

Planning beyond growth: a case study of wellbeing-oriented planning in Wales and Cornwall

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Abstract

Although an increasing research interest in the combination of post-growth ideas and planning, questions concerning the implementation of post-growth models and initiatives in real-world planning system remain underexplored.

This study explores two post-growth initiatives, the *doughnut economics* in Cornwall and the *wellbeing economy* in Wales, by the means of a qualitative content analysis of documents related to land-use and transport planning.

The study shows that there are traces of post-growth ideas in strategic documents and plans, as well as indications that these ideas also are forming concrete policies, although some documents are still clearly growth oriented. To analyse the implications of post-growth ideas in planning practice and culture, a deeper empirical analysis is needed.

Keywords: Post-growth; case studies; wellbeing; doughnut economics; planning

1. Introduction

Planning beyond growth, or post-growth planning, has been promoted as both a response to the ongoing sustainability crises (Barry, 2019), and as an adaptation strategy to a future where growth cannot be taken for granted (Crowshaw et al., 2019). Two post-growth initiatives that have been launched are *Doughnut Economy* – a model displaying the socio-ecologically safe space in which society can operate, defined by an ‘ecological ceiling’ and a ‘social floor’ (Raworth, 2017) – and *Wellbeing Economy* – an initiative aiming to reorientate the economy towards wellbeing rather than towards growth (Fioramonti et al., 2022).

Although an increasing interest in the combination of post-growth ideas and planning, questions concerning the implementation of post-growth models in real-world planning system remain underexplored (Lange et al., 2021). To date, most of these studies apply the post-growth concept either as an entry point for criticising the mainstream (e.g. Berglund & Julier, 2020; Næss et al., 2020; Xue, 2015, 2018; Xue et al., 2017), or as a tool for imagining alternative futures (e.g. Hagbert et al., 2021; Ruiz-Alejos & Prats, 2022; Svenfelt et al., 2019). Although this focus is motivated by the low number of real-world examples of post-growth planning implemented at scale, there is a growing number of post-growth initiatives from which lessons already can be learned. This study explores places where two of these initiatives are in use, Cornwall and Wales. Cornwall adopted the Doughnut economics model in 2020. Together with the public participatory process called ‘The Cornwall We Want’, the localised doughnut model formed the basis of the new local plan which was published the same year. Wales became in 2015 the first country to translate the principles of the UN Sustainable Development Goals into law in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. Furthermore, Wales joined in 2018 the Wellbeing Economy Governments, which is a network of national governments with the ambition to rethink their economy to become more wellbeing-oriented and to replace GDP as a main goal for national economics.

This study constitutes an initial step of a larger case study which aims to understand how the application of post-growth initiatives in Cornwall and Wales has influenced the strategies, processes, practices, and culture of land-use planning and transport planning at each place. The aim of this initial study is to explore the influence of post-growth ideas on documents related to land-use planning and transport planning in the two places.

The study is structured in the following way. The next chapter (Chapter 2) offers a summary of previous research on post-growth planning. Chapter 3 presents a brief description of the study design. Thereafter, the findings from the document analysis are provided (Chapter 4). The final chapters (Chapter 5 and 6) discuss the document analysis in the light of previous literature and reflect on research questions of relevance for the planned in-depth study of post-growth initiatives in Cornwall and Wales.

2. Previous research on post-growth planning

2.1 Framing ‘post-growth’

As a notion, ‘post-growth’ refers to an alternative to the current growth-oriented paradigm (Barry, 2019; Lange et al., 2021; Savini et al., 2022). Whereas the more widely used term ‘degrowth’ emphasise the need to downscaling the economy, post-growth has a more agnostic aura in relation to growth – the main point of criticism being the unreflective assumptions about growth and the growth-dependence of our economies (Barry, 2019), as well as the misleading use of quantitative indicators like GDP to measure progress (Savini et al., 2022). Since these are important points in degrowth research too, it is clear that there are many overlaps between degrowth and post-growth.

Thus, post-growth is about rethinking the way land, production systems, consumption patterns, and work are organised (Lange et al., 2021). It is motivated by the failure of growth-dependent economies to sufficiently decouple economic growth from material and energy use – partly due to rebound effects – with its corresponding ecological deterioration (Hickel & Kallis, 2020). In a time of accelerating ecological crises and in a world where millions of people still do not have opportunity to meet their basic needs (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023), the necessity of societal transformations towards socioecological sustainability are imperative.

Growth-critical ideas are not new per se, but they have until recently been relatively absent from the field of planning research, which, according to Lange et al. is surprising given planning’s interest for issues linked to land scarcity and spatial justice. However, as Barry explains, planning has in many places become a type of institutionalised pro-growth activity, although this does not have to be the case. Instead, he suggests that:

‘Hence, planning in the 21st century should be oriented around the following: how to design urban forms that produce high levels of human wellbeing and flourishing while using less energy and resources and where growth is a potential by-product, not the goal of planning.’ (Barry, 2019, p.8).

