. As citizens invoke their rights to collective space and become engaged in, and aware of, opportunities to care for land, fewer properties are left uncared for. Over time, such incremental changes have the potential to produce meaningful transformations in the physical shape of the city, heightening regional and ecological connections, sustaining further citizen participation, including government commitment to locally-controlled citizen-land models and (re)organisational support to address, not only vacancy, but concerns about food security, neighbourhood regeneration, ecology and economic development (Church, 2014).

In essence, the capacity of citizens to self-organise and adapt in response to disturbances is the true meaning of sustainability, offering emancipated possibilities for a reformed planning socioecology (Wu et al., 2012; Gleeson, 2014). Lawson and Miller (2012), for example, recount how Detroit's policy on food security, scrambling to cope with the influx of predatory investors, evolved from a collaboration with the *Detroit Black Community Food Security Network*[58] and calls for community gardens and mini-farms to be protected in law as resources that will not be taken over for other types of development. The irony here is that the less planning regulation and the more neighbourhoods are empowered to make at least some of their own localised rules and decisions to conduct their own affairs, the more opportunities for urban regeneration evolve from the bottom up. This, according to Schilling and Logan (2008) is also central to the final category of rightsizing strategy — the question of reimaging what the city should be and what it can become in the absence of growth?

As presented in Chapter 2, in the case of some of the most radical examples of post-growth reimagining, for this to happen city leaders and planners must accept the fact that growth has ended and is likely to persist (Hummel, 2014). "In some respects," as Pinder (2002) suggests, "a notion of

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[58] www.dbcfsn.org

ending might be seen as allowing greater freedom in thinking about cities, a loosening of the hold of ideals and teleological notions of historical progress that are imposed externally or from above" (p.236). The case of the local grassroots organisation, *People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH)*[59] in Buffalo, New York, offers an instructive case in point. Buffalo's shrinkage is typical of many American post-industrial cities with a combination of deindustrialisation and out-migration to nearby suburbs signalling the decline of the 'Queen City' (Pallagst et al., 2009). A community campaign against the state housing agency's hoarding of vacant land for speculative purposes resulted in a major policy shift and for PUSH to be awarded new financial resources to landbank dilapidated properties (Weaver et al., 2016). This led to the creation of a 'Green Development Zone' which combines affordable housing construction, community-based renewable energy projects, housing retrofits, green jobs training programs and urban agriculture (Hart and Magavern, 2017). In contrast to the world of neoliberalised privatised infrastructure and reduced public spending, Bartley (2011) describes this policy shift as a 'community growth machine', leveraging public sector investment to generate community controlled capital and a more virtuous cycle of relocalised investment, opportunity and experimentation. In recognition of this grassroots campaign, the Buffalo Common Council subsequently passed a resolution supporting the formal creation of land banks and calling for the designation of Buffalo as the nation's first 'Living Laboratory for Revitalization' (Schilling, 2008)[60].

The experience of many shrinking cities is that, given broader patterns of contemporary 'parasitic urbanisation', it is not possible for an individual city to go it alone, requiring broader multilevel cooperation and resources, thus paving the way for concomitant rightsizing strategies at a regional scale

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[59] www.pushbuffalo.org
[60] New York State's first land banks were established in 2012 following to the enactment of the New York Land Bank Act 2011 (see www.nylandbanks.org)

(Weaver et al., 2016). There are many other examples of multi-scaled, bottom-up communities of practice emerging from the post-growth conditions of shrinking cities breaking through to transform their worlds, catalysing regenerative planning cultures and redistributive spatial governance institutions that follow in their direction (Crowley et al., 2021). They therefore prefigure, in concrete real-world praxis, each of the four prerequisites that Buch-Hansen (2018) suggests are essential for a degrowth paradigm shift, the latter two which are currently absent at a systemwide scale, namely: (i) a deep crisis that cannot be solved by the institutional arrangements to which the currently prevailing political project has given rise; (ii) an alternative political project that show the ways out of the crisis; (iii) organic intellectuals and an comprehensive of social forces promoting the project in political struggles; and, (iv) broad-based political consent.

