

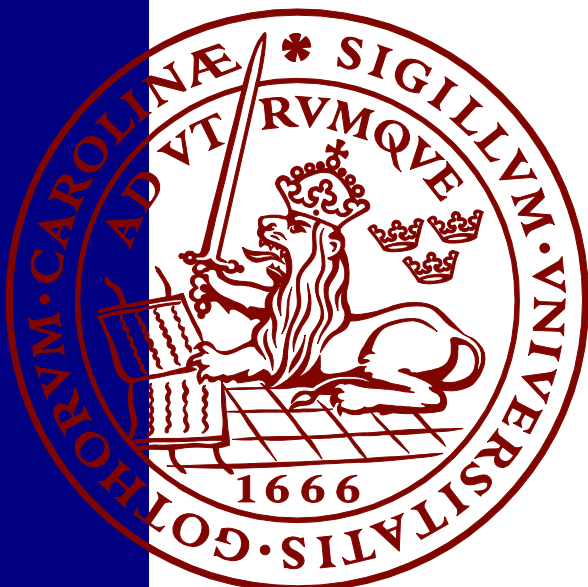
Is the time for leisure now?

The growth paradigm in the Finnish welfare debate

Vera Lindström

Master Thesis Series in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science,
No 2020:027

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Lund University
International Master's Programme in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science
(30hp/credits)



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Sustainability Studies



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Submitted May 12, 2020

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Abstract

The government of Finland has the ambition of making Finland the first fossil-free welfare state in the world and reaching carbon neutrality in 2035. Simultaneously, worktime reduction and basic income have been matters of vivid political debate. Both worktime reduction and basic income are go-to solutions for post-growth scholars as ways to arrange welfare in a non-growing economy. These initiatives could thereby support the climate goals of the government– but are concerns with limits to growth distinguishable in the debates? In this thesis, I have mapped out the political debate in Finland surrounding the welfare reforms of worktime reduction and basic income to explore how growth-sustainability tensions are addressed and if welfare alternatives are limited due to the growth paradigm.

To see whether post-growth ideas are present in Finnish party politics, I interviewed eleven candidates from seven parties in the Finnish parliament to see on which grounds these initiatives are proposed and opposed. I found that the main driver of the debate is the transformation of work in the 21st Century, rather than the ecological crises we are facing. Most interviewees did not link Finland’s environmental goals to the two welfare initiatives discussed. Nevertheless, a minority considered basic income and worktime reduction to be sustainability strategies. There is recognition of limits to growth among politicians, and possibly more broadly in the parties they stood election for.

It appears that the growth paradigm is being politically contested. Although most respondents considered economic growth as a solution to social and ecological problems, growth was given instrumental value rather than being blindly pursued. The welfare state of Finland is embedded in a system depending on growth, whereby there is concern that current levels of welfare cannot be realised in a non-growing economy. Thereby the barriers to transition are more structural than narrative, although the latter was also distinguishable in the data.

I conclude that concerns with limits to growth are present in Finnish party politics. The political discussions on worktime reduction and basic income would benefit from including the potential co-benefits between social and environmental sustainability that post-growth scholars argue these initiatives have. This connection is however not without tension. As alternative methods of financing the welfare state have not been convincingly mapped out, reliance on growth to solve ecological and social problems is likely to continue.

Keywords: growth paradigm, post-growth, economic growth, steady-state economy, basic income, worktime reduction

Word count: 11 998

Acknowledgements

Looking back, this thesis journey has been more social than it felt like in the last couple of weeks. There is much gratitude to go around. First and foremost, I wish to thank all my interviewees for taking the time and sharing their thoughts with me. I appreciate every word shared. I want to thank my Mockduck group – Keeli, Kirstine, Miriam and Dana for all the support and for those thesis camps that never happened but hopefully will. Mine Islar encouraged me on the first steps of this process, for which I am grateful. I want to thank my brother Petter for helping me sound smart, and my brother Jakob for technical support in these strange times of the pandemic. My supervisor, Darin, and my peer, Megan, my thesis team, for all the feedback and for ensuring that the process was never boring! And finally, many thanks to Ben for tolerating endless rants during this thesis process, for all the comfort and reassurance, and for keeping me going with pizza during the final stretch.

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1 Introduction

In August 2019, the now prime minister of Finland, Sanna Marin, expressed a vision that national worktime reduction could be a goal for the near future: *Is 8 hours the final truth? In my opinion, people deserve more time with their loved ones, with their hobbies and with culture. This could be the next step for us in working life* (Äijö, 2019). Despite the cautious tone, Marin's vision sparked substantial backlash and heated debate. The media coverage of the debate focused on the social and economic aspects of worktime reduction. The silence on environmental aspects of the policy was notable, as worktime reduction is a go-to policy in ecological economics.

Marin's vision is not completely novel in Finnish politics, as worktime reduction has been on the party agenda for the Left Alliance for some years (Äijö, 2019). Neither is worktime reduction the first flirtation with policy options popular in the post-growth community. Finland ran the first basic income trial in Europe 2017-2018, and basic income remained a common discussion point during the 2019 parliamentary elections.

However, both social policies have been discussed separately from ecological policy objectives despite the programme of prime minister Sanna Marin's government aiming for Finland to be the first fossil-free welfare state in the world. The goal is for Finland to be carbon neutral by 2035 and net carbon-negative soon after (Finnish Government, 2019). The goals of welfare and carbon-negativity are not without tension. The Finnish welfare state is relying on economic growth which is now pushing against biophysical boundaries. Economic recession, on the other hand, is socially unsustainable. A sustainable welfare state needs to solve this puzzle, whereby the lack of connections made between the economic, social and ecological sustainability in the media coverage is concerning. In early 2020, the government initiated a committee for social security reform (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, n.d.), but whether the reforms will align with environmental goals remains to be seen.

In this thesis, I set out to explore whether the dominance of the growth paradigm is causing the silences on sustainability issues in these social policy debates. Further, I examine whether the initiatives of worktime reduction and basic income aim to challenge the growth paradigm and if there is room for post-growth thinking in Finnish party politics. The study is guided by the following research question and sub-questions:

Research question: *How is the growth paradigm reflected in social policy discussions in Finland?*

Sub-question 1: *What are the arguments for and against basic income and worktime reduction in Finnish party politics?*

Sub-question 2: *How are growth-sustainability tensions addressed by Finnish politicians?*

My aim is to understand the points of contestation in the debate, but also to find synergies and possible pathways forward. I also aim to contribute to the discussion on the role of parliamentary politics in facilitating sustainability transitions. The question on transition pathways is a central one in the post-growth community, where some argue that current parliamentary systems are so intertwined with the growth paradigm that it cannot be escaped from within (Asara, Profumi & Kallis, 2013). I aim to find out whether post-growth ideas are embedded as drivers of these initiatives, and whether these ideas can be expressed in party politics. If they can, that implies that the post-growth alternatives are available to Finnish voters and thereby the parliamentary system could hypothetically facilitate post-growth transitions. For sustainability science, improved understanding of sustainability transitions in a growth-based society is of value. Further, to bridge the communicative gap between science and decision-makers, it is important to know how sustainability is understood outside of academia.

I will start by describing the growth paradigm and the limits to growth. The problematisations of growth are followed by an introduction to Daly's steady-state economy as an alternative model to growth-orientation, and discussions on how worktime reduction and basic income fit into the steady-state framework. Following these theoretical discussions, I will describe the empirical study conducted. The bulk of this thesis focuses on displaying results, answering the above research questions, and the theoretical and societal significance of the findings.

2 The growth paradigm and lock-in

Aki Kangasharju, the Managing Director of the Research Institute of the Finnish Economy (ETLA) and a prominent economic expert in Finland, manages to capture the essence of what a no-growth economy is perceived to entail: *Economic growth has no alternative – without growth, our current way of life will end* (Kangasharju, 2018, p. 2). Economic growth is a central objective of both neoclassical and neoliberal economics, although there is a lack of consensus on what the sources of growth are (Solow, 1992). What is supposed to grow when the economy grows is output per unit - be it labour, time or capital - which increases the material wellbeing in society.