Similarly, Savini et al. (2022) argue that a post-growth logic ‘needs to provide a realistic but utopian vision of urban prosperity, based on the principles of post-growth urbanisation’ and that it ‘also needs to be backed up by a matching toolkit of planning instruments’ (Savini et al., 2022, p.5).

While post-growth predominantly has a positive connotation in the literature, the term is in some studies applied synonymously to ‘end of growth’. This does not refer to a deliberate transition to a planning system more apt to provide human and planetary wellbeing, but rather to an unplanned societal change provoked by the collapse of economy when the growth-era comes to its inevitable end (Crownshaw et al., 2019). It is therefore important to make clear that a post-growth future may imply substantially different things depending on whether the transitions happen in a planned manner or if it occurs beyond our control. I will here use the term ‘post-growth planning’ as a deliberate action to plan differently, both in terms of the planning process and the planning outcome.

2.2 Real-world studies of post-growth planning

The emerging combination of post-growth ideas and planning has given rise to a variety of case studies with different focus. In the rest of the section, I will exemplify the most prevalent themes encountered in the post-growth planning literature: post-growth as a starting point for criticising the mainstream planning; post-growth as imaginaries of alternative futures; post-

growth as experimentation with the alternative; and post-growth as specific initiatives, including doughnut economics and wellbeing economy.

2.2.1 Post-growth planning as a critique of the mainstream

Several critical urban and regional studies have motivated the need of post-growth planning by analysing the effects of eco-modernist development in cities and regions. Taking Helsinki as a case, Berglund & Julier (2020) illustrate how urban development projects, branded as ‘sustainable urban development’, imply commodification of public land and exploitation of valuable natural environments. In Copenhagen, another city with explicit ‘green’ ambitions, Xue (2015, 2018) criticises the fact that no absolute decoupling between housing growth and environmental degradation, and between economic growth and traffic growth, is achieved, as the urban development is characterised by both suburbanisation and densification. Similarly, while Copenhagen can report progresses in active travelling and public transport, road traffic has also increased (*ibid.*). Using Oslo as an example, Næss et al. (2020) problematise the rationale of urban growth by exemplifying how urban sprawl constrains accessibility and risks exploitation of agricultural land, whereas densification drives exploitation of central green areas with potential negative effects on climate adaptation, public health, and wellbeing. Turning to the national level, Xue et al. (2017) compares the opportunities for Norway to meet the Paris Agreement with either an eco-modernist agenda or a degrowth agenda, with the conclusion that an eco-modernization is unlikely to be sufficient. Fauré et al. (2016) contributes with a similar insight regarding the Swedish performance on the topic of sustainability. This study applies the doughnut model to identify the socio-ecologically safe space for Sweden as a starting point for a backcasting scenario. Since Sweden performs relatively well at the parameters of social sustainability but is far from meeting the ecological targets, the study concludes that a radical decrease in ecological impact while not jeopardising the social parameters should be of key importance.

Targeting the regional level, Rydin (2022) emphasises the importance of differentiating between post-growth planning in high-growth areas contra low-growth areas, since the prerequisites for such places look fundamentally different. While post-growth planning in high-growth areas may imply minimising resource-use, re-using the existing built stock, and favouring affordable housing, post-growth planning in low-growth areas may instead include strategies for stimulating a sufficient level of endogenous growth to maintain provision of local services. Two important factors for this purpose are land ownership and collaboration with local stakeholders (Rydin, 2022). In other non-growing areas, growth stimulating measures are not expected to have effect, and then post-growth strategies may be motivated primarily for adaptation reasons as a response to a negative population trend. Dax & Fischer (2018) describe an Austrian area with these characteristics. The case study shed light on the uneven regional development that is visible in many parts of Europe, where peripheries are generated and reinforced at different scales due to changes in migration patterns and demographics. Post-growth as a planning strategy can in this context be to prioritise how to improve well-being and local attractiveness, targeting the existing population rather than external actors and capital. Durrant et al. (2023) challenge the predominant rationale of planning based on a polycentric structure consisting of growth-nodes and peripheries, arguing that this form of planning is detrimental for communities located in the periphery. Two suggested priorities for post-growth regional planning are to promote sufficient economic activity to support local livelihood in all parts of the region, and to ensure that new

infrastructure investments replace less sustainable mobility practice rather than being an addition to it.