Specifically, they provide important insights into how degrowth values and principles; and specifically new urban imaginaries emerging from ecovillages, transition towns and permaculture; could be institutionalised in real-world praxis, transcending sustainability's prohibitive imaginaries of collective balance and equilibrium, which privilege continuity from the present into the future, and instead institute regenerative planning cultures capable of constant learning and transformation in response to, and anticipation of, inevitable change (Wahl, 2020).

Conclusions

> "To the extent that the contours of the future city can be outlined, it could be defined by imaging the reversal of the current situation, by pushing to its limits the converted image of the world upside down." (Lefebvre, 1996, p.139)

In this chapter I have argued that discursive processes of framing and reframing lie at the heart of institutionalising post-growth planning transformation efforts. The key empirical conclusion of Part II of this thesis is

that planners shape the attention of others through the discourses they use, albeit often unwittingly. Ergo, it is only when change happens at the level of discourse that it will be possible to transform the mindsets and values (imaginaries) of policy actors towards alternative possible futures.

While degrowth offers a valuable conceptual store of prefigurative ideas and practices to provocatively transgress the legitimacy of growth-orientated political institutions, too much of it remains at the margins. The question of 'how to' is the critical, outstanding challenge. I have suggested Lefebvre's utopian philosophy of the possible offers an ideal, but heretofore largely unexplored, spatial-theoretical complement to help weaken this niche-regime divide and to guide the pragmatic, heuristic task of post-growth institution building to progressively decelerate praxis away from growth.

Lefebvre entreats us that, in seeking to contribute to the task of societal transformation, we must start by turning the world upside down, "using theory, the imaginary, and dream" (Lefebvre, 2014, p.xl). Applying this perspective, and in probing for cracks in the system that resonate with the right to the city, I have theorised that the extreme urban reversal of shrinking cities offer an unparalleled empirical arena to, "generate concrete abstractions about the social and territorial structures through which alternatives are performed" (Jonas, 2013, p.826). These emergent heterotopian spaces of insurgent citizenship invention offer insights into how non-conformist grassroots praxes can, in the absence of growth meanings, rise up to deconstruct the very basis of mainstream planning's legitimacy and its various institutionalised growth-orientated technocratic instruments (e.g. property, zoning, regulations etc) — a critical undertaking that alterity scholars often stop short of as a stepping-stone for post-growth research and action (Thompson, 2021).

It would of course be naïve to expect that these niche praxes could oust deeply institutionalised urban-spatial governance regimes, at least in the short-term. It is a tall order to expect to persuade planners that natural

ecosystems should be considered as important to the city as built infrastructure and to reconceive cities as regenerative human ecosystems (Rees and Mandipour, 2017). Accordingly, in order to precipitate a transformative shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric worldview these ideas need to accumulate sufficient performative power within institutional worldviews, rather than merely being absorbed within them (Albrechts, 2010).

In recognition of the unique capacity of language to persuade, and what is pragmatically possible does not exist outside our imaginations, I have offered two alternative discourses of 'differentialism' and 'regenerativism' as my contribution to help these counternormative ideas transfer and to provide strategic planning processes with a way of broadening the horizon of future choices, raise awareness of alternatives, facilitate debate, recognise limits and potentials, and, above all, "with a way of seeing the future as bound up with the continual elaboration of the new, the openness of things" (Grosz, 1998, p.53; see also Xue, 2021, p.13).

My proposals acknowledge the power of bottom-up interstitial strategies to make socially empowered institutions viable while at the same time recognising that systemic transformation is not achievable through wholesale ruptures of the entire social order. Instead, per Wright, what I am proposing as my theory of change is very much a symbiotic strategy which accepts that planning institutions are essential for advancing degrowth, through empowering and broadening democracy to eventually transform them (see also Barlow et al., 2022).