The ecological economist Herman Daly (1972), described the unsound reliance on growth as the 'orthodox growth paradigm', i.e. an agreed upon set of assumptions of the world (Pesch, 2018). I find this framing important, as it challenges the 'naturalness' of economic expansion. Rather than being 'an invisible hand of the market', the economy is inherently political and reflects power structures in society (Gough, 2017). This section briefly introduces the multiple reinforcing beliefs constituting the growth paradigm.

First is the institutionalisation of GDP as an indicator. Developed during the 1930's depression, GDP was supposed to be a simple tool to fill the gap of economic data the US government had, but quickly became a singular number for progress that used in comparative politics (Schmelzer, 2015). Even the creator of GDP, Simon Kuznets, had warned against using GDP to reflect welfare goals stating that *"goals for more growth should specify more growth of what and for what."* (O'Neill, 2014, p. 104). GDP reflects the total value of goods and services produced in a country, i.e. activity in the official economy (O'Neill, 2014). It does not differentiate on the quality of that activity. For instance, growth in GDP can just as much stem from building a new prison or cleaning up an oil spill as employing more nurses (Jackson, 2009). Further, the 'social' economy (Gough, 2017) of unpaid household work and socialising children is not incorporated in GDP despite being central for society to function (D'Alisa, Deriu & Demaria, 2014; Jackson, 2009).

The second aspect is that growth is a panacea solution to social problems such as poverty and unemployment, as well as more recently ecological problems. Growth avoids the politically contested issue of just distribution of wealth, as the promise is that everyone can be better off in a growing economy (Daly, 1972; Schmelzer, 2015). This applies both nationally and internationally, as

development economics have long had as their purpose setting 'underdeveloped' nations on a path of growth (Potter, 2008). As GDP is a symbol for the state of the economy, and growth is a panacea solution for societal problems, growth in GDP becomes a goal in its own right rather than a means to an end (Schmelzer, 2015).

Lastly, and perhaps most interestingly from a sustainability perspective, is the perception of growth as endless. Ecological economists argue that the economy is treated as if it was abstracted from its material basis and could therefore expand solely based on labour and capital inputs disregarding the material throughput (Daly, 2011). The social and ecological limits to growth are fleshed out in the next section.

The growth paradigm legitimises some ideas and knowledge over others, but today the paradigm has become institutionalised in fundamental societal functions. The growth-oriented society operates under its own logic, and the institutions created for this society are all operating under the logic of growth. This creates a societal lock-in (Pesch, 2018). Economic growth is fundamental to economic stability in an economic system based on the liquidity of capital and thereby credit and debt (Jackson, 2009). Upholding economic stability through growth, employment and consumption is vital for fiscal revenue and thereby funding state functions. Conversely, recessions disrupt the stability and create misery. Unemployment and stagnant consumption reduce tax revenue, therefore the state needs to increase public debt in order to finance its functions (Jackson, 2009).

As governments are responsible for upholding growth for economic stability, there is a tendency to turn to economic knowledge and economic experts even in questions regarding issues that are not strictly in the economic realm, what Schmelzer (2015) calls 'economisation of the social'. Thereby the lock-in reinforces the paradigm.

3 Limits to growth

If growth is associated with wellbeing and comfortable, modern lives, challenging growth is perceived as a path back to the dark ages. It is undeniable that there is a material component to human wellbeing. However, Daly (2014) argues that economic growth has become uneconomic and does not increase societal wealth to the same extent as it increases 'illth' – depletion of sources and pollution of sinks. This deterioration of the material base of wellbeing is making us poorer rather than richer. This section provides a brief overview of common arguments to why growth ought to be questioned.

3.1 Social limits

Growth has quite successfully combated absolute poverty and precarious subsistence in parts of the world. However, these societies still aim to accelerate growth and increase incomes. The purpose of growth as a goal has been questioned, since after a threshold happiness no longer increases with affluence, a process called Easterlin's paradox (D'Alisa, Deriu & Demaria, 2014). In the language of economists, marginal utility diminishes rapidly, at which point growth becomes 'uneconomic growth' (Daly, 2014; Farley, 2015). The individual-level utility-limits to increased incomes quite fundamentally challenge the social purpose of growth and are still disputed (Kangasharju, 2018). Of course, we know that in affluent societies disposable incomes are now used on positional goods, i.e. goods that are socially scarce. Arguably, time and leisure have increasingly become such positional goods (Hirsch, 1978).

The other reason for continuous growth has already been discussed in relation to systemic lock-ins. In the global north, where the fundamental material needs of most people have been met, growth is still relied upon to solve unemployment. Economic recession and mass unemployment have socially unsustainable outcomes. However, growth has not saved us from economic shocks. The economic system we rely on has historically been unstable, going through cycles of boom and bust. Our welfare relies on the stability of an economic system which has repeatedly proven itself to be unstable (Jackson, 2009).

3.2 Ecological limits

The more straightforward objection to endless economic growth is that of ecological limits, which were lifted back on the agenda with the 1972 Club of Rome report *Limits to Growth*. Ecological limits to growth is no new debate that has arisen in the Anthropocene, but rather the limits have been

forgotten in modern economics (Daly, 2011). Classical economists, such as Thomas Malthus and Adam Smith considered infinite growth on a finite planet as impossible.

The economy has a material base, as the ecological system acts as a source of raw materials and as a sink for our waste and pollution. Currently, we are exceeding the extractive and absorptive capacity of our natural environment (Farley, 2015; Meadows, Meadows & Randers, 2005). The planetary boundaries framework conceptualised by Rockström et al. (2009) determines an operating space for human systems that does not threaten the planetary system we depend on. Four of these nine boundaries (climate change, biodiversity loss, biochemical flows, land-system change) have already been transgressed (Steffen et al., 2015).

This being the case, it is no longer a question of when growth in throughput should be capped, but how much it must shrink for the economy to be sustainable (Farley, 2015). If we accept that the economy in terms of material throughput must be finite, then what we are facing is a severe issue of distributional justice globally, especially as the global population is still growing (Jackson, 2009). If we cannot rely on growth to solve poverty, then poverty could only be solved through a redistribution of existing wealth (Farley, 2015).

It is true that theorised ecological limits to growth have been repeatedly challenged. Global population has obviously grown vastly after Malthus composed his now infamous population principle. The predictions of the 1972 *Limits to Growth* have also been criticised for being unnecessarily pessimistic. Lomborg & Rubin (2002) counter the Club of Rome by exemplifying how we have seen rare minerals substituted by other materials and discovered new sources, so many former scarcities are no longer scarcities today. Further, economic growth is also associated with lower fertility rates and cleaner technologies.

The problem with relying on economic growth, technologies and substitutability of natural capital is that the time for solving problems is always in a brighter, more advanced future (Castle, 1997). This is what critics call techno-optimism.

As with poverty, proponents of growth have found solutions to the environmental problem in more growth. Arguably, we are in a process of decoupling, where growth in value no longer require growth in material throughput (Kangasharju, 2018). We should, however, distinguish between relative and absolute decoupling. Relative decoupling refers to productivity gains, i.e. that resource intensity grows slower than GDP, whereas absolute decoupling implies stable resource intensity despite growing GDP. Empirically we see relative decoupling taking place in most countries, and some countries even claim that they have decoupled in absolute terms (Lorek, 2014). However, when we

look at consumption rather than production in countries that have claimed to have decoupled in absolute terms, we see that material throughput is increasing rather than decreasing (Lorek, 2014). The production of the goods consumed has just been relocated to other countries. The expansionary tendency of capitalism displaces environmental problems rather than solves them (Peet, Robbins & Watts, 2011).

Further, the dynamics of economic growth diminishes the effects of relative decoupling due to rebound consumption. William Stanley Jevons noticed during the industrial revolution that while efficiency per unit of coal was going up, demand for coal and labour was still increasing (Alcott, 2014). The direct effect is that as the efficiency of (for instance) coal increases the price per unit of coal decreases. Thereby the producer can purchase more which may result in higher consumption of coal rather than lower. This process is dubbed the Jevon's paradox. Rebound consumption may also happen indirectly, where the money saved through efficiency gains is consumed elsewhere. For example, renewable energy systems create electricity that is consumed on top of existing fossil energy, rather than replacing it (York, 2012).

