

# International planning for freedom

## Otto Neurath's democratic planning theory in the context of the climate crisis

12–13 June 2023 · Vienna

**Elisabeth Nemeth** is retired Professor of Philosophy at the University of Vienna. Publications related to the subject of the conference include: *Otto Neurath's Economics in Context*, ed. together with S.W. Schmitz & T.E.Uebel, 2007; 'The Philosophy of the "Other Austrian Economics"', in *New Challenges to Philosophy of Science*, ed. H. Andersen et al. (2013); 'Gesellschaftliche Tatbestände sichtbar machen. Neurath über den Gegensatz der Wirtschaftswissenschaft und seine Visualisierung', in *Die Konturen der Welt. Geschichte und Gegenwart visueller Bildung nach Otto Neurath*, ed. G. Waldner (2021).

**Günther Sandner** is a political scientist and historian. He wrote the books *Otto Neurath. Eine politische Biographie* (2014) and *Weltsprache ohne Worte. Rudolf Modley, Margaret Mead und das Glyphs-Projekt* (2022). He co-edited (with Christian Damböck and Meike Werner) *Logical Empiricism, Life Reform, and the German Youth Movement*, and (with Boris Ginner) *Emanzipatorische Bildung. Wege aus der sozialen Ungleichheit* (2021), which was awarded the Bruno Kreisky Prize 2021.

A cooperation between Institute Vienna Circle (University of Vienna), Vienna Circle Society (Vienna), Chamber of Labour (Vienna), FWF Project Isotype: Origin, development, legacy (P31500), Wien Museum.

### Concept of the Conference and Introduction

Only a few years ago it was hardly imaginable that demands for planned economy measures would be raised and publicly discussed again. Now the time has come. Ulrike Herrmann's book *Das Ende des Kapitalismus. Warum Wachstum und Klimaschutz nicht vereinbar sind – und wie wir in Zukunft leben werden* (2022) is a bestseller. Her central thesis is discussed in numerous public media: The transition from growth-dependent capitalism to a social and ecological circular economy will only be possible through a 'private planned economy'.

What she understands by this has striking similarities with the ideas of economic planning that Otto Neurath conceived even before the First World War and continued to develop until the end of his life in 1945. An important point of reference for Neurath was Josef Popper-Lynkeus. The latter justified the demand for overall social planning with a radically individualistic ethic. Seen from today, this combination is surprising and inspiring – not least because Popper-Lynkeus and Neurath were among the first to introduce ecological viewpoints into economics.

A highlight of the conference will be the screening of the film *Land of Promise* (UK 1946). The film was conceived by Neurath as a 'film argument' and directed by Paul Rotha. It argues for combating the housing shortage in post-war England with an extensively planned housing programme. The arguments put forward in the film bear a remarkable resemblance to the arguments Ulrike Herrmann puts forward today for a 'private planned economy' as a transition to a circular economy.

12 June 2023 Arbeiterkammer (Chamber of Labour) Bildungsgebäude, Theresianumgasse 16–18, 1040 Vienna

Please pre-register: <https://veranstaltung.akwien.at/de/arbeiterkammer-wien-international-planning-for-freedom>

13 June 2023 Erika Weinzierl Saal, University of Vienna, Universitätsring 1, 1010 Vienna

Please pre-register: [office.wienerkreis@univie.ac.at](mailto:office.wienerkreis@univie.ac.at)

### Two related events

14 June 2023, 15:00-17:00 Institute Vienna Circle, Philosophy of Science Colloquium: 'Utopianism, Rationality, and Thought Experiments in Viennese Late Enlightenment'. Institut für Philosophie, Neues Institutsgebäude (NIG), Universitätsstraße 7, Lecture Room 2i. <https://philevents.org/event/show/110253>

15–16 June 2023 'The Metrics of Energy: Accounting for Nature in the History of Social Science and Ecological Economics'. International workshop, organised by Anna Echterhölter and Marco Vianna Franco; University of Vienna in cooperation with the Institute for Advanced Studies IHS Vienna.