Naturally, I acknowledge that much more needs to be said and, on their own, my propositions are not entirely novel. But they serve to remind us of the currently marginalised perspectives that could become institutionally authoritative in response to the production, circulation and functioning of changed discourses (and circumstances) which increase the likelihood of realising alternative, more desirable futures by providing planners with the discursive agency to progressively adapt their praxis and 'to do things

otherwise', which can be continuously evolved and expanded as part of the endless process of social learning (Hajer & Versteeg, 2019). After all, as Leys (1990) reminds, "for an ideology to be hegemonic, it is not necessary that it be loved. It is merely necessary for it to have no serious rival" (p.127).

Chapter 8: Ending Remarks

Wherefrom?

> The world has changed: can planning change? (Castells, 1992)

In this thesis I set out to answer the (not so) simple question—how can spatial planning praxis function within the conditions of no growth? My aim was to try and theorise an understanding of how planners could transcend the growth paradigm governing their praxis and become a vanguard of alternative post-growth futures.

My motivation was the deep socio-ecological crisis of global capitalist urban society, fundamentally undermining ecosystems upon which the continuation of human civilisation depends. Degrowth has emerged as an activist research agenda to challenge the dominant ideology of growthism and to prefigure transformational alternatives. However, as of yet, and despite degrowth proposing a planned democratic contraction of production and consumption for wellbeing and equality, engagement with what 'planning for degrowth' might look like has remained undertheorized (Schmelzer et al., 2022). My supposition was to test the potentiality of experimental, grassroots planning praxes emerging from shrinking cities, already experiencing post-growth development trajectories, and whether these could contribute theoretically to a wider post-growth planning cultural turn.

In pursuit of this aim, I proceeded with three objectives. The first was to disarticulate the objectivity of growth-orientated discourses performatively shaping institutional planning norms to identify possible openings for how they might be challenged and changed. To achieve this, in Part I, following my opening motivational remarks as to my own loss of meaning following the collapse of the Irish Celtic Tiger offered in Chapter 1 and, subsequently, my literature review recounted in Chapter 2, the key outcome of Chapter 3 was the development of an experimental research strategy and method. This, in itself, is offered as an original contribution of this thesis to address an identified epistemological gap in the literature for how to deploy degrowth as a theoretical weapon of critique.

In advancing an epistemic synthesis between degrowth and discourse-analytical theory, I arrived at my research hypothesis, identifying planning's foremost discourses of 'balanced' and 'sustainable' development as crucial mediums for precluding any loss of growth-orientated meanings, continuously foreclosing the potential for the emergence of transformational alternatives. Thus, in my theorisation, these discourses present important sites for locating a discursive struggle such that planning praxis might be opened up to alternative post-growth possibilities.

In Part II, I applied this exploratory epistemology to the process of preparing the Irish NPF, as the case study for this thesis, through answering four empirical research questions. In Chapter 4, I identified the means by which Irish planning practice institutionalised the imperative of growth through the interpellation of common sense growthist spatial imaginaries amongst policy communities, taking advantage of particular Irish socio-cultural susceptibilities (*Research Question 1*). In Chapter 5, in support of my research hypothesis, I next demonstrate how this growth imperative is applied and pursued in practice through problematising the habituated storyline of 'balanced' development, central to NPF policy debates, as a permanently transfigured fictional expectation of coherent and cohesive growth futures. I

have empirically argued that the primary purpose of this storyline is to mediate the endemic political tensions associated with the unavoidably uneven core-periphery geographies of the wider national growth agenda, hegemonizing growth-orientated meanings and delimiting the possibilities for alternative planning action (*Research Question 2*). In searching for openings for how this situation might be challenged and changed, using my research strategy for applying 'degrowth-as-method', in Chapter 6 I have shown how, through exposing the contradictions and limitations of planning's consonant harmonious fiction of 'sustainable' development, a residual openness to different spatial possibilities can still be detected (*Research Question 3*).

