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Rethinking Regional Prosperity 'Pro-Growth' vs. 'Post-Growth' Paradigms in Development Planning : A Systematic Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

Regional development planning faces a debate between the 'pro-growth' paradigm (GDP-focused) and the 'post-growth' paradigm (holistic well-being and ecological limits). The 'pro-growth' approach is criticized for causing environmental degradation and social inequality. This study aims to identify the characteristics, analyze the implications, and develop a conceptual framework integrating both paradigms. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, 59 articles from Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect were thematically analyzed. Findings show that 'pro-growth' leads to environmental degradation and inequality , while 'post-growth'—focusing on justice and local resilience—faces implementation challenges like political resistance and the need to redefine prosperity. The study concludes that regional prosperity must transcend GDP. Its primary contribution is a new conceptual framework bridging both paradigms to achieve holistic, resilient, and sustainable regional prosperity.

Keywords: *Development Planning, Regional Development, Pro-Growth, Post-Growth, Systematic Literature Review, Conceptual Framework.*

Abstrak

Perencanaan pembangunan regional dihadapkan pada perdebatan antara paradigma 'pro-pertumbuhan' (fokus PDB) dan 'pasca-pertumbuhan' (fokus kesejahteraan holistik dan batas ekologis). Pendekatan 'pro-pertumbuhan' dikritik karena menyebabkan degradasi lingkungan dan kesenjangan sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi karakteristik, menganalisis implikasi, dan menyusun kerangka kerja konseptual yang mengintegrasikan kedua paradigma. Menggunakan metode *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) pada database Scopus, Web of Science, dan ScienceDirect, 59 artikel dianalisis secara tematik. Hasilnya

menunjukkan bahwa 'pro-pertumbuhan' menghasilkan degradasi lingkungan dan ketimpangan , sementara 'pasca-pertumbuhan' yang berfokus pada keadilan dan resiliensi lokal menghadapi tantangan implementasi seperti resistensi politik dan kebutuhan redefinisi kemakmuran. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kemakmuran regional harus melampaui PDB. Kontribusi utamanya adalah kerangka kerja konseptual baru yang menjembatani kedua paradigma untuk mewujudkan kemakmuran regional yang holistik, berketahanan, dan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Perencanaan Pembangunan, Pembangunan Regional, Pro-Pertumbuhan, Pasca-Pertumbuhan, Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis, Kerangka Kerja Konseptual

INTRODUCTION

The issue of regional development is crucial and continuously evolving, in line with shifting global dynamics and local-level challenges. The concept of regional prosperity has traditionally been equated with continuous economic growth, known as the 'pro-growth' paradigm (Keyßer et al., 2025; Mulya & Hudalah, 2024). This approach prioritizes capital accumulation, increased production output, and consumption expansion as the main drivers for economic and social progress (Khosravi Kazazi et al., 2022). Various development policies in many countries, including Indonesia, have long been based on the assumption that economic growth will automatically impact welfare improvement and be a solution to social problems (Haseeb et al., 2025). For example, a case study in Karawang Regency, Indonesia, shows a focus on agricultural intensity for sustainable regional development, which implicitly supports the economic growth narrative (Jena, 2024).

However, the 'pro-growth' paradigm has come under scrutiny with increasing awareness of ecological crises and social inequalities. Empirical evidence shows that dependence on limitless economic growth often brings significant negative impacts, such as environmental damage, natural resource exploitation, and rising carbon emissions (Khofi et al., 2025). For instance, rising agricultural water scarcity in China is driven by the expansion of irrigated land in water-scarce areas, highlighting the conflict between agricultural growth and environmental sustainability (Qi et al., 2022). Similarly, studies on decoupling consumption-based CO2 emissions from economic growth show that while some countries succeed in reducing production-based emissions, this is often achieved by outsourcing emissions to other countries, which can lead to higher global emissions (Boumahdi & Zaoujal, 2023).

