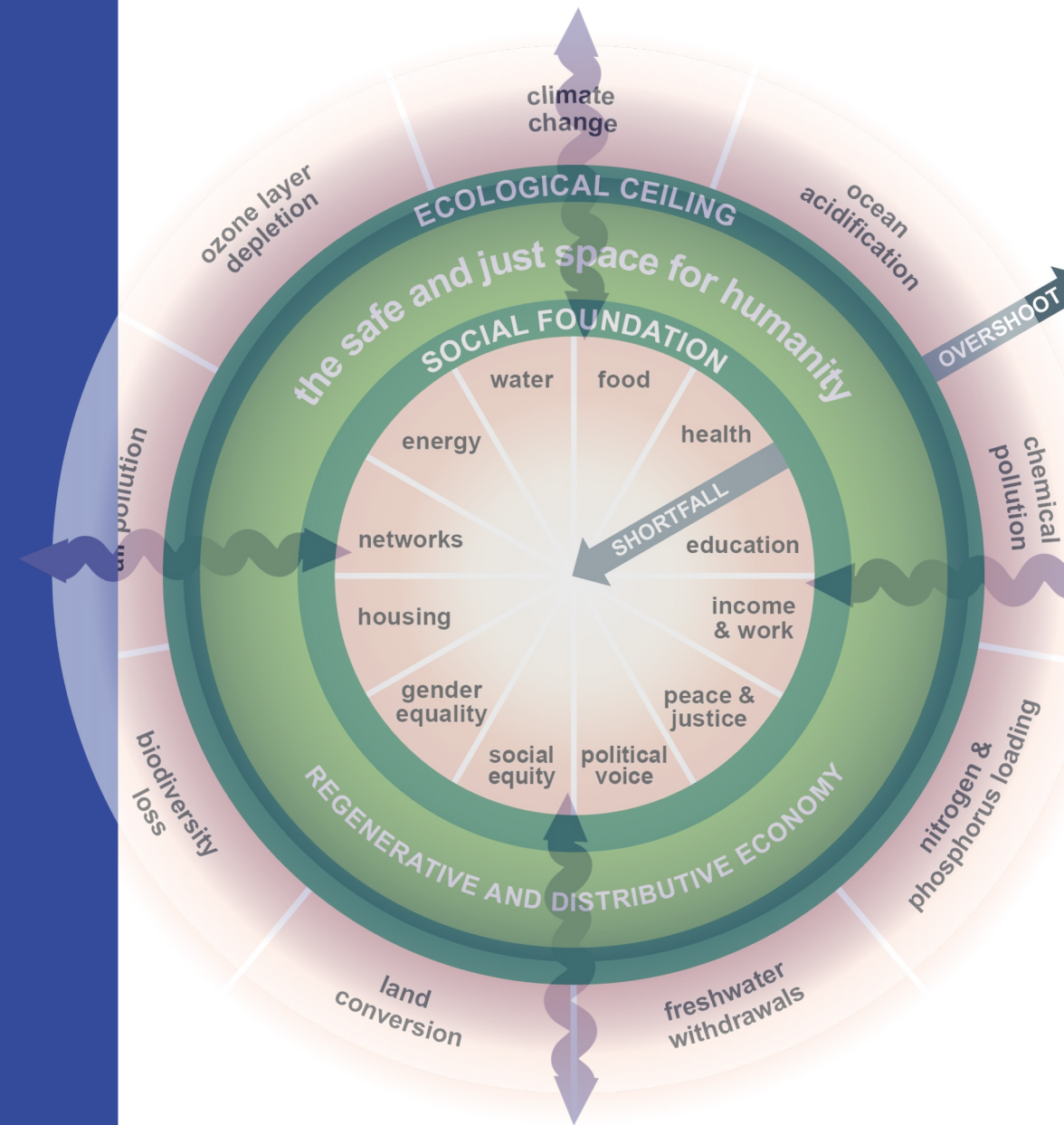


# The Specter of Growth in Doughnut Economics

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Freiburg, 15. November 2023



# Structure

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*Learning from the ambiguous role of economic growth in practical experimentations with Doughnut Economics for social-ecological transformations*

- 1. Doughnut Economics and growth agnosticism**
- 2. Urban Experimentations with the Doughnut**
- 3. Towards a secularization of growth**