The results of my empirical case study analysis suggests that equipping planners with the agency for transformative post-growth change will not be possible without different discourses. In Part III (Chapter 7), I therefore address the second and third objectives of this thesis through answering my final research question in offering a theoretical contribution to the development of an alternative post-growth planning paradigm (*Research Question 4*). Through composing a Lefebvrian encounter with degrowth and urban shrinkage, I conclude with my proposal for two alternative discourses of 'differential' and 'regenerative' development as performative means for both spatialising degrowth and degrowing planning.

It is my thesis that such discourses are essential for enlarging the terrain of possibilities for non-reformist niche political actions, such that they might gain authority, become persuasive and ultimately influence wider institutional regimes, such that spatial planning praxis can progressively function within the conditions of no growth.

So What?

Having now finally arrived at this concluding Chapter 8 and toiled through to completing this thesis to tentatively offer my findings and proposals as a modest contribution to knowledge, Flyvbjerg (2006b), reflecting the thoughts

of many of his peers, makes what is perhaps the most profoundly dispiriting observation—if you are wrong about this, who will notice? Maybe the answer will indeed be, nobody. In fact, when I measure the outcome of my research against the pressing scale of our planetary terror, I am reminded of Wendell Berry's riposte:

> "Some will find it an insult to their sense of proportion, others to their sense of drama. I am offended by it myself and I wish I could do better. But having looked about, I have been unable to convince myself that there is a better solution or one that has a better chance of working." (Berry, 2008, p.48)

History and social science teach us that making major transformational shifts takes decades. Until change sediments into the cultural register, new strategies always remain fragile, subject to regression and all the usual power resistance (Albrechts, 2010). But we no longer have decades. We live in a world that simply cannot continue, now. In the end, like everyone who has gone before me, regrettably I have not arrived at a compelling solution to this *problematique*. In fact, if anything in the past is a reliable guide to the future, it is that our ever-worsening civilisational polycrisis will likely be the mother of all transformation. I must admit this is not exactly a comforting prospect. However, as I have tried to articulate, acknowledgment of that reality is probably the most powerful idea to have right now (Steffen, 2021).

Nevertheless, the true spirit of planning is not to be a prisoner of the past but to actively take responsibility for the future in formulating an intended course of action (Albrechts, 2010; Ferreira, 2021). "In confusing and stressful times," Girardet (2014) implores, "some people anticipate disaster and even collapse while others try to make plausible proposals for a safer world" (p.2). Such a shift in scholarly engagement from a problem-oriented to a solution-orientated perspective for offering real, alternative possibilities is the cornerstone of activist-scholarship. At the end of the day, Lockyer and Veteto (2013) remind, whether working within the ecological or social domains, or both, "the basic idea is the same: overcoming the model of modern

liberal capitalist society has become a must for survival, and perhaps a real possibility" (Escobar, 2008, p.303). As our crises are a crisis of imagination fostered by our affective attachment to growth, our task must be to seek to reorientate the performative powers of discourse such that imagining the end of capitalism (growth) becomes easier than imagining the end of the world (Katz-Rosene and Szwarc, 2021).

It might be usual around this point in a thesis to offer some practical recommendations for praxis and future research. The result of my enquiry leaves me somewhat empty-handed in this regard, save for one proposition which I believe is absolutely vital. A key observation from my empirical data—and often contrary to the views of many scholars and practitioners—is how academe tacitly shapes praxis, relegating alternative knowledge and reproducing highly restrictive one-dimensional futures (Marcuse, 1964; McLoughlin, 1994). It stands to reason, and even if for no other purpose than to counter our own sense of hopelessness, that the contrary can also hold true (Mayer, 2020). After all, the spatial politics of the future will revolve around who can make their socio-technical imaginaries authoritative and scholarship is in a unique position to positively contribute to a collective sense of agency through insisting that the production of different, regenerative space is possible, even if such possibilities are impossible in the present (Oomen et al., 2021).