In response to these limitations, an alternative paradigm has emerged, known as 'post-growth' or 'degrowth' (Blattert et al., 2022). This approach fundamentally challenges the assumption that economic growth is the primary goal of development. Instead, it advocates for a planned reduction of consumption and production to achieve ecological sustainability and social justice (Dou et al., 2025). This concept is gaining traction in discussions on urban and regional planning, especially in developed countries facing challenges of shrinking cities and the need for more sustainable development strategies (Olofsson, 2025). For example, studies on post-growth cities in Germany highlight the challenges and opportunities of collaborative governance in dealing with economic and demographic decline (Alcaide Manthey, 2025). Grassroots movements also play a role in transforming cities toward post-growth futures, as seen in the collaborative economy movement in Gothenburg, Sweden (Enarsson et al., 2024).

This paradigm shift raises fundamental questions about how regional prosperity should be defined and realized in the 21st century. In this context, regional development planning faces the challenge of aligning economic targets with ecological and social imperatives (J. Huang et al., 2023). The integration of integrated assessment for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in metropolitan regions, such as the case study in the Pearl River Delta, China, demonstrates efforts to achieve this balance (J. Huang et al., 2023). Furthermore, an emergy-based indicator framework

for assessing regional ecosystem health and ecological service value emphasizes the impact of water conservation projects on sustainability (Jian et al., 2025).

Given the complexity and urgency of these challenges, a systematic literature review is needed to comprehensively analyze the debate between the 'pro-growth' and 'post-growth' paradigms in regional development planning. This research aims to:

- Identify the key characteristics and fundamental assumptions of the 'pro-growth' and 'post-growth' paradigms found in regional development literature.
- Analyze the implications and obstacles arising from the application of both paradigms in the context of regional development planning.
- Develop a conceptual framework capable of integrating insights from both paradigms to achieve a more holistic and sustainable regional prosperity.

Through this review, it is hoped to provide a more nuanced understanding of the development choices available to planners and policymakers, and to facilitate the transition towards a more adaptive and resilient regional development model.

METHODS

This research adopts a **Systematic Literature Review (SLR)** approach. This method is known for its structured and transparent process in identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing all relevant research on a specific topic (Tranfield et al., 2003, as cited in (Assumma et al., 2024)). The SLR method is used due to its capability to present a comprehensive and objective (unbiased) review of the available literature. This allows for the development of a robust and evidence-based conceptual framework (Haddad et al., 2021).

The SLR process in this study follows these stages:

1. Protocol Planning

The first step is to clearly formulate the research protocol. The protocol includes defining research questions, setting inclusion and exclusion criteria, designing a search strategy, and determining procedures for data extraction.

Research Questions (RQ): This study aims to answer the following questions:

- **RQ 1 :** What are the main characteristics and underlying assumptions of the 'pro-growth' and 'post-growth' paradigms in regional development literature?
- **RQ 2 :** What are the implications and challenges of applying both paradigms in the context of regional development planning?
- **RQ 3 :** How can a conceptual framework be developed to integrate insights from both paradigms to achieve a more holistic and sustainable regional prosperity?

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: To ensure the relevance and quality of the literature, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied.

- **Inclusion Criteria:** Studies included are journal articles in English or Indonesian, focusing on regional development, planning, sustainability, economic growth, or post-growth ideas. Publications must also be relevant to a timeframe that reflects the contemporary debate surrounding development paradigms. From 104 available journals, 59 references were carefully selected based on their relevance to the research title and objectives.

- **Exclusion Criteria:** Articles excluded are those irrelevant to regional development or planning, case studies with too specific a scope to provide broad theoretical implications, and publications that have not undergone a peer-review process.

2. Conducting the Review

This stage involves the systematic search, screening, and data extraction from the identified literature.