# Doughnut Economics and growth agnosticism

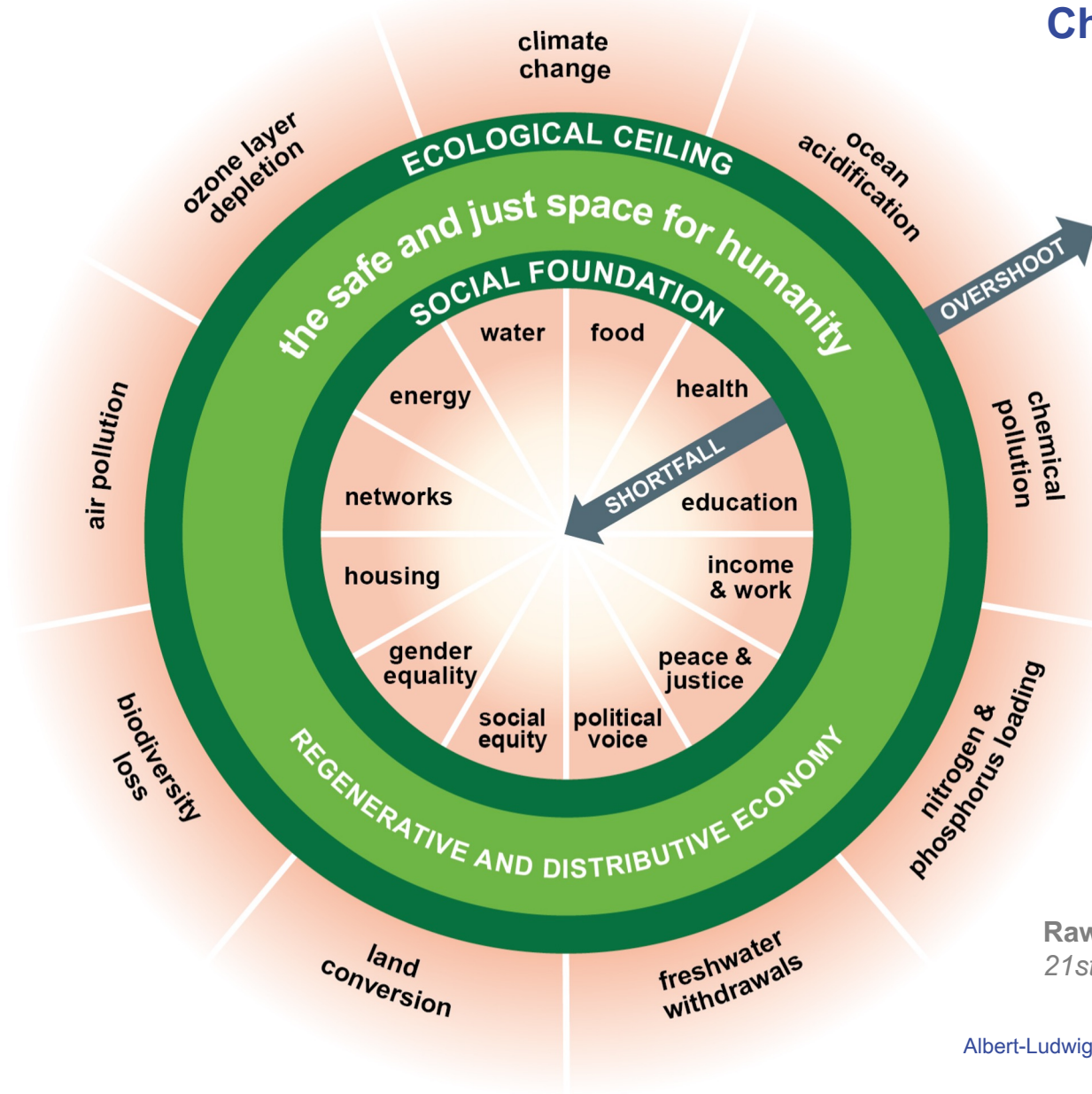
# Doughnut Economics

Change the goal: from GDP to the Doughnut

## Growth agnosticism

*'I mean agnostic in the sense of designing an economy that promotes human prosperity whether GDP is going up, down, or holding steady' (Raworth, 2017: 245).*

Raworth, K. (2017). *Doughnut economics: Seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist*. Random House Business Books.