**Christopher Burke** is a typographer, typeface designer, and design historian. He co-edited Otto Neurath's 'visual autobiography' *From hieroglyphics to Isotype* (2010) and *Isotype: design and contexts, 1925–1971* (2013); and he co-wrote (with Wim Jansen) *Soft propaganda, special relationships, and a new democracy: Adprint and Isotype 1942–1948* (2022).

**Ivan Ferreira da Cunha** is a Professor at the Department of Philosophy of the Federal University of Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil. His research concentrates on philosophy of science, with recent publications on logical empiricism, values, and thought experiments. A recent publication related to our subjects: Linsbichler, Alexander.; da Cunha, Ivan. F., 'Otto Neurath's Scientific Utopianism Revisited: A Refined Model for Utopias in Thought Experiments', *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10838-022-09630-5>

Additional contribution to the panel 'Utopianism, Rationality, and Thought Experiments in Viennese Late Enlightenment' (14 June, 15:00):

### **Otto Neurath's scientific utopianism as thought experimenting**

This paper gives a presentation of Otto Neurath's scientific utopianism as a methodology for thought experimenting in the social sciences. Neurath conceives scientific proposals for the transformation of society in a continuum with the utopian tradition. In this sense, Neurath's utopias can be regarded as centerpieces of thought experiments, opening a new front for contemporary discussions in philosophy of science.

### **Visualizing the welfare state**

Soon after settling at Oxford in 1941, Otto and Marie Neurath became involved in producing films and publications for the British war effort. They contributed animated diagrams to films produced by Paul Rotha, but Otto Neurath also acted as script consultant for the film about worldwide food policy, *World of Plenty* (1943), and his ideas on war economy surface in *Land of Promise* (1945).

The Neuraths established the Isotype Institute in England to continue their work in visual education. Among the publications they visualized during the war was a popular booklet about the Beveridge report on social welfare, produced in several languages. They also contributed to a series of books called 'The new democracy', which reflected the ideas that fed the post-war British welfare state.

### **Imagination in Neurath's planning for freedom: thought experiments in urbanism**

Otto Neurath advances that in a democratic, non-technocratic, perspective of planning it is important to inform and educate people, so that the relevant decisions can be taken by the interested community. Political decisions, claims Neurath, are outside of the scope of experts. This stance derives from Neurath's epistemology of science, according to which practical directions cannot be determined by scientific knowledge. Hence the ideal situation is one in which non-experts have enough knowledge of the available plans so as to be able to discuss future paths with one another and with experts and then to make *informed decisions* in regard to the plans presented. In 'International Planning for Freedom' (1942), Neurath observes that this democratic model might seem less efficient than one in which decisions are taken by experts in function of some systematic optimum standard. In spite of that, he argues that muddled decisions present a better outlook in the long run, as communities take a leading role in the planning process. Yet, there is another sense in which information and education are important in the process of planning and deciding, that of fueling imagination. Neurath points in that direction in 'Foundations of the Social Sciences' (1944), when he claims that a serious obstacle to engineering is the limitation to invent and imagine possible solutions to given puzzles. Also, in 'Die Utopie als gesellschaftstechnische Konstruktion' (1919), Neurath argues that a situation should be avoided in which people get attached to one single plan, instead of discussing and comparing groups of plans. Such passages imply that Neurath sees the need for creativity in planning – in the social-scientific effort to improve society that Neurath calls 'scientific utopianism'. Hence, in the Neurathian conception of planning, community education is important not only for informed decisions to be made, but also for the development of an informed or educated imaginative habit. However, Neurath does not elaborate much on how imagination can be educated for planning, except in the sense that the input of factual information can make it more effective. A more concrete perspective can be found in Jane Jacobs's famous *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). Similarly to Neurath, she maintains that (urban) planning must give room for people's spontaneity. To do that, she presents a variety of examples of existing urban arrangements that were the result of planning, but that did not function as intended. Beyond the recognition of past failures and successes, the aim of her examples is that

the reader acquires a habit of seeing the present as a result of past planning efforts and thus of imagining the future from present plans. In other words, Jacobs's examples invite for thought experimenting with urban planning. By connecting Neurath's proposals to Jacobs's, this talk hopes to contribute to the understanding of the role imagination plays in Neurath's conception of planning.