- **Search Strategy:** Literature searches were conducted using academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. Keywords used included combinations of: "regional development", "development planning", "pro-growth", "post-growth", "degrowth", "sustainability", "economic growth", "ecological limits", and "social well-being". Additional references were also identified through snowballing techniques from the bibliographies of key articles.
- **Article Screening:** The collected articles were then screened in two phases. The first phase was screening based on titles and abstracts, aiming to remove duplicates and clearly irrelevant articles. The second phase was screening based on full text to ensure the articles met the predetermined inclusion criteria. This entire screening process was carried out by the researcher to reduce potential bias.
- **Data Extraction:** Relevant data were extracted from each included article. This data included: author, publication year, research objectives, methodology, key findings, definitions of 'pro-growth' and 'post-growth' paradigms, policy implications, and identified challenges.

3. Data Analysis and Synthesis

Next, the extracted data were analyzed and synthesized using a thematic approach to find patterns, trends, and gaps in the literature.

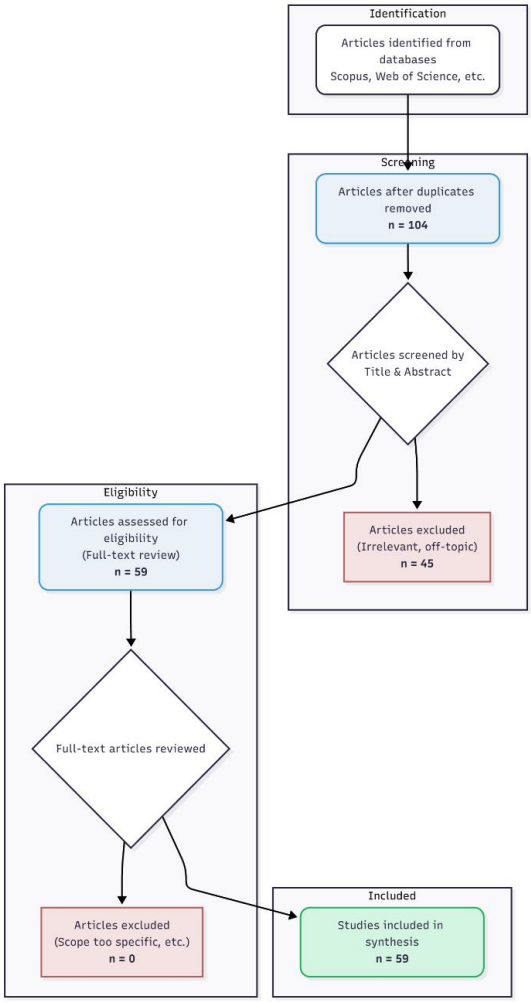
- **Thematic Analysis:** A thematic analysis approach was used to identify recurring themes and essential concepts related to the 'pro-growth' and 'post-growth' paradigms. This process involved coding data and then grouping these findings into meaningful categories. For example, a study on "Agricultural intensity for sustainable regional development: A case study in peri-urban areas of Karawang Regency, Indonesia" (Wellington et al., 2023) would be categorized within the 'pro-growth' context that seeks to integrate sustainability. Meanwhile, articles like "Sustainability transition in shrinking regions: uncovering perceived regional opportunity spaces and expectations shaping regional development" (Chen et al., 2024) would provide insights into 'post-growth' perspectives in the context of shrinking regions.
- **Comparative Analysis:** A comparison between the two paradigms was conducted to highlight fundamental differences in assumptions, goals, and policy implications. For instance, the analysis would compare how "Regional development trap in Turkey: Can relatedness find a way out?" (Çınar, 2023) in the 'pro-growth' context seeks to overcome stagnation through economic diversification, contrasting with a 'post-growth' approach that might emphasize local resilience and consumption reduction (Blattert et al., 2022b).
- **Conceptual Framework Development:** Based on the synthesis of findings, a new conceptual framework will be developed. This framework will attempt to bridge the gap between the two paradigms, offering a more integrated approach to regional development

planning that considers both responsible economic growth and ecological limits and social needs.

4. Reporting the Results

The results of the SLR will be presented systematically and comprehensively, including a discussion of findings, implications, and future research directions.