Firstly, this requires an acceptance of being in a bad situation, of our ignorance, and that, "optimism cannot improve it or make it look better. But there is hope in seeing it as it is" (Berry, 2008, pp.46–47). Secondly, an emphasis on solution-orientated research does not imply a move away from a problem-orientated prognosis of 'expected futures', only that it requires us to also radically rethink the role of knowledge with an emphasis on 'desirable futures' and how to get there (Hajer and Pelzer, 2018). I hope I have shown that one of the major deficits in degrowth literature, and specifically incipient attempts to spatialise degrowth, is a dearth of engagement with urban political-economy

theory (Koch and Buch-Hansen, 2021). Only when urbanisation is conceptualised in terms of the systemic power relations of the capitalist 'growth machine' can we apprehend the extent to which alternative imaginaries are regulated by normative institutional practices and ideologies. Advancing such a critical ethos is an essential precondition for planners to encounter 'fearless speech' and to eventually act in accordance with their own moral judgements (Grange, 2016).

Finally, it requires a recognition that possible solutions are already here right in front of us, in the cracks, and being developed from the grassroots. If mainstream planning reproduces growth, then its necessary counteragent is a mode of planning orientated towards these insurgent praxes (Holston, 1998). Academia offers possibly the only environment to try to purposefully scale these spaces of difference, to safeguard their meanings from hegemonic reappropriation (see Fullerton, 2015) and to help guide the pragmatic trial-and-error task of post-growth institution-building, especially beyond the exigencies of career advancement and peer-review (Hajer and Versteeg, 2019).

While the case for revolutionising planning scholarship is compelling, I am of course under no illusions. The academic profession seems to cosset ethically minded scholars from the real world, leaving the pitch clear for pro-growth voices to dominate. It is of course understood that within our prevailing neoliberal, globalised world it would be suicidal for any country or region to attempt to unilaterally undertake a degrowth transition, implicitly privileging the production of pro-system knowledge (Kallis, 2015). "Stop growth purely and simply? It's impossible." Lefebvre concludes. "What is needed is to orient it by reducing it; it must be oriented towards qualitative social development" (Lefebvre, 2000, p.103, author's translation).

The challenge for planning scholarship is now only surpassed by the opportunity to contribute in shaping humanity's great deceleration, in what Rees (1999) says could be the first planned paradigm shift in the history of our

species. And while we stand timorously at the foot of a dark mountain range of ignorance, I have shown that there is hope beyond hope in engaging in the spaces and struggles of insurgent post-growth communities of practice which could, through an accumulation of small changes, and even as crises compound, help us to build incrementally towards a broader social transformation (Miraftab and Wills, 2005). This will inevitably be a messy, experimental process but the crucial point, Holloway (2010) insists, is that we do not have time to wait as, to borrow Bookchin's famous maxim, if we do not do the impossible, we shall be faced with the unthinkable, and central to the idea of the crack is that we can already make a start on it now along the path to the unknown world ahead of us:

> "So we find ourselves, our ways of telling unbalanced, trapped inside a runaway narrative, headed for the worst kind of encounter with reality… Words and images can change minds, hearts, even the course of history. Their makers shape the stories people carry through their lives, unearth old ones and breathe them back to life, add new twists, point to unexpected endings. It is time to pick up the threads and make the stories new, as they must always be made new, starting from where we are." (Kingsnorth and Hine, 2009, pp.11–12)

In this thesis, I have tried to make a start.