# Being agnostic to growth?

## Deemphasizing Growth, due to:

- ambiguity of (de)growth
- lack of political appeal of anti-growth positions
- unpredictability of GDP development in context of stringent social-ecological measures
- geographical and social differences regarding basic provisioning

*‘It is not possible to predict definitely one way or the other whether GDP will go up or down in high-income countries as they create regenerative and distributive economies that engage the household, market, commons and state alike’ (Raworth, 2017: 267).*

## Confronting growth, due to:

- counterproductivity of GDP-growth for reduction of energy and material use
- the trivialization of overconsumption
- co-optability of growth agnosticism
- raise of global inequalities despite growth
- the high likelihood of a GDP decline as a consequence of a social-ecological transformation

**Raworth, K. (2017).** *Doughnut economics: Seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist.* Random House Business Books.

**Kaika, M., Varvarousis, A., Demaria, F., & March, H. (2023).** Urbanizing degrowth: Five steps towards a Radical Spatial Degrowth Agenda for planning in the face of climate emergency. *Urban Studies*, 60(7), 1191–1211.

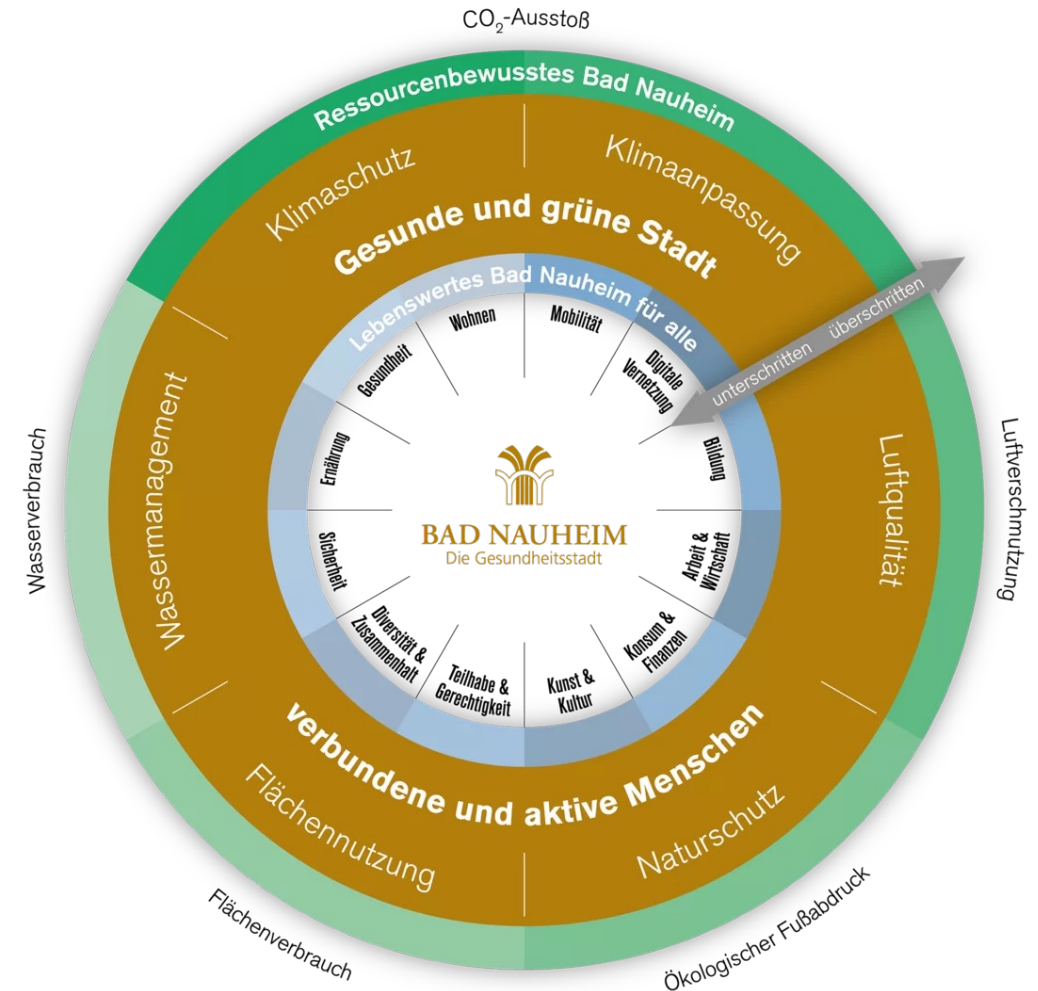


# Being agnostic to growth?

## Deemphasizing Growth, due to:

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*Practical success due to communicative strategy that resonates with broad coalition of actors (Schmid, forthcoming)*