2.2.2 Post-growth as an imaginary of something else

Research on post-growth planning has also explored attitudes to post-growth ideas among planning professionals. Hagbert et al. (2021) investigate how planning beyond growth is perceived by various planning actors, including professional planners, other civil servants, politicians, and grassroots. The study shows that 'growth' sometimes is perceived as a prerequisite and sometimes an obstacle for sustainability. It also attests a widespread concern that a shift to post-growth policies potentially could increase social risks and revolutionary instabilities. Ruiz-Alejos & Prats (2022) address the role of local planning practices in implementing degrowth ideas, using Södertälje as a case. The study reveals that many municipal planners experienced that they do not have the mandate to integrate overarching social and environmental goals in planning and that opportunities for more visionary scenarios are lacking. Instead, these planners perceived their role as facilitating a planning process driven by private actors and developers. However, if only they had the mandate to be more proactive, the believed municipal planning to have the potential to be an enabler of change. Svenfelt et al. (2019) develop four scenarios of a future beyond GDP growth in order to initiate a discussion about post-growth futures with planners in three Swedish municipalities. All scenarios are the result of a multi-target backcasting approach based on the fulfilment of four sustainability targets, including climate, land-use, participation, and resource security. The discussions reveal a general interest to discuss various imaginaries of the future more freely, although the opinions on what a desirable future naturally diverge between the participants. Svenfelt et al. conclude that backcasting scenarios are a useful method to explore alternative development paths than what is normally predicted.

2.2.3 Post-growth planning as experimentation with alternative futures

Apart from the abovementioned exploratory approaches to post-growth imaginaries, research on post-growth planning includes case studies on places with experience of experimenting with post-growth ideas in the planning process. Crowley et al. (2021) use examples from Spain and Portugal in which citizen participation in urban planning has contributed to stopping transformations of public land into private. In this example, both the planning process, i.e. promoting a more participatory approach, and the planning outcome, i.e. avoiding commodification of public land, are in line with post-growth ideals. However, as Crowley et al. observes, this type of bottom-up governance may be less effective in considering global impacts of local planning than it is to safeguard the interests of the local community. An alliance between urban planning and post-growth advocates can arguably contribute to balancing the interests of the local contra the global. Ferreira & von Schönfeld (2020) present a manifesto for such an alliance, pointing out commodification of commons as one central discussion point for the planning actors. This is motivated by its role as fuelling economic growth, on the one hand, and driving environmental degradation and social exploitation, on the other. In this way, post-growth-inspired planning is associated with simultaneous concerns for social welfare and ecological qualities. Ferreira & von Schönfeld (2020) observe, however, that post-growth strategies are no 'silver bullet' and that its success depends on how it is designed, what the underlying motives are, and the geographical context of the place. This is illustrated by real-world experiences in which various degrees of success have been reported (Ferreira & von Schönfeld, 2020).

2.2.4 Post-growth planning as initiatives: doughnut and wellbeing

There are also case studies on places which have committed to specific post-growth initiatives, including doughnut economics and wellbeing economy. Since studies on Cornwall and Wales are of greatest relevance for this literature review, these will constitute the main part. However, some comparative studies have also been included.

Addressing the Cornwall Doughnut, Turner et al. (2020), highlights the importance of downscaling and localising the model and, when possible, linking its socioecological domains to concrete policy goals and targets. This downscaling process is not without challenges (R. A. Turner & Wills, 2022). One challenge is to handle interest conflicts related to scale, time and different domains, another is to alter the growth-imperative in which local institutions typically are embedded and the path dependencies caused by vested interests. Still another question concerns whether the ecological ceiling targets should be technocratically or democratically determined (*ibid.*). The case of the Cornwall doughnut is further analysed by Honeybun et al. (2024), who argue that both statutory bodies – in particular, the Council Leadership Board – and the participation of local stakeholders have been crucial to approach sustainability issues more holistically and to gain legitimacy in the local community. Hjelmskog et al. (2023) make a similar conclusion when analysing the case of Glasgow from a doughnut economics framework. The study concludes that the model is a good tool to get a shared understanding for connections, co-benefits and trade-offs between different domains but observes that it remains unclear whether it also leads to transformative action in practice.

Khmara & Kronenberg (2023) compares four different degrowth initiatives or phenomena in order to assess their respective transformative potential, including Copenhagen as a C40 city, Totnes as a Transition Town, Amsterdam as a doughnut city, and Detroit as a shrinking city. The cases were compared with respect to urban policy, land rent, housing policy and transport, and the study concludes that the Amsterdam doughnut performed best in relation to post-growth ideals. However, Khmara & Kronenberg remark that Amsterdam adopted the doughnut model as a result of also being a C40 city and that many post-growth-oriented policies were in place before the doughnut came into place.

Several studies have taken an interest in the implementation of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act. Having analysed key factors for the realisation of the Wellbeing Act, Messham & Sheard (2020) conclude that the engagement of individual politicians and the political context of the time played a particularly decisive role for the Wellbeing Act to be put in place. McKinlay (2019) compares the Welsh Wellbeing Act with New Zealand's wellbeing budget, pointing out the Welsh focus on localism as one key attribute to delivering wellbeing in practice, and the presence of a 'Future Generations Commissioner', as another. The role as commissioner, whose task is to review the policymaking of all public bodies with potential implications on the wellbeing goals, does not exist in New Zealand. Howe & Nutbeam (2023) presents an interview with the first person at this position in Wales, Sophie Howe. Key learnings that Howe mentions from her time as Commissioner include the importance of legislating the wellbeing mechanism, of supporting civil servants in transforming their working methods, and of finding appropriate indicators reflecting progress towards each goal without getting obsessed by them.

