

# Sustainability Beyond Growth

## Paths Towards a Social & Ecological Transformation

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*International Stakeholder Dialogue Growth in Transition –  
Sustainable Economic and Social Concepts*

# 0. Structure

1. Sustainability **and** Growth
2. Sustainability **or** Growth? Crisis and critique
3. Sustainability **beyond** growth: crisis as a chance for transformation
4. Challenges for a social and ecological transformation





# 1. Sustainability and Growth

## → Structural role of economic growth in modern societies:

- ▶ Securing & Increasing Prosperity (social mobility)
- ▶ Dynamic Stabilization by growth
- ▶ Political Stability and social pacification (reduction of social conflicts --> bigger cake)
- ▶ Poverty Reduction & employment creation (a rising float..)
- ▶ Technological Innovation --> Green Technologies

## → Sustainable Development: an impossible theorem

→ Green Economy: the great betrayal

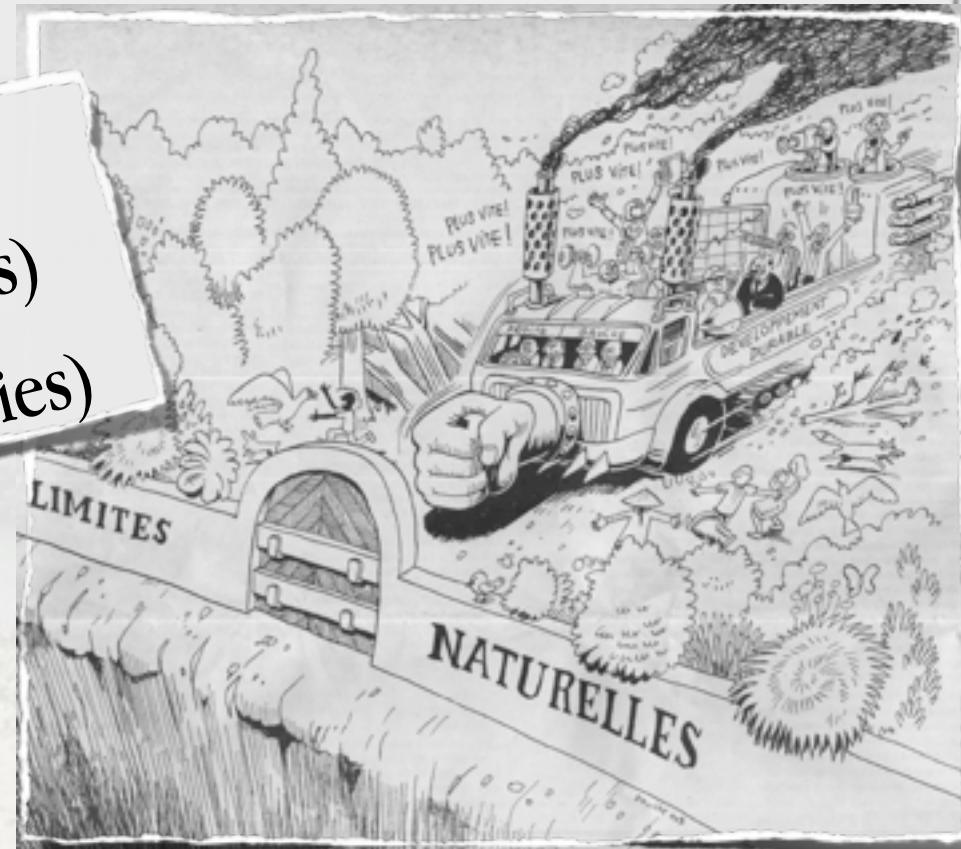


## 2. Sustainability or Growth

### Crisis of Growth

- ▶ Dynamic reproduction of modern Welfare States by means of growth:
- ▶ Logic of expansion & intensification to keep it going
- ▶ **immanent contradiction** --> undermines its own condition of reproduction

- ▶ **External limits** to growth
- ▶ ecological (resources & sinks)
- ▶ social limits (affluent societies)