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Appendix 1: NPF Submissions

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Appendix 2: Interview Guides

Master Interview Guide:

No.	PRIMARY QUESTION		POSSIBLE FOLLOW-ON QUESTIONS	ANALYSIS (Thesis Concepts)
1.	**Background**	How long have you been working with your current organisation?		
2.		What is your current position and what roles do you perform within your current organisation?		
3.		You[r organisation] made a public submission to the drafting of the National Planning Framework (NPF),could you talk me through the main focus of your submission?		
RQ1	For (i) <u>what reasons</u> and (ii) <u>in what ways</u> and has planning practice institutionalised the imperative of growth?			
RQ2	How has this growth imperative (i) <u>been applied</u> and (ii) <u>pursued in</u> Irish planning practice?			
4.	**Where are we going?** (Objective 1)	The NPF includes ambitious national growth targets for Ireland in 2040 [+1.1 million additional people, +660,000 new jobs, +500,000 houses], do you believe such targets are realistic and achievable?	• Should promoting national **growth** be the **core objective** of national planning? Is achieving growth **an important benchmark of success**? • The targets included in the NPF are based on a number of <u>**assumptions on future trends**</u>, do you see any difficulties in simply translating these assumptions into targets? What do you think of the **method** by which these **targets** were arrived at? • What do you consider is the chief **purpose** of including growth targets in the NPF? Is achieving growth synonymous with the **public interest or common good**? • How can growth targets be reconciled with **unpredictable economic futures** and periods of **no growth** [e.g. recessions]? • Do you think current planning practice is **growth dependent** and must therefore always be **flexible and responsive to market demands**? • The rapid growth of the 'Celtic Tiger' property bubble ended in a spectacular economic collapse. What do you think was the **role that planning played in the Celtic Tiger** and **what has the profession learned from that experience?** • If the NPF targets are achieved for 2040, should the successor to the NPF continue to plan for **further population growth** or is there **an optimal scale?** Is more always better?	• Neoliberalisation • Realrationalität • Growth Politics/Growth-First/'Growth-Machine' • Growth Dependence • Entrepreneurialism • Productivism • Growth Fetishism

RQ3	What are the (i) <u>contradictions</u> and <u>(ii) limitations</u> of the growth imperative for institutional planning practice?			
5.			Ireland also has ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emission targets by 80% by 2050 – do you think these targets are compatible with the growth targets contained in the NPF?	• A growing the economy means growing energy and resource demands. Do you think this makes the task of **transitioning to a decarbonised society** more difficult? Does climate change and the global ecological crisis represent **a limit to growth?** • Do you think that the **concept of sustainable development** (green/smart growth) can reduce emissions and reduce resource consumption while allowing the economy and population to grow? **How successful has this approach been to date?** • How do you think climate change and energy descent will **shape spatial development patterns** in Ireland over the coming decades? How vulnerable is Ireland? Is the planning profession **prepared for such challenges?** [Peak Oil]	• Storylines/Rationalities • Construction of Meaning • (Empty) signifiers • Problem framing • Simulative politics • Spatial Practice
6.	**Is this policy desirable?** (Objective 2)	The 2018 IPCC report concluded that *"rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society"* would be needed to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The IPBES recently warned that a *"fundamental, system-wide reorganisation across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values."* to halt biodiversity loss. Do you consider that planning policy and practice will need to be significantly altered to address environmental challenges?	• Do you think that planning practice requires a far-reaching change in **paradigms, goals and values** to achieve the **transformative and systemic changes** necessary? • What type of **policies, practices and institutions** should be considered? Which forms of spatial organisation are less environmentally damaging? **Do we need to redefine the concept of 'sustainability'?** • Should Ireland consider a **moratorium on carbon and resource intensive development**, such as motorways and airports, in order to avoid being further **locked into** carbon and resource intensive development patterns? • Could planners have greater capacity to act as **agents of change** rather than having to seek a consensus position? i.e. leaders or followers? • Are planner's **professional allegiances, skills and bureaucracies too constraining** to allow for that? • What type of tools or discourses could increase planning's influence in addressing systemic challenges? • The SEA for the NPF does not consider any futures which do not included future growth – could engaging with **scenarios which do not accord with 'business as usual'** growth trajectories be helpful in informing policy debates? [Resilience] • How important is it to allow **dissenting voices**, articulating radically opposing visions which challenge mainstream growth trajectories, be heard in the planning process? Do you think such **alternative possibilities** get a fair hearing in planning debates? • Do you think that current planning processes largely **marginalise competing stories** of the future and are **restricted to maintaining the status quo?**	• Values/Ethics • Positioning Effects • Agency • Legitimisation • Governmentalities • Planning Cultures • Knowledge Claims • Insurgent Practice • Discursive Struggle • Noise Reduction • Agonism • (De)politicisation • Discourse coalition