In essence, under a growth imperative efficiency gains from technology will not decrease material throughput in the economy but may have opposite effects. This is not to say that efficiency gains are undesirable, as they have allowed relative decoupling, but leaning heavily on technology will likely not solve the sustainability crises we are experiencing. When expected population growth is accounted for, the sheer amount of decoupling that would be necessary to achieve a sustainable level is stellar. The carbon intensity of each dollar should be 130 times lower by 2050 than it is today (Lorek, 2014).

4 Steady-state economics

Contrary to the gloomy predictions of Malthus and Smith later thinkers, such as John Stuart Mill and John Maynard Keynes, have regarded limits to growth as a positive transition to a society that can focus on qualitative development rather than increased material wealth (Farley, 2015). Following this line of thinking, Daly developed steady-state economics as an alternative to the growth-oriented societal model. The steady-state economy recognises that the economy is a subsystem of the ecological system. Therefore, the stocks of people and artefacts should be stable, and the material throughput set at a sufficient level that respects ecological boundaries (Daly, 1974). The steady-state economy needs to abide by five rules (Farley, 2015). First, the use of material flows cannot exceed the rate of replenishment. Second, the creation of waste cannot exceed the absorptive capacity of the planet. Third, the use of finite stocks, such as fossil fuels, cannot exceed the rate by which we create alternatives, such as renewable energy systems. Fourth, neither the extraction nor waste can threaten fundamental ecosystem functions. Finally, population would have to be capped at a level considered desirable for everyone to have a good standard of living. Caps, quotas, and redistribution are required to uphold such a system.

The final rule of the steady-state economy is perhaps the most difficult one, as management of population quotas have historically had ethically questionable outcomes. Daly and other post-growth scholars recognise this issue as contentious, and the lack of policy recommendations on this topic is an evident weakness (Kerschner, 2010). Daly's (2014) only clear policy suggestion is to make contraceptives readily available for those who want them. However, considering the unequal wealth and consumption globally, population growth is hardly the culprit behind the ecological crisis we are facing. Focusing on population growth as the reason for scarcity deters attention from issues of distributive justice (Robbins, 2019). The expected growth in population is more an argument *for* capping growth in throughput in countries that have transgressed the social limits to growth, rather than an argument *against*.

Within the abovementioned limits, many versions of steady-state economies may develop (Buch-Hansen, 2014). The steady-state economy is not envisioned to be restrictive or stagnant. Development would be qualitative rather than quantitative (Daly, 1972). A steady-state economy does not mean the end of, for example, medical innovations, nor going backwards as is the common perception. Although the empirical evidence for absolute decoupling does not convince him, Daly has

no objections to productivity gains. Nor is he opposed to the idea of growth continuing indefinitely in a non-material economy. This is also to say that transitioning to a steady-state economy should not have a preoccupation with reduction of GDP, but rather replace the indicator with ones that reflect societal priorities. It is not necessarily growth in terms of GDP that needs restricting, but rather the material throughput of the economy (Farley, 2015).

4.1 Work and welfare without growth

Both worktime reduction and basic income are often proposed ways of social and economic organisation in a non-growing economy (Asara, Profumi & Kallis, 2013; Jackson, 2009; Jackson & Victor, 2011; Khan & Clark, 2016). In this section, I will give a brief overview of how these policies might fit into a steady-state economy.

4.1.1 Worktime reduction

Historically, worktime has been far from static. Industrialisation in the late 18th Century resulted in massive changes in social organisation, one of which was a drastic increase in average worktime (Mont, 2016). While collective bargaining has steadily reduced annual worktime, the era of Fordism resulted in a 'class compromise', where productivity gains were translated into higher salaries (Mont, 2016). Disposable incomes were necessary in order to create national markets for the products of the assembly lines, i.e. mass production necessarily needed mass consumption (Peet, Robbins & Watts, 2011).

Increases in labour productivity through automation could result in 'jobless growth', since less labour is needed for the same output. So far, growth has been the solution to this problem, i.e. the creation of new jobs (Daly, 1991). In a no-growth economy, the amount of available work may decrease, and the remaining tasks should be shared (Schor, 2014). Thereby, worktime reduction is a distributive tool and has been used as such during economic recessions (Schor, 2014).

Writing nearly a century ago, Keynes (2010) anticipated that by 2030, the average workweek would be around 15 hours. It seems unlikely that Keynes estimates would realise themselves in the next ten years, since no significant worktime reductions have been initiated since the 1980s (Mont, 2016; Nässen & Larsson, 2015). Increases in productivity have not been translated to less work as Keynes predicted, but more consumption (Alcott, 2014).

Although the focus in ecological economics is on the macrolevel where worktime reduction is an eco-social policy for distributing work in a non-growing economy, research has also gone into how

worktime reduction has individual-level social and environmental benefits. Empirical studies show that shortening worktime has health and wellbeing benefits (Nässen & Larsson, 2015). The increased leisure time increases freedom to devote time to activities that one finds meaningful. Freedom - having autonomy over one's life and time - correlates better with life-satisfaction than indicators of health, employment or income (Sekulova, 2014). On a societal level, reduction of worktime allows for more time to be devoted to non-monetary activities and increased participation in social and political life (Schor, 2014).

Different models of worktime reduction would likely translate to different sustainability outcomes. The argument is that if societal working hours are reduced, then the society has a lower ecological footprint as full production potential is not met. These patterns are found empirically in wealthy OECD countries (Schor, 2014). On a microlevel, consumptive behaviour may change. As low-impact activities are often more time consuming, the increased leisure time itself allows for more sustainable lives (Schor, 2014). However, these effects depend on how the increased leisure time is allocated (Nässen & Larsson, 2015). If wages are cut proportionally to worktime, it would affect consumptive capacity and therefore have demand-side impacts on throughput.

4.1.2 Basic income

For growth-critics, basic income is another often suggested social policy in a post-growth society (Alexander, 2014; Jackson, 2009). Although implementations vary, the core idea of basic income is that it is universal, guaranteed and unconditional (Alexander, 2014), providing a minimum standard of living for all inhabiting a territory. Basic income would thereby decouple subsistence from work and thereby from the engine of growth. It would increase the bargaining power of labour, allowing refusal of work that is alienating, demeaning or meaningless – these jobs would either disappear or be well compensated for (Paulsen, 2017). Further, basic income is a social security system that recognises and rewards societal activities outside the formal economy, such as unpaid feminised tasks (Gough, 2017). Lastly, an ecological tax reform where revenue is mainly collected from consumption rather than income (Daly, 2005) could be better justified if the revenue was redistributed in the form of basic income (Andersson, 2010). Otherwise, the impacts of consumption taxes are often criticised as exacerbating existing wealth inequalities (Ottelin, Heinonen & Junnila, 2018)

Gough (2017), questions basic income as a transition pathway to post-growth welfare states. He argues that there is an inherent dilemma with inserting a system that requires massive fiscal funding in a state that simultaneously needs to shrink the economy. Basic income is very growth-friendly

(Paulsen, 2017), and even if it offers distribution, it does not by default combat inequality (Gough, 2017).

It is worth noting that although both basic income and worktime reduction are commonly suggested eco-social policies, and could complement each other, there is a fundamental difference between them. In worktime reduction, the income of an individual is still dependent on work, whereas basic income is by definition unconditional. Thereby the normative underpinnings of these two welfare policies are very different.

5 Work and welfare in Finland

I chose Finland as the site for this case study mainly for the geographical proximity as well as my pre-existing familiarity with the political system, parties, and debates. This section gives some contextual background to the contemporary work and welfare system in which the debates are playing out, as this affects the generalisability of my results.

Finland can be characterised as a country with comparatively low inequality and poverty rates, attributed to the extensive provision of education and health care through public spending, as well as a good coverage of social insurance that citizens are entitled to (International Monetary Fund, 2020). These services are funded by relatively high tax rates, which in turn require economic stability (Ottelin, Heinonen & Junnila, 2018). Currently, funding requires an increase of public debt, and economic growth rates are sluggish (OECD, 2019). To combat debt-dependency and boost economic growth, the previous government pushed through a small extension of worktime in 2016 (Savolainen, 2016). Arguably this brought worktime back on the political agenda.