Other studies have analysed the implementation of the Wellbeing Act at national and local scale. Jones (2019) reminds that every scale at which the Wellbeing Act is implemented has

implications on the degree to which wellbeing and justice can be achieved. A challenge at national level is to ensure that city problems are not prioritised at the expense of rural problems, whereas a local scale challenge is that local priorities may reinforce unequal development of the progress of specific wellbeing goals. Nesom & MacKillop (2021) explores the experiences of local actors from implementing the Wellbeing Act and observe that there is a tension between the national and the local level. Local implementation is stressed, but many local actors express a lack of clarity regarding the national government's expectations and the local government's room for action. Nesom & MacKillop argue that support, resourcing, and time for local implementation are needed, as well as trust-building between different levels of governance. On a similar note, Carter & MacKillop (2023) identify a lack of both guidance and resources as the main obstacles for local implementation. There is a clear national-local divide in attitude to the Wellbeing Act, where the local governments are less positive than the national government. Although the Wellbeing Act theoretically is based on ideas of spatial justice given its place-based approach and emphasis on participatory processes, the delivery of spatial justice in practice proves to be insufficient (Carter & MacKillop, 2023).

3. Study design

The study was carried out focusing on two places in which post-growth models or initiatives have been applied, namely Wales and Cornwall, and consisted of a qualitative content analysis of a selection of planning documents. Each document was read with three questions in mind:

- What is the prime focus and main motivation of the suggested planning approaches of the text?
- Are post-growth ideals visible in the text, and if so, in what way?
- How is urban growth and economic growth framed in the text?

For Cornwall, the local plan and the transport plan were selected for analysis. In addition to these, the annual review of the local plan was included. For Wales, the national plan, the planning policy, and the transport strategy were chosen.

The choice of documents was motivated by its relevance for reflecting the land-use planning and the transport planning at the respective places. Since the analysis aims to explore the influence of post-growth initiatives on planning documents in Cornwall and Wales, only documents published after implementation of the doughnut model and the wellbeing economy were considered. In the case of Cornwall, the annual review was also included since it offered an additional perspective on the progress of the realisation of the plan.

4. Document analysis

4.1 Cornwall

4.1.1 Cornwall Local Plan 2020-2050

Cornwall Local Plan 2020-2050 has the slogan 'Together we can' (Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Leadership Board, 2023a). This emphasis on togetherness and the positive view of

future as an opportunity for a better way of living captures well the tone in plan. The plan begins with two quotes about the long-term concerns of the environment and health, and children's right, poverty, and equal chance. Together, the initial quotes and the positive slogan underline what is considered to be central challenges of today, while pointing out the approach that the Council suggests suitable to tackle them. While emphasising the multiple challenges that society is facing, positive experiences, including community kindness and successful implementation of local solutions, are also mentioned. The need for 'a new era' is emphasised.

The local plan expresses its ambition to build a greener, cleaner, fairer, and more inclusive Cornwall. This ambition is translated into six aims: a creative net zero economy; sustainable food, land, and sea; thriving places with decent, affordable homes; equality, education, and entrepreneurship; healthy, safe, and resilient communities; and digital revolution for sustainable living. The aims are said to be based on the present conditions, on the one hand, and on citizen visions collected through the campaign 'The Cornwall we want' in 2020, on the other. In the survey of the campaign, the main themes raised by citizens concerned a greener economy less reliant on tourism; a Cornwall with more space for nature; a fairer, more inclusive, and compassionate Cornwall, and more local decision-making regarding local issues. Worth mentioning is that a resident survey from 2023 presented affordable housing as the single most important issue for Cornish citizens (Cornwall Council, 2023).

The wellbeing goals of the doughnut run like a red thread throughout the local plan. Not only is the Cornwall doughnut explicitly demonstrated, but its ideals are also implicitly present in the six aims. Both local and global ecological concerns have a prominent role: the local considerations are mainly linked to natural environment and biodiversity, whereas the global considerations are mostly represented by the net zero 2030 climate goal. Regarding social concerns, aspects of health and wellbeing, inclusion, equal chances, safety, and 'the local' are all represented in various forms throughout the aims. The focus of the plan is the needs of the present population and of the future generations to come, rather than boosting Cornwall's attractiveness in terms of external skills and capital. Despite visionary formulations like 'Cornwall's creative economy is growing' (p. 27) and 'Cornwall is well positioned to develop new businesses and support existing businesses to grow' (p.28), very little is written about economic growth explicitly, and when it is addressed, it is never framed as the ultimate goal of society nor as the most central means to achieve socioecological wellbeing. In this sense, the spirit of the doughnut is clearly present in the plan: it places the social needs and the ecological limitations at its heart instead of focusing on promoting economic growth. When discussing how the plan will be delivered, the need of partnership is emphasised, since 'state institutions, however powerful, cannot achieve this vision on their own' (p.33). Partnership with the residents is pointed out as the most crucial one, although an enhanced partnership with the UK government is also mentioned.