**Hans Joachim Dahms**, born 1946 in Lemgo (Lippe, BRD) studied philosophy, general and comparative linguistics and sociology in Göttingen. He was involved in a number of research projects in Göttingen, Munich and most recently in Vienna at the Institut Wiener Kreis until 2011. In addition to c.90 essays on the history of philosophy, science and universities (including several on Otto Neurath), he has published, among others: *Positivismusstreit. Die Auseinandersetzungen der Frankfurter Schule mit dem logischen Positivismus, dem amerikanischen Pragmatismus und dem kritischen Rationalismus* (1994; spanish translation 2023) and as editor and co-author: *Philosophie, Wissenschaft, Aufklärung. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Wirkung des Wiener Kreises* (1985); and *Die Universität Göttingen unter dem Nationalsozialismus* (1987, 2. erw. Ausgabe 1998).

**Michelle Henning** is Professor of Photography and Media at the University of Liverpool, and co-director of the Centre for Culture and Everyday Life. She has written on Neurath in many essays and articles including: 'Living Life in Pictures: Isotype as Modernist Cultural Practice' in *New Formations* 70 (2011); 'Neurath's Whale' in Sam Alberti (ed.) *The Afterlives of Animals* (2011); 'Isotype and Elephants: Picture Language as Visual Writing in the Work and Correspondence of Otto Neurath', in Susan Harrow (ed.) *The Art of the Text* (2012) and 'Of Tennis Courts and Fireplaces: Neurath's internment on the Isle of Man and his Politics of Design' in Jordi Cat & Adam Tamas Tuboly (ed.) *Neurath Reconsidered* (2018).

## Otto Neurath's vision of a planned world economy

In Summer 1931 a Conference 'World Social Economic Planning: the Necessity for Planned Adjustment of Productive Capacity and Standards of Living' was held in Amsterdam, in order to discuss the necessity and the social consequences of a possible introduction of a planned economy, as it was done in the Soviet Union. In his capacity as director of the Viennese Social and Economic Museum, Neurath gave a lengthy presentation 'The current growth in global productive capacity'. He developed the vision of a planned world economy (as a self-confessed 'social engineer,' he expressly avoided the term 'utopia'). This system should avoid the crises inherent in capitalism with all their effects like mass unemployment, hunger and death, as well as the waste of human and natural resources during periods of 'normal' development. Several areas of the world were singled out to perform specific functions for this type of economy (like later at CIAM IV in Athens in 1933 on a minor scale the functional urban planning ideas developed with Neurath's aid). After sketching and discussing this vision, I try to answer very briefly two questions:

1. in which respects has the globalized world economy developed without such overall plans since 1931 in the direction of Neurath's functional ideas?
2. Would Neurath's system have advantages nowadays for confronting man-made climate change?

## Planning for happiness

This paper looks at various well-being and happiness projects launched by the British Government in the 2000s and 2010s. This period saw growing social inequalities and the expansion of a consumer logic into education and politics through projects that were really little more than consumer satisfaction surveys. By looking at Otto Neurath's work on happiness and the standard of living, particularly in the context of wartime Britain, where he was held up as a 'sociologist of happiness' who would help to 'make Britain happy' after the sufferings of the war, and where he was part of a larger planning movement. I want to expose how the twenty-first-century technocratic attempts to survey well-being and happiness were shackled with the assumptions of the Hayekian economics that Neurath argued against. I draw attention instead to the particular approach to planning that Neurath proposed, and try to show how it can still be used to challenge contemporary approaches. Neurath's work suggests that planning for happiness is the only kind of planning worth its salt, but it can only work as a decentralized, inexhaustive process, where there is the political will to reject the idea of the free market as a means for and measure of the pursuit of individual pleasure, to challenge flawed 'atomistic, utilitarian' economics and 'technocratic' solutions, and to see happiness in the context of everyday life, as a goal which is much greater than mere consumer satisfaction.