The high levels of guaranteed social insurance and the high tax rates on labour arguably create welfare traps, namely situations where the fear of losing benefits disincentivise the unemployed to accept work. The system may therefore constrict employment rates (International Monetary Fund, 2020). A further problem with the social insurance systems is their fragmentation, whereby the recipient must navigate a patchwork of different benefits and conditions of such, again disincentivising labour market participation (Halmetoja, De Wispelaere & Perkiö, 2019). These problems spurred the basic income trial of 2017-2019. On closer scrutiny, the trial had many limitations. It was time-bound and handed out not to a randomised group of people, but to a handful of welfare recipients that had suffered from long term unemployment. Therefore, it was neither universal nor unconditional and guaranteed for only two years.

Finland is a country of coordinated capitalism, in which markets are governed by compromises between employers' organisations, labour unions, and the state (Buch-Hansen, 2014). The government itself has a smaller role in initiating change in labour markets, as wages and worktime are regulated by broad collective agreements negotiated between these interest organisations. In terms of this study, this distinction is significant. The political contestation among political parties

over the shortened workweek and basic income is only a part of the story. Albeit informal, multiple parties in Finland have connections to labour unions or employers' organisations (Raunio & Laine, 2017) and can thereby be considered proxies to access the more holistic societal ideas and debates.

6 Methods

6.1 Sampling and data collection

To explore the dominance of the growth paradigm in party politics and map out the debate surrounding these reforms I interviewed candidates that partook in the 2019 parliamentary election. The sampling for this study was purposive, as I approached candidates that have already participated in the public debate around these initiatives or had interesting answers to questions relating to basic income and worktime reduction during the election.

Requests for interviews were sent for candidates of all nine parties that got seats in parliament in the 2019 election. A total of 13 semi-structured interviews with candidates representing all nine parties were to be conducted during two rounds of data collection during the winter and spring of 2020. Unfortunately, the second round of data collection took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in a few cancellations. The final sample of this study represents seven parliamentary parties and 11 interviewees, eight of which were current members of parliament. Despite the unfortunate cancellations, a level of saturation was reached.

An interview manual (appendix I) was created ex-ante to guide the interview. However, in qualitative interviews the aspects the interviewees themselves find relevant is of interest (Bryman, 2012). The interview manual was constructed to allow flexibility to follow the lines of thought the interviewees themselves were articulating, therefore not all interviewees were asked the same set of questions. The interview manual was re-evaluated and modified continuously during this process.

The choice of method for this study was not obvious. There had been extensive media coverage on the shortened workweek debate in the summer of 2019, and the initiatives were also discussed on social media forums. Basic income received a lot of attention during the 2019 election campaigns. Sampling existing statements and media content would have had the benefit of removing myself as the researcher from the creation of data.

Interviewing however had two benefits. First, it gave me answers from each respondent to all the subject areas for interest, while also allowing the interviewee a chance to make connections between subject areas during the interview itself. Second, the chance of anonymity allowed for the interviewees to speak freely, which is beneficial when exploring whether post-growth ideas are a taboo within their respective parties or in parliament. In comparison, public statements made by the

candidates are an utterly different form of communication with a promotive purpose, which are likely to affect the content.

6.2 Data Analysis

The eleven interviews were transcribed and analysed through a thematic analysis, exploring patterns in opposition to and support for the two social policy initiatives discussed in the interviews. The themes that arose from the data were then categorised under ecological, social and economic reasons for opposition and support (Table 1), which answers the first sub-question. As the interview manual shows, both the opposition and support as well as the categories of economy, social and ecological reasons were anticipated a priori of the coding process, and formed a template for organisation of the themes arising from the data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Table 1: The debate

What were the important discussion points regarding worktime reduction?		
<i>Is the support due to sustainability reasons?</i>		
<i>Is the opposition mainly due to potential harm to growth?</i>		
Support	Economy	<i>Productivity gains Wages</i>
	Social	<i>Work-sharing Health impacts</i>
	Ecology	<i>Changes in consumption Value shift Changes in throughput</i>
Opposition	Economy	<i>Stagnation of growth Productivity losses Reduced competitiveness on global markets.</i>
	Social	<i>Fiscal base and funding welfare functions Population ageing</i>
	Ecology	<i>Reduced fiscal base for investment</i>
What were the important discussion points regarding basic income?		
<i>Is the support due to sustainability reasons?</i>		
<i>Is the opposition mainly due to potential harm to growth?</i>		
Support	Economy	<i>Increased negotiating power of labour</i>
	Social	<i>Fragmentation of current benefits Human nature Stability of livelihoods Freedom</i>
	Ecology	<i>Distribution of commons Liberation from work and production</i>
Opposition	Economy	<i>Welfare traps Expenses Human nature</i>
	Social	<i>Work as social</i>
	Ecology	<i>Reduced fiscal base for investment</i>

The analysis of this debate sheds light on how growth-sustainability tensions were addressed, which is the second sub-question. The themes were theoretically grounded (Table 2). This is to see whether the opposition and support for the policies of worktime reduction and basic income reflect pro-growth or post-growth narratives, i.e. whether the interviewees found there to be tensions between environmental and welfare goals and economic growth.

Table 2: The narratives

Are the respondent’s ideas pro-growth or post-growth?	
Pro-growth	<i>Growth as solution to ecological problems</i> <i>Growth as solution to poverty/unemployment</i>
Post-growth	<i>Growth no longer linked to welfare</i> <i>Growth as ecologically unsustainable</i>

Finally, the understandings of these two initiatives and the perceptions on growth allow exploration of the growth paradigm in the social policy discussions in Finland. For simplicity, I have divided the growth paradigm into structural and narrative aspects (Table 3), but these are, of course, intertwined.

Table 3: The growth paradigm

Narrative and structural barriers	
Narrative	<i>Reliance on econometric knowledge.</i> <i>Growth as panacea</i> <i>Growth unquestioned</i>
Structural	<i>System lock-ins such as economy driven by profit and debt, the need for growth to fund the welfare state</i> <i>Global market competition between states.</i>

Finland is a bilingual country with two official languages, both of which have been used in the interviews. This may, of course, influence both how questions were asked and interpretation of responses. For coding, the different languages used in this study had to be reflected on when ensuring coherence between concepts and themes. All quotes in the results have been translated from their original language to English. All translations have been accepted by the interviewee in question.

6.3 Ethical considerations

Having stood election in 2019, the interviewees are public figures and political actors, therefore confidentiality is paramount. All interviewees signed a consent form agreeing to be recorded and where they chose whether their party affiliation and status should be published in connection to their answers. In accordance with the highest level of confidentiality required by an interviewee, I decided not to publish status or party membership of any respondent. I have decisively had to strike

a balance between respecting the anonymity of the participants and transparency, but I consider that the integrity of interviewees should be prioritised due to the nature of their work.

7 Results

In this section, I will map out the central arguments for and against the two social policy initiatives (table 1). The growth implications (tables 2 and 3) of these results are analysed in the next section.

7.1. Worktime reduction

7.1.1 Support

Social

The central argument for worktime reduction was the wellbeing benefits of a better work-life balance. The key idea in this line of argumentation is that people should have more control over their time – i.e. increased freedom and leisure. The argument is that working life has increased in intensity and that people work beyond the optimal level for their wellbeing. Worktime reduction was considered to improve wellbeing through reduction of work-related stress, allowing people more time with their families and personal interests.

Most interviewees deemed it as almost self-evident that people hold leisure time in high regard and would always choose a shorter workweek if their salaries remained the same. Multiple respondents considered it likely that many would prefer to reduce their worktime even if wages would be reduced in proportion, as long as salaries remain sufficient for a decent living. Interestingly, only one interviewee brought up work-sharing as a benefit of worktime reduction, although a few recognised that this had been a tool used during the economic recession.

Economy

A better work-life balance was also seen as having macrolevel economic benefits through increased productivity. The argued mechanism is that as people are better rested and more satisfied in their personal lives, they are more motivated and more productive at work. All respondents in support of worktime reduction referred to worktime reduction trials conducted in Swedish healthcare, where these co-benefits were found. In terms of knowledge work, several interviewees referred to studies implying that our attention spans are shorter than the average workday, whereby the quality of work would be significantly reduced for the last hours spent at a task.

.. in certain tasks it may be rational to keep the same salary and reduce worktime, it's beneficial for both the employer and the people, and those people are more productive from a societal perspective.

(4)

This type of worktime reduction where productivity increases due to shorter working hours, whereby total production either remains stable or may even increase, had broad acceptance among interviewees. Many opposing collective models had no problem with employees and employers agreeing on shorter workhours amongst themselves as a market-based, individualised solution. This was perceived as positive as it is a way of seeking maximum productivity.