The Cornwall Plan Annual Review 2023 displays how the proceedings of implementing the plan are going to date, based on the 22 identified socioecological areas of the Cornwall Doughnut (Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Leadership Board, 2023). In 2023, the majority of the areas were classified as off-target. The five domains that were considered to be 'significantly off-target' were the areas of air quality, biodiversity, renewables, food provision, and housing. Based on this, three short-term actions were decided as priority for the work in 2024: further actions to tackle the increased cost-of-living, e.g. supporting housing security and preventing

people's debt; encouraging organisations to do a 'pledge for nature' to promote biodiversity actions; and to make the websites related to the local plan more accessible to children and young residents. Being a prioritised area also the previous year, actions for tackling the cost-of-living have been handled in a temporary work group, which, according to the review, has now become permanent. Hence, the review offers both a snapshot of the work towards goal-fulfilment and some concrete actions and processes that are on-going (*ibid.*).



Figure 1: Social foundation of the Cornwall Doughnut (R. Turner et al., 2020).

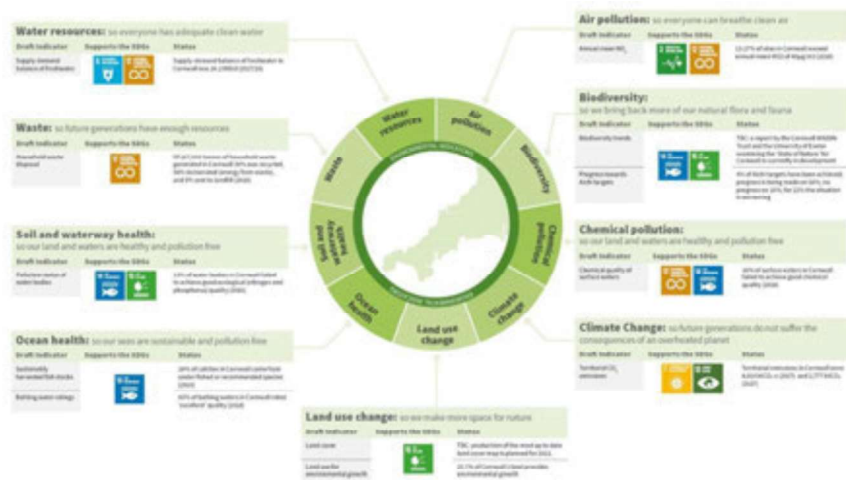


Figure 2: Ecological ceiling of the Cornwall Doughnut (R. Turner et al., 2020).

4.1.2 Cornwall Transport Plan

Turning to the Cornwall Transport Plan (Cornwall Council, 2021), the emphasis on climate change and wellbeing continues to be central. The vision declares that:

‘Transport in Cornwall will be excellent and carbon neutral. Our transport system will connect people, communities, businesses and services in a way that enhances quality of life, is reliable, efficient, safe, healthy and inclusive. People will choose to travel in ways that will have low impact upon the environment and other people.’ (p.2)

Key themes in the transport plan include a modal shift to more active travel and public transport, reduced speed limits for safer and more liveable streets, and replacing the predict-and-provide logic with a decide-and-provide approach. Like in the local plan, the need of ‘a new era’ is stressed. Furthermore, the importance of connecting the Transport Plan to other strategies and policy frameworks – locally as well as regionally and nationally – is explicitly stated.

Six transport goals are presented, including tackling climate change, supporting economic prosperity, respecting and enhancing the environment, supporting healthy active lifestyles and wellbeing, supporting community and road safety, and supporting equality of opportunity. Every goal is concretised in suggested policies and discussed in relation to the goal of carbon neutrality in 2030. In this sense, climate concerns appear to have a superior position to the other goals. There is also a red thread throughout the proposed solutions for the goals, with more active travel, reduced speeds, and less car use as examples of actions for several goals included those related to climate, health and safety. The co-benefits of more sustainable transport modes are hence emphasised. The plan also includes policies for land-use planning, as exemplified by suggestions to design for enhanced accessibility, connectivity, and inclusion, and to incorporate nature recovery in planning. For environmental reasons, the management of existing infrastructure is prioritised over construction of new roads. In order to achieve carbon neutrality in 2030, the plan highlights that travel behaviour ought to change – electrification is not sufficient. A backcasting scenario based on net zero 2030 suggests an increase in public transport travels by 50 percent and a replacement of 50 percent of the car trips to active transport modes by 2030, and a 15 percent shift to electric vehicles by 2025.