# Urban Experimentations with the Doughnut

# Case Studies

## Bad Nauheim, Germany



## Tomelilla, Sweden



*What is the role of economic growth in practical experimentations with Doughnut Economics?*



# Experimenting with the Doughnut

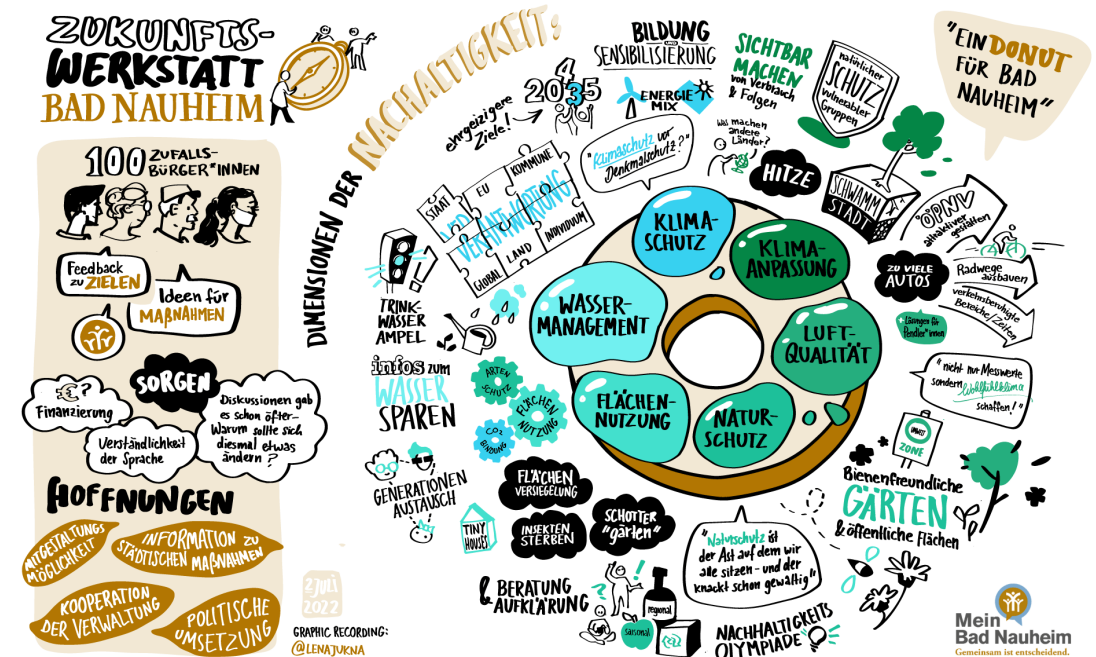
‘People generally react to it like “yeah, this is sensible, this is what we need to do” and [...] there is no one who really questions the basics of it.’ (Conversation 1, TL)

‘I have never heard anything negative about this actually’ (Interview 4 with political representative, TL)



School Building Masterplan, Tomelilla

‘Everyone thinks holistic sustainability is good’  
(interview 6 with municipal official, BN)



Public Participation & Climate Action,  
Bad Nauheim

# Understanding the Doughnut

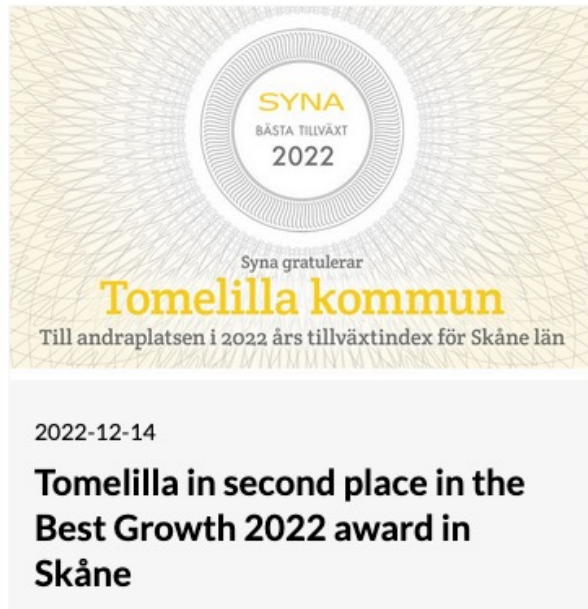
‘...it's also a bit about what people want to hear and what conclusions they draw from it for themselves, for their stance, for what they do’ (interview 6 with municipal official, BN)

‘Our vision says that we should have a sustainable growth, so that's, so we say that we should grow but we should grow in a sustainable way, so that is our main vision as a municipality’ (interview 3 with senior municipal official, TL).