Figure 1. SLR Method Flow Diagram (PRISMA)



Source: *Author's Processing, 2025*

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Main Characteristics of the 'Pro-Growth' and 'Post-Growth' Paradigms

The literature review reveals fundamental differences in the characteristics and assumptions underlying the 'pro-growth' and 'post-growth' paradigms in the context of regional development. A deep understanding of these two paradigms is essential for formulating a more holistic conceptual framework.

Tabel 1. Perbandingan Karakteristik Paradigma 'Pro-Pertumbuhan' dan 'Pasca-Pertumbuhan'

Key Aspect	Pro-Growth' Paradigm	Post-Growth' Paradigm
Main Goal	Aggregate economic growth (GDP).	Human well-being, social justice, and ecological sustainability.
Success Indicators	Regional GDP, investment rates, trade volume.	Quality of life, health, education, life satisfaction, justice.
View of Environment	Resources to be exploited; environmental problems can be solved with technology (decoupling).	Acknowledges planetary boundaries that must not be exceeded.
Economic Focus	Industrialization, urbanization, and increased consumption.	Circular economy, local resilience, and selective reduction of consumption/production.
Planning Approach	Tends to be Top-Down and centralistic.	Emphasizes Bottom-Up participation and collaborative governance.

Source: *Author's Processing, 2025*

1. The 'Pro-Growth' Paradigm

The regional development discourse has long been dominated by the 'pro-growth' paradigm. This paradigm is rooted in the belief that economic growth is a fundamental condition for social progress and welfare improvement. The core assumption of this paradigm is that an increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will correlate with job creation, higher incomes, and ultimately, an improved quality of life for the community (Nowack et al., 2023).

Key characteristics of the 'pro-growth' paradigm include:

- **Fokus pada Pertumbuhan Ekonomi Agregat: Focus on Aggregate Economic Growth:** Regional development success is measured by macroeconomic indicators such as regional GDP, investment rates, and trade volume (Keyßer et al., 2025). For example, a study on regional development in Kazakhstan analyzes theoretical models and the reality of development oriented towards economic growth (Uskelenova & Nikiforova, 2024).
- **Industrialization and Urbanization:** Development is often driven by industrialization and urban expansion, with the expectation that economic agglomeration will create efficiency and innovation (Lawton & Morrison, 2022). owever, this urban expansion also poses challenges, such as the loss of peri-urban agricultural land in Greater Western Sydney, Australia (Lawton & Morrison, 2022), and the impact of carbon emissions from urbanization in Zhejiang Province, China (Wu et al., 2024).
- **Resource Exploitation:** Economic growth often depends on the increasing extraction and consumption of natural resources (Qi et al., 2022). This is evident from the increasing agricultural water scarcity in China driven by the expansion of irrigated land in water-scarce areas (Giamporcaro et al., 2025).
- **Technological Innovation as a Solution:** It is believed that technological innovation will always find solutions to environmental problems arising from growth, enabling "decoupling" between economic growth and environmental impact (Fan et al., 2025). However, studies show that decoupling consumption-based CO2 emissions from economic growth often just shifts the problem to other regions through production outsourcing (Li et al., 2025).

- **Top-Down Planning:** Development policies tend to be centralistic, with the government or large institutions formulating plans and strategies to drive growth (Constantin & Popescu, 2025). Nevertheless, there is also recognition of the role of decentralization in local economic development, as shown by a study in Burkina Faso (Bargain et al., 2025).

2. The 'Post-Growth' Paradigm

The emergence of the 'post-growth' paradigm is a critique of the 'pro-growth' model, which is considered ecologically unsustainable and socially unjust. This paradigm encourages a shift in focus, from being fixated on GDP growth to being oriented towards human well-being, social justice, and ecological sustainability that respects planetary boundaries (da Silva Hyldmo et al., 2024).

