

# The interpretation of "degrowth" in local policy and planning

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# Project context "Beyond GDP Growth"

- ➔ "Beyond GDP Growth: Scenarios for sustainable building and planning
- ➔ Swedish research project led by KTH Royal Institute of Technology
- ➔ 2014-2018
- ➔ Work packages:
  - The built environment
  - Economic modelling
  - Sustainability assessment
  - **Policy and planning**
  - Mobility
  - Coordination and management
  - Social and environmental objectives
  - Scenarios
  - The organization of everyday life
  - Welfare

# Overview WP: Policy and planning

## Four articles:

1. International outlook: “experiences of degrowth”
2. **Case study Swedish municipality Alingsås: “current situation analysis”**
3. Scenario-oriented study using transition theory: “what would it take?”
4. Implications for policy and planning: “recommendations or solutions”

# Background

- Economic growth and degrowth is often analyzed at macro-level
  - Market logics as a central organizing principle in society
  - GDP is used to develop countries' economies
- At local (municipal) level, growth often mean other things
  - Population growth, a growing income among residents, employment etc.
- What is then "degrowth" at local level?
- Focus on formal local institutions in a non-crisis context



# Research questions

- ➔ How is growth interpreted in local policy and planning and what critique is raised?
- ➔ What characterizes the local degrowth discussion?
  - Who discuss “degrowth” (actors)?
  - Where is “degrowth” discussed (arenas)?
  - What elements of “degrowth” versus other forms of sustainability discourses are present in the local discussion?
  - Has the “degrowth” discussion had any impact on local policy and planning?
  - What are the conditions for “degrowth” to have an impact on local policy and planning?

# Method

- ➔ Case study: Alingsås
- ➔ Analysis of local policy documents
- ➔ 14 interviews, representing three categories of informants:
  1. Local government officials: key positions in local planning and development and/or sustainable development
  2. Degrowth-interested individuals
  3. Organizers of “Future Week”
- ➔ “Future Week” Alingsås (4-8 April, 2016)



# The meaning of growth and its critique

- ➔ Growth ideals are highly present in policy and planning
- ➔ Population growth. Alingsås vision: 42,000 inhabitants in 2019
  - The local growth program
  - Focus on building residential houses and growth of local business (and to some extent tourism, culture and leisure activities).
  - Concerns raised about environmental impact and the city's identity
- ➔ A parallel degrowth-discussion (degrowth as we know it)



## Actors

- ➔ Engaged individuals:
  - 1) a profession that focuses on environmental, energy or sustainability issues, as well as
  - (2) a background, or ongoing engagement, in civil society organizations that focuses on environmental issues and/or degrowth specifically.
- ➔ These individuals are engaged in organizations that in various forms promote sustainable development, and issues that are close to ideas about ecological limits:
  - The City Council, municipal companies with responsibility for housing or energy, or within civil society organizations

# Arenas

- Informal discussions between key individuals
- “Future weeks”
- Local fora is limited
- National and international degrowth networks



# Conditions for impact

- Little (almost no) impact in current local policy and planning
- Discourse vs. practice
- Institutional frames: norms and values about growth makes it difficult to change
- Examples of strategies that key actors employ

# Issues raised and discussed

- ➔ End paper with change-oriented discussion
- ➔ Some ideas:
  - How can local policy and planning change to be based on “degrowth” ideas?
    - Brief theoretical insights about inertias that hold back change, but also how people can make a change (norms and values)
    - The role of local case-specific contexts
  - What determines whether “degrowth” can be an inspiration for municipalities in their local policy and planning?
  - What difficult issues are raised by “degrowth” from the perspective of the municipality?