## How can Doughnut Economics and pro-growth positions co-exist?

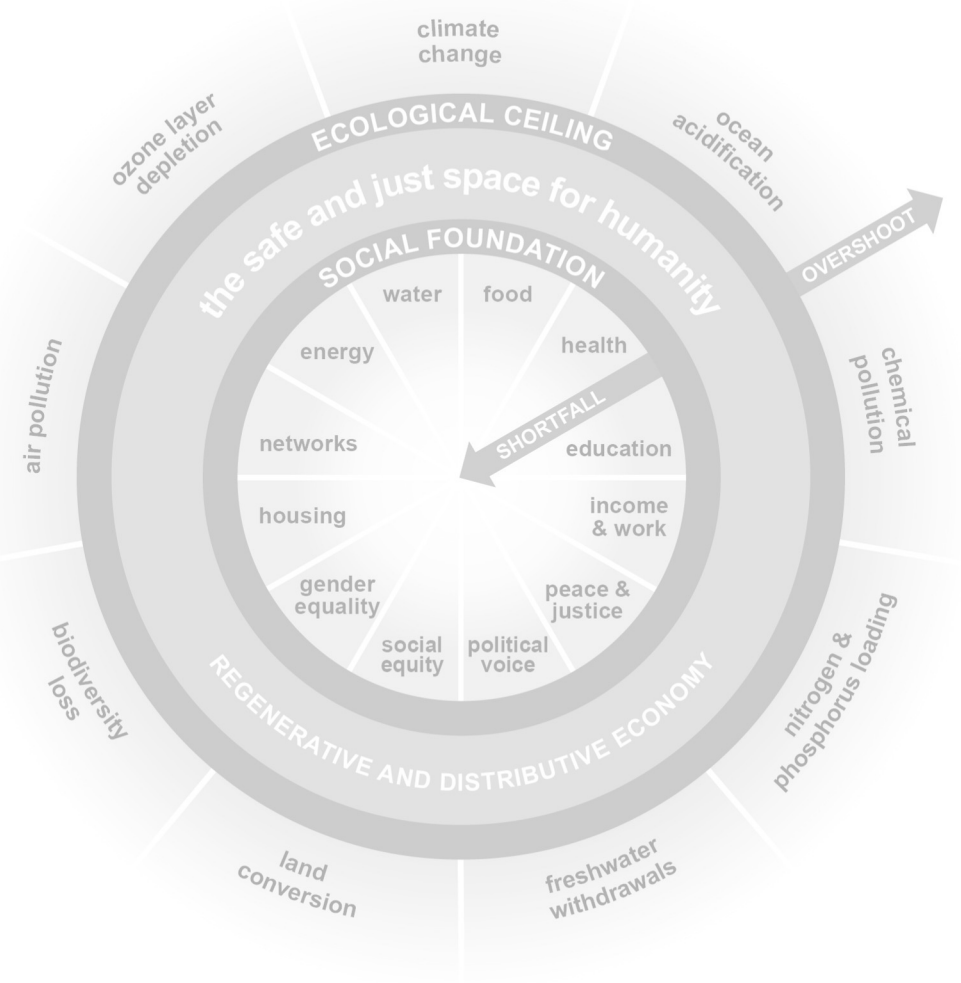
- Imaginary of separate economic dimension within the Doughnut > ”triple bottom line” (e.g. Norman and Macdonald, 2004)
- social foundation as 'the boundary for social **economy**' (interview 1 with senior municipal official, TL)
- Climate action in “interaction with other Doughnut dimensions, such as social and **economic** sustainability, at the urban level’ (Bad Nauheim, 2024a: 18).



# Communication Strategies

‘In order to discuss growth in a meaningful way, or to discuss the necessity of growth, one needs, I think, a better knowledge or understanding of the topic than what is typically present in the average society. That's why I don't find it very sensible to address the topic.’ (interview 6 with public official, BN).

‘We should have a low profile, I believe, in order to make it [the work with DE] more successful’ (interview 4 with political representative, TL).