**Ortrud Leßmann** is an economist by training. Her research interests lie in the overlap of economics, sociology, philosophy and political science. She has worked on poverty measurement, sustainable development, socio-economic reporting and labour standards. Currently she holds a position at the German Youth Institute monitoring the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee in Germany.

**Alexander Linsbichler** is a philosopher of science and mathematical logician. As Principal Investigator of the FWF ESPRIT Project *Adverse Allies: Logical Empiricism and Austrian Economics*, he investigates the significance of these two intellectual movements for the sciences, philosophy, and politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Articles relevant to the conference include 'Rationalities and their Limits' (2021), 'Otto Neurath and Ludwig Mises: Philosophy, Politics, and Economics in Viennese Late Enlightenment' (2022), and 'Jan Tinbergen and the Rise of Technocracy' (2023). An English edition of Alexander's latest book *Viel mehr als nur Ökonomie* (2022) will be published in 2024.

**John O'Neill** is Professor of Political Economy at Manchester. He has written widely on philosophy, political economy and the environment. This has included a number of papers and chapters on the Neurath's philosophy and political economy. His books include *Markets, Deliberation and Environment* (Routledge, 2007). *The Market: Ethics, Knowledge and Politics* (Routledge, 1998) and *Ecology, Policy and Politics: Human Well-Being and the Natural World* (Routledge, 1993). He is co-author of *Environmental Values* (Routledge, 2008) with Alan Holland and Andrew Light.

## **Planning for freedom by SDG indicators and the multidimensional poverty index?**

Evidence based policy has become an ideal in politics and policy advising. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals can be seen as an example of this trend. A framework of 231 indicators has been developed 'to monitor progress, inform policy and ensure accountability of all stakeholders'. In a similar vein the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) has introduced its 'Multidimensional Poverty Index' (MPI) and convinced many governments around the world to collect data and calculate the MPI showing the various aspects of poverty. Despite all these efforts to base policy on more and broader data, the dominant indicator of economic development – GDP – prevails. Neurath recognized many of the problems of planning in kind that still effectively block its use.

## **Introduction to the panel 'Utopianism, rationality, and thought experiments in Viennese Late Enlightenment' (14 June · 15:00)**

The panel highlights and critically discusses ideas of the two most prominent protagonists of scientific utopianism in Viennese Late Enlightenment: Otto Neurath and Josef Popper-Lynkeus. Particular attention will be paid to the following themes:

1. Neurath's and (to a lesser degree) Popper-Lynkeus's epistemology invokes a cautionary notion of rationality.
2. Neurath's notion of rationality and his strict empiricism inspire a constructive refinement of Häggqvist's template for thought experiment in contemporary philosophy of thought experiments.
3. Popper-Lynkeus's social program pioneers topical issues such as calculation-in-kind and universal basic income.

## **Neurath in Manchester: planning, participation and human well-being**

This paper will examine Neurath's collaboration with Paul Rotha on the film commissioned by Manchester City Council, *A City Speaks*. The top-down approach to urban planning in the film contrasts with Neurath's own more participatory approach to urban planning developed in Red Vienna and later in the UK in his involvement with Bilston. The contrast is evident in differences between the approach to urban planning in *A City Speaks* and that in their other collaboration, *Land of Promise*. At the same time, the film highlights potential limitations of Isotypes in urban planning, in particular in how far they can capture the social factors that shape how changes to the physical landscape convert into changes in well-being. A comparison with Neurath's and Sen's accounts of well-being reveals both Neurath's sensitivity to such conversion factors and limits of Isotype in capturing them.



