

THE CAGE AND THE LABYRINTH: ESCAPING THE ADDICTION TO GROWTH¹

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Abstract

The impasse we encounter as we try to define the contours of a post-growth economy is the product of an interaction between behavioral changes at the level of the individual, wired to develop an "acquisitive mentality", and the responses to such changes at societal level, which reinforce that mentality and encourage acquisitiveness as a survival strategy for the individual in an environment that puts competition above cooperation. Moreover, although a small but growing part of opinion acknowledges the limits to growth, the means through which to steer society in a different direction remain vague and contested. These two constraints impede our ability to move away from the inherited system. The collective action problem posed by the need to move beyond growth, however, can also be seen as a promise. For we can only escape the cage by recognizing that the transition calls for a plurality of solutions, because there are a number of ways to unlock the system. We are in a cage, perhaps; but we are not in a labyrinth that would only allow for one escape route: it is building on the double predicament that we can imagine governance tools through which the post-growth can emerge.

¹ This paper appears in an amended form as chapter 7 of Cassiers, I., Méda, D., and Maréchal, K. (Eds). *Post-Growth Economics and Society. Exploring the Paths of a Social and Ecological Transition* (London: Routledge, 2017).