# Towards a secularization of growth



# Tenacious Growth

## Growth Dependencies

‘if we go now into recession, I hope we don't do that, but if we do that, the social impact would be tough.’ (interview 3 with senior municipal official, TL)

‘I don't think there is any municipality in Sweden that would say that they don't want to and don't need to grow.’ (interview 5 with senior municipal official, TL)

## Ambiguity

- Association with stability, progress, welfare etc.
- Hesitance to relinquish growth orientation

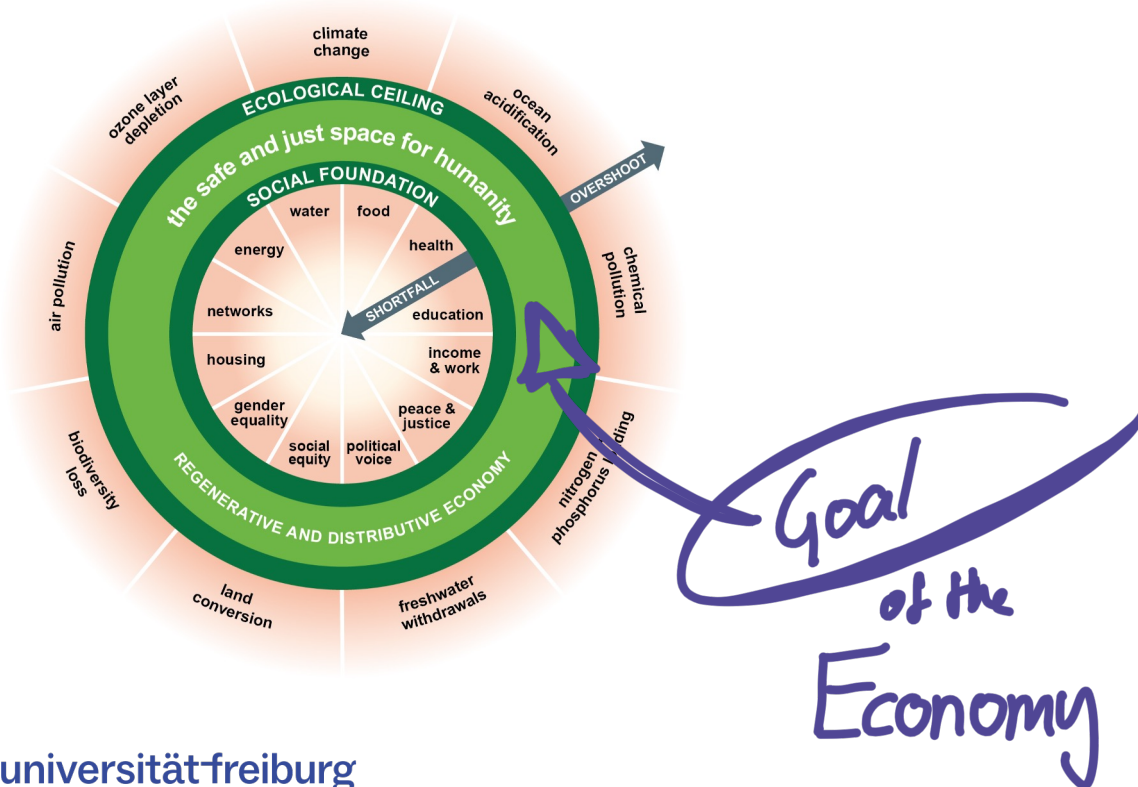
*The dependence of prevailing provisioning arrangements and institutional stability on economic growth, due to:*

- market competition
- ownership relations
- taxation infrastructure
- monetary system
- logic of capital
- technological progress
- growth-based values

Bailey (2015, 2020); Binswanger (2009); Büchs (2021); Corlet Walker, Druckman & Jackson (2021); Koch (2021); Richters & Siemoneit (2019); Schmid (2023)

# Secularization of Growth

**Secularization:** the process through which societal institutions, behaviors, and values become less influenced or governed by religious beliefs and authorities



**(1) Disambiguation:** clarifying what is meant by growth and what is hoped to be achieved through it

**(2) Scrutinization:** critically examining how economic growth informs policy-making

**(3) Acknowledgment:** identifying specific aspects where growth orientations contradict social and environmental goals

**(4) Partitioning:** singling out areas where a growth orientation is likely to be counterproductive and devising sector-specific alternatives

**(5) Generalization:** exploring growth dependencies and potential alternatives to growth-oriented strategies on broader scale

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## Publications:

**Schmid, B. (2023).** Post-growth municipalism: Exploring the scalar constitution, strategic relevance, and legal viability of the municipal scale for tackling growth dependencies. *Local Environment*.

Schmid, B. (forthcoming). The spectre of growth in urban transformations: insights from two Doughnut-oriented municipalities on the negotiation of local development pathways *Urban Studies*.