**Thomas E. Uebel** is Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the University of Manchester. He published widely on the history of analytical philosophy and the history of philosophy of science, specializing in logical empiricism and the work of the left Vienna Circle. He edited (with R.S. Cohen) *Neurath's Economic Writings* (2004) and (with E. Nemeth and S.W. Schmitz) *Otto Neurath's Economics in Context* (2007); most recently he edited (with C. Limbeck-Lilienau) *The Routledge Handbook of Logical Empiricism* (2022).

**Troy Vettese** is an environmental historian who specializes in environmental economics, animal studies, and energy history. In 2019 he completed his doctorate in history at New York University. From 2019 to 2021, he worked at Harvard University as a William Lyon Mackenzie King postdoctoral research fellow. He has collaborated with Drew Pendergrass, an environmental engineer, on numerous projects including *Half-Earth Socialism* (Verso 2022).

**Marco P. Vianna Franco** is an ecological economist and historian of economics working mainly on the history and philosophy of ecological economics. He obtained his PhD from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (Brazil). He is a former postdoctoral fellow at the Konrad Lorenz Institute for Evolution and Cognition Research and an affiliated researcher at the Institute for Multilevel Governance and Development at the Vienna University of Economics and Business. He is co-author with Antoine Missemer of *A History of Ecological Economic Thought* (Routledge, 2023), in which a chapter is dedicated to Neurath and Popper-Lynkeus. For a related article, see: 'The Factual Nature of Resource Flow Accounting in the Calculation in Kind of the "Other Austrian Economics"', *Æconomia: History, Methodology, Philosophy* (2020).

## **Another deal gone down: the curious career of K. P. Hensel's refutation of L. v. Mises' dismissal of calculation in kind**

In 1955 K. W. Kapp, a pioneer of ecological economics, drew attention to what amounted to a refutation of L.v. Mises' claim that without money and market prices it was impossible to establish an economy that made efficient use of its resources by K. P. Hensel, a German economist, in his habilitation-dissertation of 1954. One might be forgiven for expecting this counterargument to be discussed or at least to receive an honourable mention in histories of the socialist calculation debate but that is not the case. This talk will present Hensel's argument, discuss its contemporary reception and speculate on its fate.

## **An environmental theorist despite himself**

Otto Neurath was not an environmental theorist, but he can be made into one. This essay cautions against exaggerating Neurath's environmental interests, much like some ecosocialists have sought to overlook Karl Marx's deep-rooted anthropocentrism. In his exchange with Mises, Neurath discussed the aesthetic, not ecological qualities of a waterfall. Similarly, when Neurath suggested how to exhibit a whale in a natural history museum, he was interested in its economic, not ecological value (as he bluntly put it, 'everything leads to men and society'). Yet, as it is the case with Marx, we can use Neurath's logic against himself. Neurath argued that scientific knowledge would never be complete, but always in flux, like remaking a ship while sailing. This limit on scientific knowledge should have led Neurath to reimagine what the humanization of nature would look like if it were to always remain unfinished. Furthermore, Neurath positioned himself within the tradition of utopian socialism, which was led by many animal liberationists (e.g., Percy Bysshe Shelley and Robert Owen). Yet, Neurath's planning theory did lend itself to include environmental considerations. This is manifest with William Kapp's critique of 'social cost' (1950), Juan Martinez Alier (1992), and more recently in my collaborative research on 'half-earth socialism'. In short, this paper argues for a critical, but creative use of Neurath's framework to construct an ecosocialist planning theory commensurate with the environmental and economic crises of the present.

## **Josef Popper-Lynkeus's utopian social program as universal basic income**

Contribution to the panel 'Utopianism, Rationality, and Thought Experiments in Viennese Late Enlightenment' (14 June)

The paper will present Josef Popper-Lynkeus's utopian social program as a peculiar form of universal basic income and discuss the underlying ethics which centers on the right to live and which Popper-Lynkeus claims to be rational and objective. Popper-Lynkeus's contribution to debates on in-kind accounting and provisioning systems bears broader implications for social and environmental issues in contemporary economic and political thinking.