Although economic prosperity is one of the six transport goals, economic growth is not a central theme in the transport plan, which is mentioned as a difference from previous plans:

‘During 2011-2019, scheme delivery focussed heavily on investment that supported economic and employment growth [...] now is the right time to change course and steer investments towards road safety, locally important and green travel modes’ (p.17).

Discussing economic prosperity, formulations like ‘local and national transport connectivity is an important ingredient in a healthy economy’ (p.12), ‘lack of transport provision and poor connectivity can constrain the growth of our economy’ (p. 33), and ‘investment in sustainable transport connectivity is key in facilitating economic growth’ (p.33) illustrate that economic growth is still considered. However, the economic concern is never discussed without emphasising the preferability of a modal shift and to sustainable freight options for climate and wellbeing related reasons. An example of this is: ‘prioritising walking, cycling and public transport connectivity to and within our towns will help to support economic growth’ (p.46). Other solutions to support economic prosperity are linked to improvements in connectivity,

accessibility and reliability. In this vein, economic growth is described as a potential outcome of an environment-friendly transport system rather than as the main means and end.

The transport plan is suggested to be delivered by a combination of specialised plans, working in partnerships, policy steering, bidding and lobbying. The biggest risks for failing to meet the net zero 2030 target are identified as changed national policies or local priorities, and lack of funding, of community or political support, of behaviour change and of devolved power to disincentivise car use.

4.2 Wales

4.2.1 Future Wales

Future Wales is Wales's spatial development plan which presents where long-term strategic development will be located, and which guides the planning decisions at all levels (Welsh Government, 2021a). The aim of the plan is to 'addressing key national priorities through the planning system, including sustaining and developing a vibrant economy, achieving decarbonisation and climate resilience, developing strong eco-systems and improving the health and well-being of our communities' (p. 6). The introductory chapters take their starting point in the global challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and the recent experience of the Covid-19 pandemic and highlights how a good planning practice can offer multiple co-benefits. An example provided concerns co-locating housing, workplaces, services, and amenities, which is not only beneficial for the climate but also for social, health, economic and cultural reasons.

'Sustainable growth' is a central concept since the plan is considered to have 'an important role in driving sustainable growth and combating climate change' (p.10). Two out of eleven outcomes that the plan aims to achieve concern growth explicitly: firstly, 'a Wales where people live in distinctive regions that tackle health and socio-economic inequalities through sustainable growth' (p.54), and secondly, 'a Wales where people live and work in towns and cities which are a focus and a springboard for sustainable growth' (p.55). In the former, growth appears as a means for achieving better health and equality, whereas in the latter, growth seems to be a goal in itself. The three last outcomes concern climate and environment explicitly.

Throughout the plan, growth is depicted as something unequivocally desirable, as exemplified in formulations like 'development plans will have a forward thinking positive attitude towards enabling economic development, investment and innovation [...] promoting a culture of innovation, social partnership, entrepreneurialism and skills-development' (p.55). Formulations like this give rather associations to a conventional neoliberal approach to planning than to a radically different sustainability-oriented approach.

According to the plan, cities and large towns are prioritised as areas for strategic development, since 'growing urban areas across Wales will create concentrations of jobs, services, and amenities' (p.60). The choice is motivated by the ambition to avoid sprawl, while using existing infrastructure and promoting sustainable travel modes. Furthermore, it claims that 'areas outside the urban centres will benefit directly from the strength of our large towns and cities, though improved connectivity and additional investment in new homes, jobs

and services’ (p.55). While not explicitly stated, this appears to be how the plan defines ‘sustainable growth’: the promotion of growth nodes whose benefits are expected to ‘trickle down’ to the periphery. This focus on urban growth is not further problematised from a spatial justice perspective. Another aspect which is not extensively discussed is how the new modes of remote working affect the structure of labour markets and commuting patterns.

In sum, the wellbeing goals are present throughout the plan, and it is clear that urban and economic growth are not the only important aspects. Still, the whole document relies on a growth agenda, and the other aspects seem to be secondary to the growth imperative.