Interviewees also pointed out the fiscal burden of stress-related illnesses, and that worktime reduction might therefore prove itself to be cost-effective. Further, if work-sharing takes place, government spending on unemployment benefits would drop. Some respondents saw that the positive socioeconomic impacts of worktime reduction could extend beyond the workplace:

.. people don't become idle or lazy, on the contrary people become more enterprising and start their own projects. It appears to vary from starting a family to starting their own business. (9)

The centrality of these macroeconomic benefits to the proponents' arguments varied, where for some they were a positive side-effect of the health benefits, whereas for others the productivity gains were more enhanced in their argumentation. Some saw the link between worktime reduction and productivity in a reverse manner, more aligned with post-growth thinking. Here, the lack of worktime reduction despite productivity growth is seen as historically anomalous. In this distinct line of argumentation among interviewees, the historical productivity gains have not been equally distributed in society, whereby worktime reduction (and especially basic income) are ways of sharing the commons.

Ecology

Alternatively to increased leisure, productivity gains could be translated to increased incomes. For interviewees concerned with ecological limits to growth, translating productivity gains to leisure rather than money could prove itself to be an ecological and social win-win. As wellbeing can no longer build on increased material consumption due to the ecological limits, and social limits to growth have been reached, these interviewees considered increased leisure time rather than increased income to have higher returns in terms of wellbeing while simultaneously reducing consumption. Even though the vast amount of focus in environmental benefits was on the

consumptive side, reduction of the total amount of work and thereby production and throughput was also brought up in one of the interviews, as *work always has an environmental impact.* (2)

Interviewees concerned with ecological limits to growth did however recognise that in many sectors incomes are barely sufficient as it stands. A tension lies in whether the development of incomes ought to be capped, or whether consumptive capacity should be reduced from what it is today. Cutting into salaries was not considered appropriate unless it is through voluntary downshifting. However, this market-based solution of voluntary downshifting was considered unlikely in sectors where the negotiation position is weak.

However, the causality can again be a reverse one. Some solved the tension by highlighting that the increased leisure itself could lead to more sustainable consumption as low carbon activities tend to be time-intensive. Worktime reduction was seen as a part of a greater cultural change, “more time, less stuff” in simplicity. It was argued that increased leisure could result in reduction of rivalry consumption and instead seeking of emotional fulfilment in the social sphere, which was seen as the real source of wellbeing.

7.1.2 Opposition

Social

There was some recognition among the opponents of certain sectors of the economy being highly stressful, but these problems were considered to be better dealt with through increase of staff than reduction of worktime. Indeed, it was a concern that there is already a lack of staff in many sectors – health care being the prominent example. References were made that doctors working part-time and contribute to a shortage of medical staff. Arguably, this is where work-sharing could take place. However, the reality in Finland is that unemployment and unfilled positions coexist, but either the skills and demands or the geographic locations do not match, a problem that both opponents and proponents of worktime reduction recognised.

Some raised the issue of individualised models and “downshifting” being elitist, as it is only those in relatively strong negotiating positions on the labour market that are capable of negotiating shorter work time, as well as being able to afford a lower salary. Low real wages make wage-cuts problematic, but on the other hand, there were concerns that if wages are not cut the employers will not employ more people whereby work-sharing does not take place. If work is not shared, there is a risk that the employer puts unrealistic productivity expectations on the employee, i.e. that the same

tasks must be executed in a shorter time and would thereby result in increased stress. Work-sharing was also questioned as a restructuring of work among more employees could prove itself difficult.

Economy

The dynamic effects on the economy and fiscal balance was the central concern raised in opposition to worktime reduction. A further development of wages rather than increased leisure was considered to be of importance both for the individual and national economy due to the dynamic impacts of increased consumption. In particular the consumption of services is considered low, and the service sector was seen as the sector with the highest capacity of job creation.

The overwhelmingly most referred to barrier to transition to the shortened workweek was the diminishing tax revenue if total hours worked decreased on a national level which would threaten the funding of the welfare state. Many respondents underline that the fiscal balance is already strained due to population ageing. This conundrum of sustainable welfare was well recognised among the proponents and opponents alike.

Based on the current state of knowledge, it's difficult for me to understand how such a society is financed where not every capable person works according to their ability.(4)

Most respondents were neutral or positive towards individualised worktime reduction models, but a few raised concerns about people not participating in funding the welfare state. In this line of thinking, those reducing their work time voluntarily despite being capable of full-time work were considered not to be pulling their weight. The idealisation of downshifting was questioned, as the tax revenue from income taxes are used to fund welfare systems.

The second important opposition was that of global market competition. It was argued that only a few sectors would have productivity gains from worktime reduction. Collective worktime reduction without proportional wage cuts is essentially a wage increase. Therefore, production would move to countries with lower wages. This would in turn result in mass unemployment and a fiscal imbalance, again making it impossible to fund the current welfare systems.

Opponents of collective worktime reduction saw that proponents had unrealistic ideas of how much productivity has increased due to contemporary automation and digitalisation.

One day it will be like the industrial revolution, changing the whole structure of our economy.... It will be the same transformation, but driven by AI, automation, robotisation and such. It will

fundamentally change the nature of work in the world. But we shouldn't think that we are there yet.
(1)

...it's a bit of a dilemma, actually. Basically, our technology is constantly improving but for some reason it has not been realised as increased revenue per employee in the past decade... as it did in the past. (7)

Some of the interviewees also highlighted that work does not disappear due to automation, but it rather transforms into knowledge jobs. Therefore, the idea of automation resulting in less work having to be divided amongst people would not apply.

Ecology

Similarly to funding welfare programmes, environmental sustainability was perceived to be harmed if the fiscal budget shrinks due to reduction of total work in society, as sustainability requires technological advancements, which in turn requires government investment. Investment in green technology and for instance development of renewable energy systems were recognised as important by the majority of respondents, but the optimism in the capacity of technology and market-driven solutions to solve social and ecological crises varied.

7.2. Basic income

7.2.1 Support

Social

Interestingly, some respondents opposing collective worktime reduction were positive towards basic income due to the frustration with the hodgepodge of a welfare system in place today. Interviewees uniformly agreed that there is an ongoing transformation of work in the 21st Century (fragmented and multiple simultaneous contracts, freelancing, multiple simultaneous roles) and social welfare systems are not flexible enough to respond. This was linked to the transformation of skills needed for employment in Finland has changed, and especially as work becomes increasingly automated. From this perspective, basic income is necessary to prevent social unrest.

... and when our labour is no longer needed, what then? ... should we tax machines instead of people?... we need to think about this because otherwise we may face turmoil. (9)

For interviewees in favour of basic income, a universal, unconditional and automatic system would allow the needed flexibility. The current system with its welfare traps was considered as a source of

stress and insecurity in welfare recipients, and the application processes as humiliating, which could result in demotivation. Generally, much like worktime reduction, basic income could expand the freedom of the individual to pursue the kind of life they value:

I see it as a natural continuation of our welfare state, the purpose of which is to reduce market dependency (2)

Economy

The starkest contrast between opponents and proponents of basic income was that proponents saw the system as motivating rather than demotivating as it removes welfare traps. For proponents of basic income that opposed collective worktime reduction, it is precisely the *increased* work and thereby increased total productivity and tax incomes that is seen as the main positive outcome. Following this line of thought, wages would not have to be as high, as basic needs of people would be met by basic income, whereby it would also be cheaper to employ people, which in turn would have dynamic impacts on the economy as a whole.

The simplicity of basic income would also dismantle bureaucracy, which allows savings for the state and free the capacity of individuals to pursue other things. Basic income is seen as giving the material security to allow for inventions and entrepreneurialism. Most proponents of basic income highlighted in the interviews that their perception of humanity is a positive one: humans are active, enterprising and want to partake in society.

Ecology

Both interviewees that made connections between basic income and ecological benefits saw basic income as a social dividend, distributed to people as a share of the commons. Wealth and growth being tied to a material, environmental dimension also means that it is created by extracting natural resources and emitting to a common atmosphere. Further, it allows for a broader understanding of what wealth is created through – rewarding, for example, unpaid household work. In this line of argumentation, distribution of this wealth through basic income is a matter of justice.

