



Call for papers for an *ephemera* conference and special issue on:

Organizing for the post-growth economy

Conference organizers: Ole Bjerg, Christian Garmann Johnsen, Bent Meier Sørensen and Lena Olaison at Copenhagen Business School, Denmark, 8-9 of May 2014

Perpetual economic growth is an underlying assumption of the contemporary capitalist organization of society. The idea of growth is embedded not only in the corpus of economic thought but also in the institutions of the economy (Binswanger, 2013; Gorz, 2012). More recently, entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity have been seen as possible ways to solve the current economic and environmental crisis as well as to generate growth (Schaper, 2002). This is the case because entrepreneurship and innovation are portrayed as seeds of new initiatives and ideas that will boost economic development while simultaneously reduce its impact on the climate. Such a belief has produced new markets, such as carbon markets, and an emerging 'climate capitalism' (Böhm, Murtola and Spoelstra, 2012). At the heart of this logic is a faith in the individual economic actor, not least the entrepreneur, as a gifted individual with unique abilities (Shane, 2003). And it is evident that the current post-crisis discourse keeps its confidence in the emergent socially responsible economic actor who will contribute to the construction of a moral economy' (Arvidsson, 2013).

This *ephemera* conference seeks to question the feasibility, moral legitimacy and sustainability of perpetual economic growth. Although contested, current political and popular beliefs tend to hold that the twin crises of economy and ecology are merely temporary, exceptional phenomena and that the global economy will soon bounce back to business as usual. However, others have suggested that we are in the midst of a paradigm shift in the nature of capitalism (Heinberg, 2011). Instead of using our energies to prevent this shift from happening it may be more fruitful to appreciate the opportunities for reflection that are offered by the crisis. On the one hand, we should learn

from history and see that the history of capitalism is indeed the history of revolutions. This suggests that we indeed may be at the brink of a new phase in society where we experience a change in the underlying structures. On the other hand, we can explore new forms of economic organization that do not rest upon the condition of growth (Schumacher, 1973; Latouche, 2009; Eisenstein, 2011). Even though the prerequisite of growth has been subjected to criticism within economic theory (Herrera, 2011), we need to further explore its implications. Taken together, the challenge is, in other words, to imagine what a sustainable post-growth economy might look like (Gorz, 1999; Seidl, 2010; Paech, 2012).

If growth is intrinsic to the current capitalist organization of society, then we need to ask to what extent it is possible to image a system that does not presuppose perpetual growth. Is economy without growth a contradiction in terms? We can approach the seeming paradox of the post-growth economy by rethinking fundamental economic concepts in today's capitalist society. Since the value of growth seems to be deeply embedded in many of the most basic economic concepts used today, we therefore need to reconsider from the perspective of a post-growth economy: What is a market without growth? What is the role of entrepreneurship? And consumption? What would constitute organization and work? What is money? And most importantly of all, what is economic growth? These questions may be approached theoretically by analysing their implicit assumptions connected with the paradigm of growth-oriented capitalism (e.g. Daly, 1996), or they may be explored empirically by studying actual practices of alternative economic organization (e.g. North, 2010), such as, for example, slow food movements and direct trade.

The aim of a conference on a post-growth economy is not solely or even primarily to produce new knowledge but instead to think about what to do with the knowledge that we already have. Certainly, the problem of growth is nothing new. Since at least the end of the 1960s, it has been known that the expansion of the capitalist economy would eventually run up against the natural boundaries of earth (Carson, 2000; Measows et al., 1972; Georgescu-Roegen, 1971). The most pressing problem today with regards to sustainability is not that we do not know what to do; rather, the problem is that even though we know very well what to do, we are still not doing it. In other words, we know very well that current level of pollution caused by fossil fuels is not sustainable from a long-term point of view. Yet, by maintaining the current level of production and consumption, we behave as if it is. There is therefore an aspect of cynicism, in Sloterdijk's sense of the term, which needs to be addressed in relation to sustainability and contemporary capitalism.

The ambition of this conference is thus to bring together researchers, practitioners and activists who share an interest in the issue of economic growth and sustainability. We particularly welcome submissions that explore the paradoxes of a post-growth economy and the interrelated themes of sustainability and entrepreneurship, alongside an exploration of the

cultural and political context out of which they have emerged. Possible topics include but are not limited to the following:

- What is post-growth economy?
- What would count as work in a post-growth economy?
- What should management be like in a post-growth economy?
- What is the role of entrepreneurship in a post-growth economy?
- What constitute organization in a post-growth economy?
- What is the role of finance and debt in a post-growth economy?
- What would consumption be like in a post-growth economy?

Deadlines, conference fee and further information

The conference takes place at Copenhagen Business School, Denmark, 8-9 of May 2014. The conference is organized by the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy. The conference is associated with the Sustainability platform and the Entrepreneurship platform at CBS.

The deadline for submitting abstracts is extended to 15 February 2014. The abstracts, of no more than 500 words, should be submitted in the format of a Word document to the mail address: postgrowth2014 AT gmail.com. *ephemera* encourages contributions in a variety of formats including articles, notes, interviews, book reviews, photo essays and other experimental modes of representation. The conference fee has not been set yet, as it is dependent on the number of participants, but will be kept to a minimum, approximately €100. PhD candidates pay a reduced fee, most likely €50. Further information about the conference can be found on the conference website: <http://www.ephemerajournal.org>. If you have any queries, you can also contact one of the conference organizers: Ole Bjerg (ob.mpp AT cbs.dk), Christian Garmann Johnsen (cgj.mpp AT cbs.dk), Bent Meier Sørensen (bem.mpp AT cbs.dk), Lena Olaison (lo.mpp AT cbs.dk). Conference participants are encouraged to submit their contributions to the Special Issue on Post-growth economy in *ephemera* that will be published 2015.

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