		What are the prospects for a post-growth institutional planning praxis based on alternative paradigms, notably the concept of Smart Decline?	
7.		The NPF aims to focus future growth into selected urban centres, do you think such an urban-centric approach should be the main strategic objective of the NPF?	• Do you think that current planning policy overly focuses on [urban] places **selected for growth**, overlooking non-selected areas which are generally understood as less significant? Have the new **regional structures** been designed to buttress urban focussed growth? • It is estimated that between 70-80% of global emissions come from urban areas. Do you consider we could have a stronger focus on smaller towns and villages as **a counterpoint to centralisation and urbanisation**? Could this involve deurbanisation? • Ireland has a significant **legacy of fossil-fuel dependent sprawl** - how do you think **this can be managed** in the context of reducing greenhouse gas emissions? Could this legacy create a **path-dependency and threaten urban growth targets**? • Could Ireland's **low level of urbanisation** and dispersed settlement patterns actually be an **advantage for reducing vulnerability and increasing adaptive capacity and resilience** in the face of climate change and resource stress?	• Representations of Space • Spatial Fix • Counter-discourse • Path-Dependency • Carbon Lock-in • Vulnerability • Adaption • Resilience
8.		Some Irish regions have experienced continuous peripheralisation over many decades, do you think the NPF can reverse this?	• The NPF does not **explicitly conceive** that any area will experience **depopulation**, do you think this is realistic? • Given the history of regional development in Ireland, can the concept of **'balanced regional growth'** reverse decline? Do you think this urban 'trickle down' approach can work? • Do you think this approach can overcome the pervasive **spatial realities of globalisation** which are often beyond local control to influence? ('Winners' and 'losers', uneven development etc.) • Could pursuing national growth and competitiveness actually **exacerbate regional imbalances**? • Do you think that the NPF growth targets might actually be a way for policymakers and politicians to **gloss over politically difficult debates on regional inequality** on the grounds that a 'rising tide lifts all boats' and everyone will have a larger slice out of a bigger cake? • Do you believe that an **open and honest dialogue** might be needed for peripheral regions where decline/stagnation will be the normal pathway and whether there might not be **an alternative path to follow?**	• Growthism • Entrepreneurialism • Abstract Space • Uneven development • (De)politicisation • Consensus/Dissensus

(Left vertical text, rows 7–8): Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power? (Objective 2)