Further, basic income ties to the environmental benefits of worktime reduction as it would allow people to choose more freely how much and what they want to do. Basic income would make it possible for people to refuse alienating work and work that is considered unethical or unsustainable, which would force industries to transform to become more sustainable. This line of argumentation by interviewees supporting basic income clearly deviates from those seeing basic income mainly as a

way to overcome welfare traps. The policy is thereby proposed on very different premises, and the dynamic effects would likely depend on the level of basic income.

7.2.2 Opposition

Social

Interestingly, even though worktime reduction was generally considered to have positive impacts on an individual level, basic income was more disputed in this aspect. The concern is that basic income, if at a level where it liberates the individual from the necessity of employment, may become a disservice and result in increased marginalisation. Work is for many not only a duty, but a meaningful social context.

Although the bureaucratic procedures are often perceived as demeaning for the recipient of unemployment allowance, ideally there could be a social work aspect to the surveillance. This aspect is removed with unconditional basic income.

... is it negligence in the sense that for a lot of people the problem isn't only that they have too little money or insecure income but that they also need a lot of support in their lives? (3)

Threats associated with basic income as compared to worktime reduction is linked to the fact that the change to current conditional welfare systems is profound, and there is no existing example of societies utilising universal and unconditional basic income at a level that would cover basic amenities. Therefore, there is a risk associated with change.

Lastly, although the merit of basic income as a social welfare system is its simplicity, it also makes it easy to dismantle. One interviewee raised the concern that basic income would be a welfare system more vulnerable to political fluctuations. Since all benefits are lumped into one instead of the complex system Finland has today, it would be easier to decrease or even remove benefits during a political term. Interestingly, the system that is uniformly deemed as hopelessly complicated by all interviewees may also protect citizens from austerity measures.

Economy

Due to the expenses, several respondents deemed basic income to be utterly unrealistic. It would likely have to be funded by tax reforms, possibly increased income tax progression which in turn was considered demotivating and would make Finland a less attractive country to work in. The relatively high living costs in Finland and global market competition were once again raised as barriers to

reform. For basic income to be sufficient to pay for basic amenities, it would have to be on a high level which was considered to result in a stellar fiscal burden.

For interviewees that saw basic income as demotivating, the policy would result in a decrease of total hours worked in society, which again diminishes welfare state funding. In essence, basic income would enable worktime reduction, so for respondents that considered a) basic income to be demotivating and b) reduction of total societal work hours to be threat to the welfare state, the basic income enables injustice as people are not obliged to participate in funding the welfare that provides for them, even though they are in principle capable of such.

Ecology

Interestingly, negative ecological aspects of basic income were not raised beyond the fiscal imbalance already discussed in relation to worktime reduction. This despite basic income being a much more contested model than worktime reduction among post-growth academics.

8 Discussion

8.1 Are 'limits to growth' reflected in the debate?

Based on the social policy discussion outlined above it can be said that post-growth ideas are represented in party politics in Finland, but both structural and narrative aspects of the growth paradigm can be distinguished in the discussion.

The most frequently mentioned theme among the respondents was the transformation of work through multiple mutually enforcing processes. Work in the Finnish society is undergoing dynamic change, whereby time spent at the workplace is no longer equal to output. Further, the social insurance systems are not adequately flexible to provide security in modern-day societies. This transformation of livelihoods and welfare appears to be the main driver of the worktime reduction and basic income discussions in Finnish politics. However, the transformation of work is linked to the dynamics of growth. The debate regarding these reforms is an old one: has productivity grown sufficiently to be translated to increased benefits for labour? And further, should these benefits be increased leisure, which caps income development, or higher salaries, with dynamic effects on the economy through consumption? The answer to this in turn reflects whether growth-sustainability tensions are recognised.

A distinct minority of interviewees saw that social and ecological limits to economic growth had been reached, or even crossed, whereby the worktime reduction and basic income initiatives form distributive policies for a non-growing economy. The majority did, however, consider that growth is needed for the functioning of the welfare state, and to an extent for the dynamics of market-led innovations to address the environmental crises. The relationship between growth and environmental sustainability is thereby unproblematic, even co-dependent. Further, population ageing and was seen as counterbalancing any suggested productivity gains, thereby reducing total work in society was seen as economically unsustainable. I will in the following section present structural and narrative manifestations of the growth paradigm that came up in the interviews.

Most of the respondents that believed in growth as a solution to ecological and/or social problems did explicitly express what growth is for – most often for funding the welfare systems. Thereby growth is not just assumed as natural or equal to all other goals, but a tool. I see this as a much better ground for discussion than strong narrative barriers to alternatives. It would be bold to say that the growth paradigm does not hold in Finnish party politics, but it is definitely challenged. As

post-growth alternatives exist in the parliament, challenging growth is not just an idea in the radical margins. Further, it is an option for Finnish voters, which would imply that democratic transitions towards a post-growth welfare state are possible.

8.2. The growth paradigm

8.2.1 Growth lock-in

The central objectives for most respondents despite of their opinion on basic income and worktime reduction, or their opinion on growth for that matter, were those of arranging human welfare in the 21st Century. For most interviewees critical of these initiatives, it was the diminishing tax revenue and thereby the threat to the funding of the welfare state that formed the central opposition. As already discussed, the growth-oriented society operates under its own logic, and the welfare state is built on this same logic. Stagnating growth comes with uncertainty and risk (Pesch, 2018), and there is safety in relying on the 'devil you know' and aim for decoupling growth from environmental harm. Yet, social limits to growth were also widely recognised among interviewees, as it was acknowledged that most people hold leisure in high regard. It is therefore almost disheartening that leisure is not more uniformly a political goal. If our productivity has been increasing, how has this not translated to as much leisure time as Keynes had predicted?

The central argument raised in the interviews is that every hour worked generates tax revenue for the state. However, ecological economists have long questioned why we tax incomes generated from work, that presumably society wants more of, rather than the actual material throughput flow, which is the cause of environmental harm (Daly, 2005). Another option would be to tax consumption instead of work, however monetary measures of this kind are often criticised for enhancing existing inequalities. Andersson (2010) however argues that if the tax income would be redistributed in the form of a basic income, this concern would be mitigated.

Our welfare states do however also have a consumption bias (Wright & Rogers, 2010). As our economy, on which the welfare state is built on, thrives on consumption, several interviewees considered it better to boost consumption through increased disposable incomes rather than translate productivity gains to increased leisure, despite what might be preferable on the individual level. Circulation of money in the economy in turn has dynamic effects on employment, therefore having societal benefits beyond tax incomes. Leisure, conversely, does not.

The low real wages interviewees were referring to raise the question of where the productivity gains from technological advancements have gone. If the argument is that productivity gains are distributed either as increased incomes or increased leisure, how come we see neither?

Further, wage increases could also end up being a disservice. The interviewees that emphasised global market competition as the central barrier to collective worktime reduction, the problem is precisely that collective worktime reduction is a de facto wage increase. This is notable, since with collective worktime reduction where wages stay stable, the tax base does not in fact decrease. The mechanism of the threat to the welfare state is therefore not the worktime reduction per se, but the fear that production will move to countries with lower wages and standards. Operation on global markets therefore limit the national room for manoeuvre.

Not all jobs are equally volatile to offshoring. It has mainly affected manufacturing and some service sectors, IT being a common example (OECD, 2007). Human services, such as care work, tend to require a geographic proximity between provider and consumer, and primary production is tied to the land. This is not to downplay the dependency most economies have on international trade, but to note that defeated determinism of the 'race to the bottom' narrative, where states compete for capital investment with lax standards, leaves no room for envisioning alternative futures. This shows the interplay between structures and paradigms (Pesch, 2018). As paradigms become institutionalised, the structures in turn reinforce the paradigms that created them.

8.2.2 Green growth or post-growth?

Both pro-growth and post-growth narratives are facing challenges of consolidating the goals of welfare and sustainability (Khan & Clark, 2016). Whereas the pro-growth narrative has not convincingly shown that absolute decoupling is happening, and planetary boundaries respected when operating under a growth imperative, the post-growth narrative is still struggling to offer an alternative plan for welfare.

