

Mentalities in Flux - Social Imaginaries in Modern Circular Bio-based Societies

A Research Outline and Project Introduction

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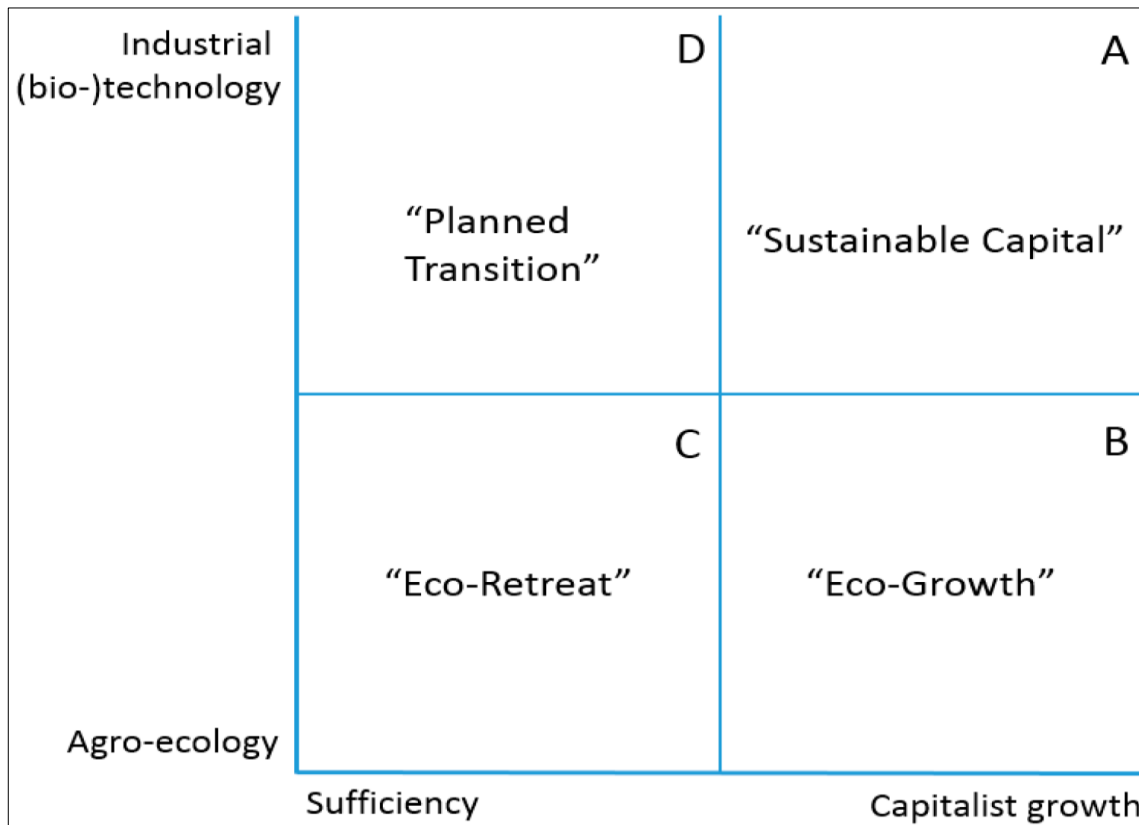
Research Project - Basic Facts

- Junior research group, funded by BMBF in the funding scheme 'Bioeconomy as societal change'
- University of Jena, Institute of Sociology
- March 2019 – February 2024
- 7 researcher positions

Bioeconomy - Definitions and Concepts

- Bioeconomy = a post-fossil economy based on renewable biological materials/energy sources
- European Commission:
The bioeconomy “encompasses the production of renewable biological resources and the conversion of these resources and waste streams into value added products, such as food, feed, bio-based products and bioenergy. [...] The bioeconomy includes the sectors of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, food and pulp and paper production, as well as parts of chemical, biotechnological and energy industries.”
(‘Innovating for sustainable growth: a bioeconomy for Europe’ 2012)

Bioeconomy - Heterogeneous Field of Debates



Hausknost et al. (2017):
*A Transition to Which
 Bioeconomy? An Exploration of
 Diverging Techno-Political
 Choices.*
 Sustainability 9, 669

Theoretical Framework

- Based sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and relational social structure analysis
- Three analytical level:
 - Employment patterns - socioeconomic structure
 - Mentalities - deeply held orientations embodied through shared social experiences
 - Expressed opinions and beliefs - fast-changing, but superficial 'views'

Research Questions I

- What *different* imaginaries of a bioeconomy exist in the minds of the broader population?
- Who supports growth-based models of bioeconomy, who supports sufficiency-based ones, and who rejects all of them?
- What *mentalities* - imaginations acquired or shared by everyday experience, internalized and collectively shared ideas or attitudes - does a transformation toward such an economy require?

Research Questions II

- How will mentalities themselves (have to) transform in its course?
- Under what conditions do these mentalities remain *modern and democratic*?
- How are the demands on *labor requirements* changing - and thus also the educational and occupational structure of the population?

Multi-method Approach

- **Qualitative case studies** of bioeconomic transformations in Germany, Finland, Estonia and Spain
- **Secondary analyses** of survey data on changes in attitudes toward social-ecological change
- **Statistical analyses** of effects on the socio-economic composition of the workforce
- Own **survey** on people's relation to the bioeconomy in Germany (2021)
- **Historical analyses** of mental transformations at the onset of fossil capitalism

Possible Results of the Research Project

- Diverse picture of the mental preconditions of future bioeconomic/post-fossil transformations.
- Shed light on the interests of potential supporters and opponents of the transformation.
- Prognoses regarding possible social conflicts and (unintended) side effects of the transformation process.
 - Struggles for hegemony between supporters of different models of bioeconomy: Growth- or sufficiency-oriented? What role for technology?
- An enriched idea of what a „modern circular bio-based society“ is or could be.

Thank you for your attention!

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