Key characteristics of the 'post-growth' paradigm include:

- **Focus on Well-being and Quality of Life:** The main goal of development is to improve the holistic well-being of society, not just economic growth (Wang et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2024). This includes dimensions such as health, education, justice, and life satisfaction, as explored in the relationship between perceptions of ecosystem services and farmer well-being in China (Wang et al., 2024) and the relationship between ecosystem services and human well-being on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau (Bærenholdt & Meged, 2023).
- **Ecological Limits:** Acknowledges the existence of planetary boundaries that cannot be exceeded by human activities (Keyßer et al., 2025). Therefore, development must operate within the carrying capacity of ecosystems (Koimtzidis et al., 2025; Shi et al., 2025). Studies on the ecological environment carrying capacity in the Xiong'an New Area (Shi et al., 2025) and the assessment of development patterns and carrying capacity in Greece using night light analysis (Koimtzidis et al., 2025) are examples of this approach.
- **Reduction of Consumption and Production:** Advocates for a selective reduction in consumption and production, especially in wealthy countries, to reduce pressure on the environment (Gossen & Heinrich, 2021). Communication promoting sufficiency and consumption reduction, particularly in the clothing industry, is an important aspect of this approach (Bolaji et al., 2025).
- **Local Resilience and Circular Economy:** Promotes more resilient, diversified, and circular local economies, reducing dependence on global supply chains and unsustainable growth (Kiviaho & Hyyryläinen, 2025). Sustainability transitions in shrinking regions, for example, explore perceived regional opportunity spaces and expectations shaping regional development (Ramcilovic-Suominen et al., 2022).
- **Participatory and Bottom-Up Governance:** Emphasizes the importance of community participation and bottom-up approaches in development planning, giving more power to local communities to shape their future (Alcaide Manthey, 2025; Tafon et al., 2023). Studies on post-growth cities in Germany highlight the role of collaborative governance (Alcaide Manthey, 2025), while stakeholder participation in maritime spatial planning in Latvia is emphasized to achieve justice (Tafon et al., 2023).
- **Social Justice:** Places social justice at the core of development, addressing inequality and ensuring a fair distribution of benefits and burdens (Haseeb et al., 2025). The question of who should bear more responsibility in addressing environmental problems, especially in the context of unequal regional development in Indonesia, becomes relevant here (Antonova et al., 2025).

3. Implikasi dan Tantangan Paradigma 'Pro-Pertumbuhan'

Although the 'pro-growth' paradigm has a track record of success in poverty alleviation and stimulating technological innovation, the literature review also highlights various serious implications and challenges related to its application. These challenges are particularly evident from a long-term perspective and in the context of sustainability.

Key implications and challenges include:

- **Environmental Degradation:** Dependence on unlimited economic growth often leads to excessive exploitation of natural resources, pollution, and biodiversity loss (Getzner et al., 2025; Qi et al., 2022). Unsustainable local land use policies, driven by socio-economic, political, and fiscal factors, contribute to continuous land consumption and land sealing (Paris & Rienow, 2025). The increasing agricultural water scarcity in China due to the expansion of irrigated land in water-scarce areas is a clear example of this impact (Adebayo et al., 2025).
- **Social Inequality:** Economic growth is not always distributed evenly, leading to widening income and wealth gaps at both national and regional levels (Haseeb et al., 2025). A study on unequal regional development in Indonesia suggests that more advanced regions may need to bear greater responsibility in addressing environmental problems (Lao et al., 2025). In Germany, cities facing economic and demographic decline show how growth-based strategies can exacerbate inequality (Alcaide Manthey, 2025).
- **Climate Crisis:** Greenhouse gas emissions generated from growth-based economic activities are a primary driver of global climate change (Driha et al., 2025). Sectors like tourism, while important to the economy, also contribute to carbon emissions, as analyzed in the decomposition and decoupling of carbon emissions in the EU tourism sector (Wellington et al., 2023).
- **Dependence on Fossil Fuels:** The growth model is often tied to fossil fuel consumption, which not only contributes to climate change but also creates economic vulnerability to global energy price fluctuations (Ledari et al., 2023). The development of a water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus model highlights the challenges of resource scarcity and regional development (Tan et al., 2022).
- **Non-Adaptive Planning:** Planning that is too focused on growth may fail to adapt to changing conditions, such as population decline in some regions (Döme & Sigmund, 2025). Thailand highlights how urban planning trapped in the growth paradigm fails to address the phenomenon of shrinking cities (Bamrungkhul & Tanaka, 2023). Similarly, governance in Tokyo faces the challenges of megacity shrinkage (Tateishi et al., 2021).