The lack of ready solutions on how welfare will be arranged in a post-growth society makes the familiar pro-growth narrative easy to fall back on. Green growth, or win-win-win narratives, where the climate catastrophe can be solved with technological advancements, which ensures continuous economic growth and thereby the survival of the welfare state as we know it, are politically attractive as they do not entail trade-offs between growth, ecology and welfare.

It is not however interchangeable to talk about techno-optimism and growth, although these are often narratively linked. Respondents critical of growth also considered technological advancements

as important. As stated, a post-growth society does not mean backwardness or end of innovation and technological advancements. Quite the contrary, relative decoupling through productivity gains is making absolute decoupling easier. The rebound effect caused by the growth imperative is what eats away these productivity gains.

It is also important that the structural barriers are addressed. Alternative ways of funding the welfare systems – education, health and social insurance – need to be explored if post-growth alternatives are to find footing. However, as it is the concern of declining tax revenue that is key rather than the stagnation of economic growth, if we start to treat them as analytically separate, we may find ways out of the growth lock-in (Daly, 2005). If tax revenue is collected from other sources than income tax, employment numbers and tax revenue could also be treated as analytically separate.

Discursive power, i.e. the assimilation and coproduction of shared beliefs (Svarstad, Benjaminsen & Overå, 2018) limits societal analysis and policy options. If alternatives to growth are always shot down as unrealistic, many aspects are being ruled out of the public discussion. The lack of sustainability aspects in the media coverage of shortened workweek debate was what inspired this thesis. The debate appeared to be reduced to whether worktime reduction would result in productivity gains or productivity losses. Although this debate was to an extent repeated in the interviews too, it was only a fragment of a larger discussion. As the perspectives of politicians were more nuanced than the media debate had revealed, there appears to be a lack of a forum for an open discussion. This precisely where the discursive power of the growth paradigm is at play. It limits what we can envision and thereby what futures we work toward, what kind of knowledge is being pursued, what kind of technologies innovated and what kind of institutions established. In essence, visions can bring about new systems (Meadows et al., 2005).

8.3 Work in a post-growth economy

Despite the general agreement of a transformation taking place, there were opposing ideas on whether this transformation of work through productivity gains attributed to digitalisation and automation will result in less work in total. The dystopian scenario is that while work has been automated and therefore jobs disappear, this results in increasing inequality and mass unemployment. On the other hand, if old jobs disappear due to automation and new ones are created, this implies growth in production and throughput (Daly, 1991). If growth is to be capped in accordance with ecological limits to growth, creating new work could no longer solve the social problem of unemployment. Post-growth scholars argue that remaining work should be shared to avoid unequal outcomes and social unrest.

The absence of work-sharing aspects in the interviews was somewhat surprising, as combating unemployment is what worktime reduction policies have recently been utilised for. This is linked to the fact that the nature of work has changed. In knowledge jobs, it is not self-evident that productivity would significantly decrease with reduced worktime, whereby there would be no need to employ more labour. The question is whether work-sharing is a realistic outcome of worktime reduction in the contemporary Finnish labour market. But if manufacturing is offshored or automated and creation of new jobs is capped, where does employment lie in post-growth economies?

Some of the interviewees referred to the vast employment potential in the service sector, which is also acknowledged by post-growth scholars such as Jackson and Victor (2011). 'Human services', care work being a common example, are labour-intensive while having a potential of being materially light (Jackson, 2019). Thereby service sector may provide an option for welfare in a non-growing economy. The important normative question is whether full employment is a worthwhile goal, or whether welfare should be decoupled from work. If distributive mechanisms such as basic income are in place automation is not the threat to social sustainability it is often portrayed to be. 'Jobless growth' and the following social unrest is only a threat if subsistence is dependent on employment.

In sum, the lack of agreement on what the labour market will look like in the future confuses the political discussion around the basic income and worktime reduction initiatives. Indeed, this is a conundrum for economists as well (Gough, 2017; Jackson, 2019). On the one hand, productivity gains paint the picture of a fully mechanised economy, but moving towards a labour-intensive, low-productivity service economy is an equally likely scenario.

8.4 Should leisure be a national goal?

A central debate is that of whether worktime reduction should take place as a collective, nation-wide agreement, as a market-based individualised transition to part-time work, or not at all. This debate was however not as polarised as expected. There were a few interviewees that were opposed to worktime reduction in all forms since work is fundamental for the funding of the contemporary welfare state. The bulk of the opposition was however not targeted at worktime reduction per se, but at collective worktime reduction models. Most opponents of collective worktime reduction were still prone to think that people should have more freedom to organise their work and leisure on the labour markets. Not even the strongest proponents of worktime reduction saw a sudden collective model as possible or necessarily even desirable. Neither is it the role of the Finnish state to induce such a transition. Unlike state-led capitalist countries, wages and worktime are negotiated between

three parties in societies of coordinated capitalism. The state could still have a facilitating role for example through incentivising worktime reduction trials.

The private sector has already reacted on the debate as two Finnish companies decided to initiate worktime reduction trials where the salaries of employees remain constant (Elonen, 2020; Räisänen, 2020). If employers start to attract workers by offering shorter working hours, then this would be a purely market-driven path to worktime reform. It is notable that both are knowledge work companies striving for growth in labour productivity, a goal vastly different from that of post-growth transitions.

Even if individualised models of worktime reduction have a broader acceptance among interviewees, and seem to already be taking place, discussions on collective worktime reduction should not be abandoned. The social and environmental implications would likely differ vastly between individualised and collective models (Gough, 2017). The often mentioned individual-level health and wellbeing benefits would likely be realised regardless, but it is questionable whether market-led initiatives would result in structural change in production and consumption.

Further, it is doubtful that individualised worktime reduction will be broadly available across society. Whether labour has the negotiating power to reduce their worktime was questioned by several interviewees. Many also considered real wages in Finland to be low, whereby part-time work with proportional decreases in salary cannot be afforded by the majority. In addition, the platform economy is creating new, precarious work forms where the central problem is the lack of guaranteed hours – uber drivers being a common example. Market-led models might exacerbate existing inequalities since only those holding high salary jobs and in strong negotiation positions on the market can afford to ‘downshift’. Further, many high salary jobs are in sectors that would not be equally prone to work-sharing, for reasons discussed in the previous section. Collective models of worktime reduction would likely result in more socially equal outcomes.

8.5 Work as virtue

Even though I started this process looking for narratives of growth in the social welfare debates, a stronger undercurrent appeared to be the narratives of work. Herein lies great variance between interviewees. On one side of the spectrum work is by default coercive and environmentally detrimental, on the other work is considered essential for societal (and social) participation and human wellbeing. Interestingly, the narratives of work as social participation were often linked to narratives of humans needing economic incentives to perform work, i.e. basic income as

demotivating. Those that saw basic income as motivating underlined that they saw humans as naturally driven to participate in society.

Many interviewees brought up cultural barriers to welfare systems unconditional of capacity to work. Even part-time work was considered uncommon, and not only due to low real wages discussed earlier. Work is an essential part of people's identities, sense of self-worth, as well as the most central social context for many, whereby questioning the role of work in society may be challenging.

Roland Paulsen (2017) has discussed extensively how work and employment have become a goal in its own right in contemporary societies rather than of instrumental value, so far that it is no longer questioned that unemployment is vice and work is virtue. This is of course linked to growth, as "creation of work" on a finite planet is intimately connected to increased material throughput unless the (relatively) immaterial service economy is realised (Jackson, 2009). However, Paulsen makes a strong case for how it is in fact *work* that has a hegemonic position in many societies. Perhaps it is also this hegemony of work, rather than the hegemony of growth, that acts as the narrative barrier to transition.

Paulsen (2017) notes that the abovementioned welfare benefits tend to stem from secondary aspects of work – the community of colleagues, status associated with the position and structure given to our lives – rather than the work itself. If other forms of socially meaningful activity that is not tied to wage labour would emerge, perhaps these experienced wellbeing benefits of the labour market would diminish too. For Paulsen, contrasting the wellbeing of the employed versus the hardships of the unemployed, both in science and our 'common sense', is a bias that has emerged from a culture obsessed with work.

The idea of idleness in regard to both policies discussed in the interview appeared to cause friction. Justice was commonly referred to in the interviews. Theories of justice being fundamental to politics, unsurprisingly interpretations in this context varied too. A common opposition to these welfare initiatives was that the burden of funding welfare through work and tax payments could become unfairly distributed. Idleness was frowned upon as freeriding by many.