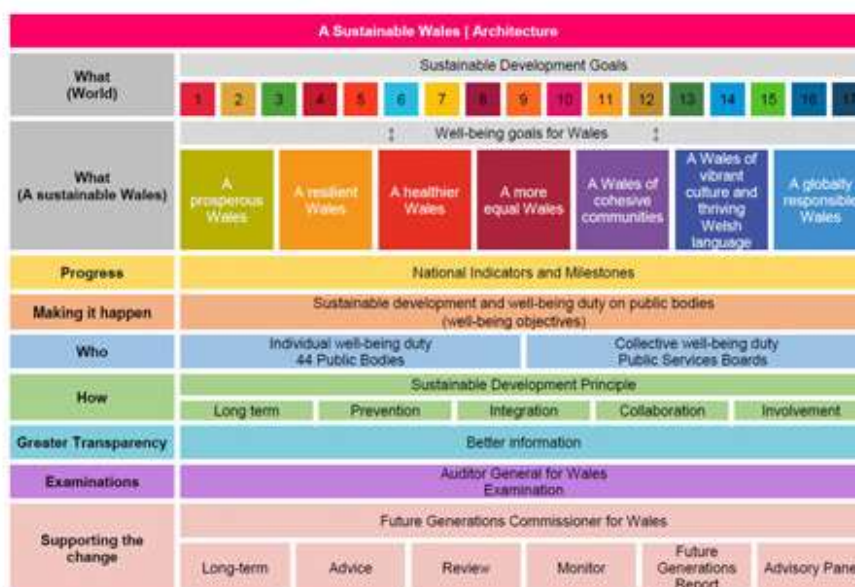


Figure 3: Wellbeing goals in Wales (Welsh Government, 2019).

4.2.2 Planning Policy Wales (PPW)

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) establishes the key principles of the planning system in Wales (Welsh Government, 2024). Although it is not part of the development plan, it is an important document in the process of planning decision-making. While pointing out ‘sustainable places and wellbeing’ as the goal, PPW identifies ‘sustainable placemaking’ as the process for goal-fulfilment. This is described as a process that involves all planning actors who need to collaborate to ‘achieve sustainable economic benefits for all in line with the well-being goals’ (p.17). Five outcomes of sustainable placemaking are presented with references to the social, environmental, economic and cultural wellbeing goals. The first outcome, ‘growing economy in a sustainable manner’, clearly reflect the idea of sustainable growth from the national plan.

In contrast to the national plan, PPW offers a definition of economic development: ‘the development of land and buildings that generate sustainable long-term prosperity, jobs and

incomes.’ (p. 86). Economic development is mentioned as one of the central ambitions of PPW, but the emphasis is put on increasing economic diversification and ensuring employment rather than on sole economic growth.

Many references are made to the Well-being Act and both the well-being goals and the well-being ‘ways of working’ – including collaboration, integration, long-term, prevention, and involvement – are present throughout PPW. However, there is no clarification on how conflicting interests linked to different well-being goals should be balanced against each other. As an example, one of the outcomes of sustainable placemaking is ‘maximising environmental protection’, but it is not clear how this outcome should be combined with other outcomes. Arguably, the maximal environmental protection would be to avoid exploitation overall – but since that is hardly the idea, it seems more likely that the concern for environmental protection enters the scene later in planning process, affecting the design of the plan at the margin rather than having the ability to question it more fundamentally.

4.2.3 Llwybr Newydd – The Wales Transport Strategy 2021

Llwybr Newydd, meaning ‘a new path’, refers to the ambition to rethink transport planning to better respond to the climate emergency and other pressing challenges of today while addressing aspects of health, poverty, inclusion, and accessibility (Welsh Government, 2021b). A three-step strategy is proposed, including bringing services to people, enabling sustainable, efficient and accessible transport, and encouraging sustainable transport choices. The strategy refers to the transport hierarchy in which the most sustainable travel modes are at the top and the most polluting are at the bottom. For infrastructure, road maintenance is prioritised over new constructions.

References to the Wellbeing Act and the wellbeing goals occur both in the aim of the strategy and in suggested priorities (Welsh Government, 2021b). The five ways of working permeate the strategy: it is long-term in that it reinforces the emphasis on the needs of future generations; it is preventive in terms of disincentivising unsustainable transport modes; it is integrative since it brings together many policy areas; it is collaborative in that it highlights the importance of partnerships for the delivery of outcomes; and it is involving in terms of encouraging increased participation of citizens and local stakeholders.

The transport strategy aims to address equality, health, climate, biodiversity, waste, economic cohesion, innovation, distribution of goods, affordability, Welsh language, art, sport, culture, and historic environment. The main economic concerns of the strategy – cohesion, innovation, distribution of goods and affordability – do not appear as superior to, or dictating the conditions of, the other goals. In this sense, the overall focus of the strategy seems to be providing a transport system that responds to the wellbeing-related needs of the residents rather than one that serves to attracting external financial or human capital.

The delivery of the strategy is suggested to occur through the National Transport Delivery Plan, mini-plans in which long-term and short-term strategies for the specific transport modes are presented, regional plans and transport commissions. Collaboration with various actors, including the UK Government, other policy areas within the Welsh Government, local authorities, regional partnerships, commercial operators, and transport users, are described as crucial for a successful implementation.

In sum, the transport strategy is clearly influenced by the ideals of wellbeing, both in its means and its ends. It is less growth-oriented than the national plan and PPW, since it appears to be less focused on sustainable growth and more on accessibility, sustainability and efficiency.