4. Implications and Challenges of the 'Post-Growth' Paradigm

While offering a vision of more just and sustainable development, the implementation of the 'post-growth' paradigm also faces various substantial implications and challenges.

Key implications and challenges include:

- **Political and Economic Resistance:** Shifting from an ingrained growth model faces strong resistance from established economic interests and political systems oriented towards GDP growth (Machokoto et al., 2023). The Degrowth Pedagogy Framework (DPF) for business schools highlights how growth-dependent sustainability models are still dominant (Liuzzo,

2025). Local land use policies also show how the growth paradigm remains dominant at the local level (Getzner et al., 2025).

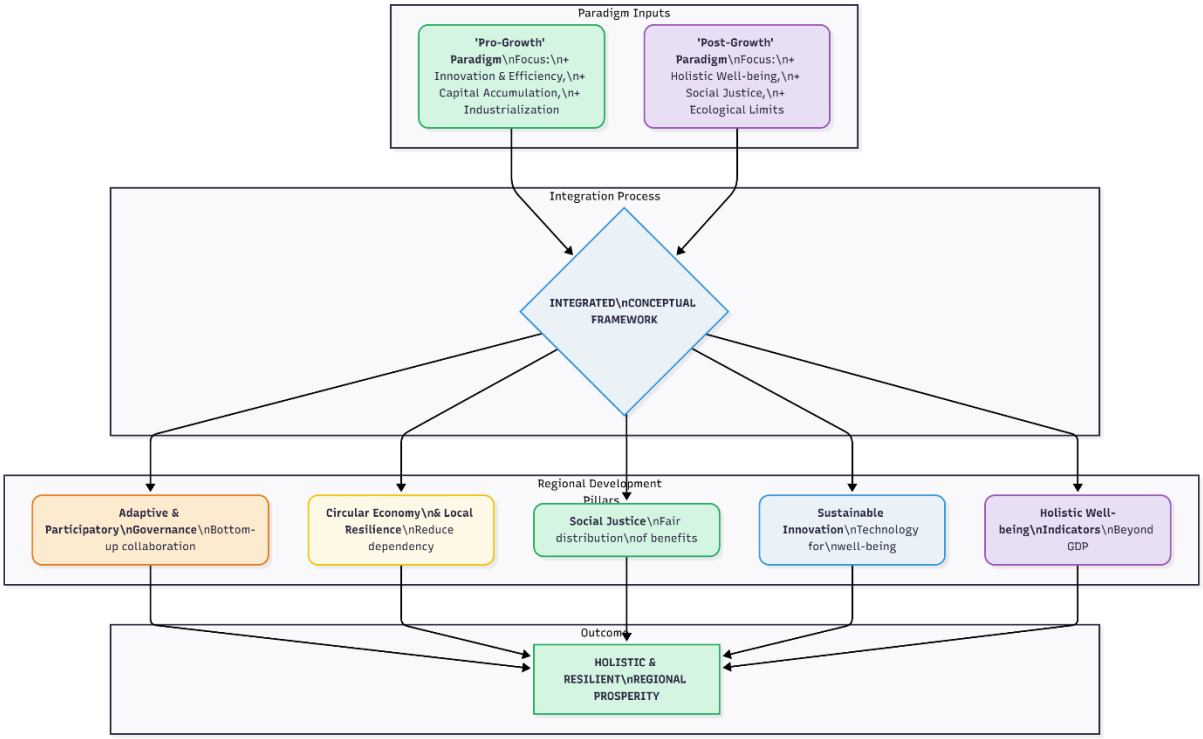
- **Redefining Prosperity:** One of the main challenges is how to redefine prosperity and success beyond traditional economic metrics. This requires profound cultural and social changes (Bagh et al., 2025). Redefining success in organizations moving towards degrowth shows the importance of considering organizational processes and members' needs (Sekulova et al., 2023).
- **Global Justice:** The application of 'post-growth' raises questions about global justice, especially for developing countries that still need growth to overcome poverty (Odei, 2023). Sustainable regional development in sub-Saharan Africa still faces unique challenges and opportunities in the context of economic growth (Paing et al., 2022).
- **Transition Mechanisms:** The transition to a post-growth society requires clear mechanisms and strategies to manage the reduction of production and consumption without causing a recession or mass unemployment (Gugganig, 2025). Studies on sustainability transitions in shrinking regions explore how regional opportunities can shape development (Kiviaho & Hyyryläinen, 2025).
- **Governance and Participation:** Despite emphasizing participation, implementing truly participatory and inclusive governance in regional planning is complex (Tafon et al., 2023). Facilitating civil society participation in regional planning, such as through the quadruple helix model in Finland, shows challenges in collaboration. Similarly, stakeholder participation in maritime spatial planning in Latvia faces challenges in achieving justice (Hnatkovych et al., 2023).
- **New Measurements and Indicators:** New indicators that go beyond GDP are needed to measure progress towards post-growth goals, such as indicators of well-being, ecological resilience, and social justice (P. Huang et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2024).