As already mentioned, worktime reduction and basic income can be mutually supportive ways to organise work and welfare, but they operate on very different premises. This being the case, it is hardly surprising that proponents and opponent for these two policies were not fully aligned. If the national goal was to reduce worktime – then there is an encouragement of idleness. Basic income is more complicated in this regard. For many proponents of basic income, it was the removal of welfare traps i.e. the encouragement of labour that was the virtue of basic income. Basic income is also a

response to a commonly acknowledged issue - the fragmentation of benefits - whereas the increased intensity of work in the 21st Century that many proponents of collective worktime reduction refer to is not as broadly recognised as a problem. Collective worktime reduction may in fact be the more work-critical and thereby growth-critical policy out of the two (Paulsen, 2017).

8.6 Do we need a crisis to change?

Discussing economic degrowth is somewhat awkward at a time when the world is shook by the Covid-19 pandemic. Of course, the sudden economic recession we see as a result causes volatile circumstances for many and is not what I advocate. However, it is in crisis when our resilience is tested and social welfare scrutinised, possibly reformed. Unconditional cash transfers have been increasingly discussed as a way out of the crisis (Meredith, 2020). Work-sharing has historically been introduced precisely to counteract economic crisis (Schor, 2014).

Scientists have also warned us about how the environmental crises will eventually force societal change, a scary example being the biodiversity loss and decline in pollinators that our food systems rely on (Diaz et al., 2019). Going for a controlled re-evaluation rather than a crash would likely have better societal outcomes (Meadows et al. 2005). Perhaps the crises ahead are an opportunity to rethink societal priorities and distance ourselves from the idealisation of our labour as productive and our leisure as consumptive. Perhaps we are reaching a momentum for reassigning value to the non-productive and non-consumptive aspects of life that are at the core of human wellbeing while being considerate of the biophysical boundaries to social systems.

It may not even matter on what grounds these social welfare systems are put in place. Due to the interplay of institutions and paradigms, a more sustainable society may emerge as a result of basic income and/or worktime reduction, even though it was not the central aim of the reforms. Of course, it is possible that the emergent discussions of these social welfare initiatives in the Anthropocene are provoked by ecological concerns. Automation could be viewed as self-evident opportunities for more growth, rather than more leisure. The fact that these debates are ongoing now may itself reflect that some limits to growth – ecological or social – are experienced if not explicitly recognised. The opposition to these initiatives may have looked very different a decade ago, when planetary boundaries were not as widely discussed. Perhaps we are already undergoing a paradigm shift, and the worktime reduction and basic income discussions in Finland are one offshoot of such.

9 Conclusion

After having followed the media coverage around the worktime reduction, I set out on fieldwork with the question of how the growth paradigm is limiting the political debate. My hypothesis was that most politicians would not question growth, and those that did could not do so publicly not to lose voters. This hypothesis was immediately challenged. The political debate surrounding the subject was found to be far more nuanced than what I had perceived from the media coverage. Many topics are agreed upon, many problems recognised across party lines. However, the connection between social policy reforms and ecological sustainability are still missing for most of the respondents, and economic and social aspects of these initiatives were pronounced in the debate.

There were however clear-cut post-growth ideas represented among interviewees and possibly more widely in their respective parties, which reflects positively on the parliamentary system having the potential to bring about a post-growth transition. Further, most interviewees that did find growth as relevant saw it as a means to an end rather than a goal in itself. This would imply that the societal lock-in to growth, rather than pro-growth narratives, is the main obstacle.

If the ecological and social co-benefits of worktime reduction and basic income would be explored, perhaps these initiatives could gain broader support. Focus of the debate could shift to whether barriers of market competition and fiscal imbalance can be overcome. Despite growth not being as naturalised as I had expected at the initiation of this thesis, there are still ideas of growth as a panacea solution to both ecological and social problems. Therefore, social policies threatening growth are seen as a threat to social and environmental sustainability. This aspect of the growth paradigm results in prejudice towards post-growth narratives, which limits the political debate.

It is true that the post-growth side needs to consolidate social and ecological sustainability. The contemporary welfare state is embedded in an economic system relying on growth. Before alternative ways of funding the welfare state have been established, it seems unlikely that aiming to stagnate growth is a politically viable option. Worktime reduction and basic income are building blocks, not silver bullets.

It is also true that there are many uncertainties regarding how worktime reduction and basic income would play out in society. We may learn something from the market-led initiatives that have been set in motion in Finland. However, as was the case with the Finnish basic income trial, small-scale trials in a system that otherwise functions as normal are unlikely to reflect the same results as if there were sector-wide collective transitions. It could however be beneficial to further study whether work-

sharing is a realistic outcome of worktime reduction in different sectors. Some lessons could be learned from countries where part-time work is common.

Further, in societies of coordinated capitalism, perspectives of the unions as well as industry representatives on these alternative policies are a significant topic for further inquiry. Similarly, this study should be replicated in societies with more heavy state-led capitalism, as the state would have more power in coordinating a transition.

It is of course important to note that the findings of this study should not be treated as an exhaustive picture of all perspectives in the Finnish political spectrum. A longer timeframe would have allowed more extensive sampling, and inclusion of parties that did not get a seat in parliament in the 2019 election but are nonetheless part of the political debate. National media also appears to not only report, but to form the discussion. The discrepancy between what I had expected the political debate to be as compared to all the nuances that the interviews presented is interesting. It should still be investigated whether the growth paradigm is reflected in the national media, as I had considered as a methodological option for this thesis. Further, the media holds a lot of power in reinforcing paradigms and upholding an 'economisation of the social' in choice of experts and perspectives that are presented.

Finally, it appears that there are other paradigms directing the political discussion and thereby societal alternatives. I have found that questioning growth in parliamentary politics is not as big a taboo as I had expected, and there is willingness to find new ways for welfare and work in the 21st Century. However, the purposiveness of work was a lot more naturalised than the purposiveness of growth. Herein lies a further interesting line of inquiry.

The aim of my research has not only been to examine the power of the growth paradigm, but also to seek common ground and show that the debate is perhaps not as polarised as it has been presented to be. Agreed-upon problems, such as fragmentation of benefits, can prove themselves to be leverage points for transition. Even though basic income and worktime reduction are not implemented as sustainability strategies, they can still contribute to creating a more sustainable society.

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Appendix I – Interview manual

Background Questions:

1. Could you tell me about your career in politics?
2. Why did you decide to enter politics?
3. Which themes are important for you in politics?
4. You stood election for party x – why did you choose this party?

Economic Alternatives Questions

1. Worktime reduction sparked a lot of debate last year, what do you think the debate was about?
 - a. What are your thought on worktime reduction? Or base a question around what they said before.
2. What are you thought on basic income Or base question around what they have said before about this.
 - a. Do you think people might work less if they received BI?
3. What do you think the economic impacts of these policies would be?

Economy		Social	Ecology
Negative impacts on growth	<p><i>Why is reduced competitiveness/ stagnation of growth a concern?</i></p> <p><i>What would be the impacts?</i></p> <p><i>Is this the primary reason to ensure growth/competitiveness?</i></p>	<p><i>Could you explain the mechanism behind wellbeing benefits?</i></p> <p><i>Do you think people might choose wtr?</i></p> <p><i>Would wtr result in work-sharing?</i></p>	<p><i>Could you explain the mechanism behind sustainability gains?</i></p> <p><i>Should the wages be reduced?</i></p> <p><i>Would this impact tax revenue?</i></p>
Positive impacts on growth	<p><i>Could you explain the mechanism behind increased productivity?</i></p> <p><i>What would be the impacts on growth?</i></p> <p><i>Would salaries be reduced?</i></p> <p><i>What would be the impacts on tax revenue?</i></p>		

Climate-goals

1. What are your thoughts on the climate goals in Finland?
 - a. Will they make economic growth difficult to maintain?

b. Why/How?

Round-up

1. You said earlier that you chose your party because of x. Are your ideas on these topics shared by the rest of your party?
2. Is there anything you would like to add that I have not asked about?

Post-growth interviewees

1. *Challenging growth can be considered a bit controversial. Can you suggest this in political campaigns?*
 - a. If yes, how is it received?
 - b. If not, why not?
2. *What do you consider to be the greatest barriers for stagnating growth?*