9.		Do you consider that areas not selected for growth in the NPF could be managed in qualitatively different ways?	• Could planning instead **accept the reality** of these areas and to **anticipate/mediate** inevitable future (declining/stagnating) trends? • Do you think we could have a planning agenda to adaptively **manage contraction** aimed more at **'coping with decline'** rather than 'going for growth'? e.g. **planned shrinkage, managed degrowth and creative shrinkage**? • Could depopulation be **reconceived, not as a problem, but in a positive or neutral way** and as a window of opportunity for regions to redefine themselves? e.g. **better living conditions and positive social, economic and environmental outcomes** decoupled from high carbon use, resource intensity and pollution, compared with growing towns and cities? i.e. **planning for less, not more.** • Do you think such a perspective could open up possibilities to **foreground objectives beyond growth, such as social wellbeing and equity, and to supplement or even replace growth as the main aim of planning?** • Could recognition of demographic/economic realities help in developing a societal consensus for the implementation of **territorially differentiated planning strategies** rather than a 'one size fits all' growth strategy? • Could this include efficiency-orientated settlement structures and coordinated development of **regional adjustment strategies** (e.g. shared services, rationalising infrastructure, etc.), **a moratorium on housing in certain locations, selective demolishing, or even incentivising homeowners to move?** • Could such a framework be adapted such that planning could take a **proactive approach in times of economic crisis and limited resources?**	• Shrinkage • Degrowth • Post-Growth • Differential Space • Gaps/Loss of Meaning • Paradigm Change • Oppositional spatial rationalities
10.		Do you think that planning could have a greater role in natural climate solutions and, to creatively re-examine how land-uses are conventionally allocated?	• Could planning have a greater role in **ecosystem-management approaches**, e.g. reserving and re-establishing native forests, peatlands, floodplains and rewilding land, as an alternative to promoting urbanisation and growth? • Could this be accomplished through changes in urban form that responds to, restores and maintains local ecology? e.g. place-based planning, whereby communities are **planned and designed to the specifics of local ecology** in ways that emphasise the integration of, and access to, nature? • Could such an approach mobilise resources of regions and increase resilience and adaptive capacity by **downsizing infrastructure and rightsizing the local economy** with smaller resource throughput and lower consumption? • Do you think that planning could learn from grassroots, bottom-up initiatives, **such as Transition Towns, Ecovillages** and other autonomous forms of experimental **cooperative, small-scale, self-sufficient development**, as locally-oriented development practices? • Do you think that current regional scalar configurations and institutions offer the best approach to managing environmental challenges? Could **rescaling according to the ecological boundaries** (e.g. River Basins) help restore a balance between human and natural systems? Could such **a bioregional approach help in shifting people's perceptions in how people**	• Commons • Sublimate • Counter-Conduct/Counter-Projects • Transgression • Decolonisation • Experimentation • Right-sizing/Down-sizing • Grassroots • Transition Towns • Ecovillages • Nowtopia/Bioregionalism/Permaculture

(Left vertical text, rows 9–10): What, if anything, should we do about it? (Objective 3)

			use and treat the environment?	
11.		In your opinion, is there anybody else that I should speak to regarding this research?		
12.		Would you be willing to participate in a focus group with other participants to explore this research topic further?		

Participant Issue:

UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

Interview Schedule

Version Number & Date: #GD_IS_PI_V.02_30.08.2019
Research Ethics Approval Number: 4807
Title of the Research Study: Exploring new directions for Irish spatial planning practice in a century of environmental resource limits.
Name of Researchers: Gavin Daly (Student Investigator); Prof. Mark Boyle (Supervisor/Principal Investigator); Prof. Peter North (Co-Investigator)

Interview Questions
1. How long have you been working with your current organisation?
2. What is your current position within your organisation?
3. You[r organisation] made a public submission to the drafting of the National Planning Framework (NPF), could you talk me through the main focus of your submission?
4. The NPF includes ambitious national growth targets for Ireland in 2040 [+1.1 million additional people, +660,000 new jobs, +500,000 houses], do you believe such targets are realistic and achievable?
5. Ireland has ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emission targets by 80% by 2050 – do you think these targets are compatible with the growth targets contained within the NPF?
6. The 2018 IPCC report concluded that *"rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society"* would be needed to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The IPBES also recently warned that a *"fundamental, system-wide reorganisation across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values"* to halt biodiversity loss. Do you consider that planning policy and practice will need to be significantly altered to address these environmental challenges?
7. The NPF aims to focus future growth into selected urban centres, do you think such an urban-centric approach should be the main strategic objective of the NPF?
8. Some Irish regions have experienced continuous peripheralisation over many decades, do you think the NPF can reverse this?
9.. Do you consider that areas not selected for growth in the NPF could be managed in qualitatively different ways?
10. Could planning have a greater role in natural climate solutions and to re-examine how land-uses are conventionally allocated?
11. In your opinion, is there anybody else that I could speak to regarding this research?
12. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group with other participants to explore this research topic further? (No Obligation)