Table 2. Key Implications and Challenges of Paradigm Application

Paradigm	Identified Key Implications and Challenges
Pro-Growth	• **Environmental Degradation:** Excessive resource exploitation, pollution, and biodiversity loss. • **Social Inequality:** Uneven distribution of economic benefits. • **Climate Crisis:** Greenhouse gas emissions from economic activity. • **Non-Adaptive Planning:** Difficulty responding to the phenomenon of shrinking cities.
Post-Growth	• **Political & Economic Resistance:** Difficulty opposing established interests oriented towards GDP. • **Redefining Prosperity:** Cultural and social challenges in moving away from traditional economic metrics. • **Global Justice Issues:** Questions of how developing countries can overcome poverty without "growth". • **Transition Mechanisms:** Need for strategies to manage consumption reduction without causing recession/unemployment. • **Need for New Indicators:** Requires new measurement tools beyond GDP to track progress.

Source: *Author's Processing, 2025*

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework Diagram (Main Contribution)



Source: *Author's Processing, 2025*

CONCLUSION

This research presents a systematic literature review that explores the debate between the 'pro-growth' and 'post-growth' paradigms in the context of regional development planning. This review also identifies the characteristics, implications, and challenges inherent in both approaches.

Through in-depth analysis, it is concluded that the 'pro-growth' paradigm—which has historically been the pillar of economic development with a focus on GDP, industrialization, and urbanization—now faces sharp criticism. This criticism relates to its role in environmental degradation, social inequality, and its contribution to the climate crisis. The dependence on resource exploitation and the assumption that technological innovation will always be the solution to negative impacts are proven to be no longer sustainable in the long term.

Conversely, the 'post-growth' paradigm offers an alternative vision that prioritizes holistic well-being, social justice, and ecological sustainability within planetary boundaries. This approach calls for selective reduction of consumption and production, building local resilience, and participatory governance. However, its implementation is not without challenges, including political and economic resistance, the need to redefine prosperity, issues of global justice, and the development of new transition mechanisms and indicators that surpass traditional economic metrics.

Overall, the findings of this research confirm that future regional prosperity can no longer be narrowly defined solely by economic growth. Instead, a more integrated approach is now needed, one that recognizes ecological limits and prioritizes human well-being and social justice.

For future research, it is recommended to empirically develop and test this proposed conceptual framework in various regional contexts, especially in developing countries. Future research could also explore practical strategies and innovative policies that can facilitate the

transition from the dominant 'pro-growth' model towards a more sustainable 'post-growth' approach, with a focus on effective governance mechanisms and inclusive community participation.

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