5. Discussion

The space for ‘more visionary scenarios’ that Ruiz-Alejos & Prats call out for (2022) undoubtedly exists in both Cornwall and Wales, which is manifested by formulations like ‘a new era’ and ‘a new path’. None of the analysed documents define progress as measurable with GDP growth, but they differ in how growth-oriented they are. Comparing Welsh national plan and the Cornwall local plan, the former follows a logic of sustainable growth where growth seems to be both a means and an end in itself, whereas the latter discusses growth very little and never as the ultimate goal of planning. In the same vein, Cornwall transport plan depicts growth as a potential outcome rather than a means or an end. This resonates with Barry’s description of growth as ‘a potential by-product, not the goal of planning’ (Barry, 2019). While a growth imperative to which the wellbeing goals are secondary characterises the Welsh national plan, the climate goal seems to have the superior position in the Cornwall transport plan, given how all policy areas are discussed in relation to it. Both the Cornwall doughnut and the Welsh wellbeing economy have clearly influenced the analysed planning documents – not least the two transport plans.

Despite the many references to the Welsh wellbeing goals, it is clear that the idea of sustainable growth is still prevalent in the key documents for national land-use planning in Wales. What ‘sustainable growth’ means is however not fully defined, nor is it clarified how conflicting interests should be weighed against each other. As both Berglund & Julier (2020) and Naess (2020) note, urban growth often implies exploitation of valuable environments – either through sprawl or through densification. How Wales will ‘maximise environmental protection’, which is one of the outcomes of PPW’s sustainable placemaking, while promoting urban growth, is not discussed in the PPW. The Welsh transport strategy, in contrast, differs from the urban growth focus that Xue (2015: 2018) identifies in Copenhagen, in which the attention to the increase in active travelling and public transport are disguising a simultaneous rise in car travels. Welsh Government (2021b) acknowledges that growth of sustainable transport modes is not sufficient, unless they replace less sustainable transport modes. In this sense, the Welsh transport strategy is less growth-oriented than the Welsh documents for land-use planning.

Both the Welsh national plan and PPW contain traces of the post-growth planning ideas that Rydin (2022) suggests as suitable for high- and low-growth areas, in terms of using existing infrastructure in urban areas and focussing on place-based strategies to maintain provision of services in rural areas. However, the Welsh land-use documents build on a polycentric growth node-periphery structure with a conventional image of labour market and commuter patterns, which Durrant et al. (2023) describes as detrimental for communities located in the periphery. The risk is similar to what Jones (2019) and Carter & MacKillop (2023) highlight, that the urban focus of the Welsh national plan makes spatial justice difficult to achieve.

Regarding the process of post-growth planning, some observations can be made. Firstly, it is indeed difficult to fit a model or concept, like the doughnut or the wellbeing economy, into a local context, given its multiple considerations needed across both time and scale. In Wales, there is an emphasis on localism and the place-based approach – which is applauded by McKinlay (2019) – and still, several studies (Carter & MacKillop, 2023; Nesom & MacKillop, 2021) notes that there is a tension between the national and the local level in relation to the Wellbeing Act. This tension is difficult to capture only from analysing the national documents.

Secondly, there is a difference between planning documents and actual action. Although the Cornwall local plan is thoroughly influenced by the ideals of the Doughnut, the annual review shows that the majority of the sustainability targets are currently not fulfilled. However, the review also provides examples of on-going actions in the process towards the goals. In order to analyse the implications of these initiatives on planning practice – more than these glimpses that an annual review can offer – the implementation processes should be investigated separately through e.g. interviews with planning actors or analysis of policy documents and meeting minutes.

Thirdly, there are signs of a new post-growth-oriented way of planning based on backcasting in the documents. The clearest example is found in the Cornwall transport plan which explicitly refers to a shift from predict-and-provide to decide-and-provide, but a similar backcasting logic is present in the Welsh transport strategy where the net zero goal fundamentally determines the design of the strategy. Overall, the ‘safe and just space’ of the Cornwall doughnut and the Welsh wellbeing goals are examples of how the places formulate a vision which will dictate the conditions of planning.

6. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore the influence of post-growth ideas on documents related to land-use planning and transport planning in Cornwall and Wales. The study shows that there are traces of post-growth ideas in strategic documents and plans, as well as indications that these ideas also are forming concrete policies. The analysed documents are clearly influenced by the doughnut model and the wellbeing economy respectively, in terms of goals and ways of working. However, some documents show a more mixed picture where the growth imperative is still striking.

The post-growth ideas were generally more integrated in the transport plans than in the land-use plans. In both Cornwall and Wales, the transport plans exemplify a broader approach to planning which combines land-use and transport perspectives. In addition, both of the transport plans are characterised by a backcasting approach in which the climate goal plays a dominant role.

Given the focus on planning documents, the study was limited to concern the ‘talk’ rather than the ‘action’ of post-growth planning. To analyse the implications of post-growth ideas in planning practice and culture, a deeper empirical analysis is needed in which the specific implementation processes are followed. A suggestion for future research is to follow such a process through document analysis and interviews with planning professionals.

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