## 2. Sustainability or Growth: Crisis....

### Growth at any cost? From means to goal

- ▶ Debts (private & public) → speculation
- ▶ Environmental degradation → w 'territories' (national parks, natural reserves...)
- ▶ Increasing environmental conflicts → bigger infrastructures (dams, highways, airports)
- ▶ Increasing willingness to take risks (engineering, waste dumps)

increasing inequality & poverty

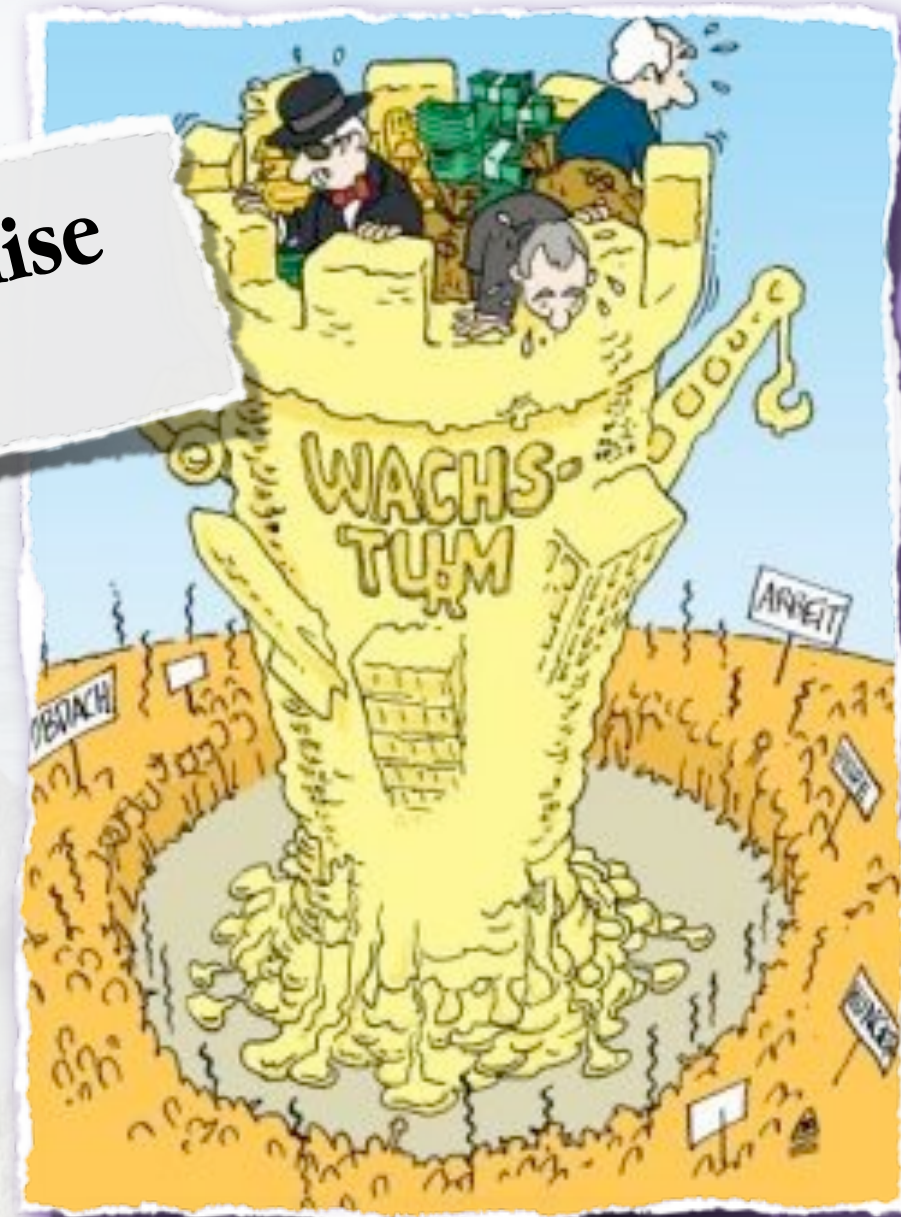
environmental degradation  
increasing environmental  
conflicts

environmental racism  
neo-extractivism

▶ Austerity politics: winners & losers after growth?

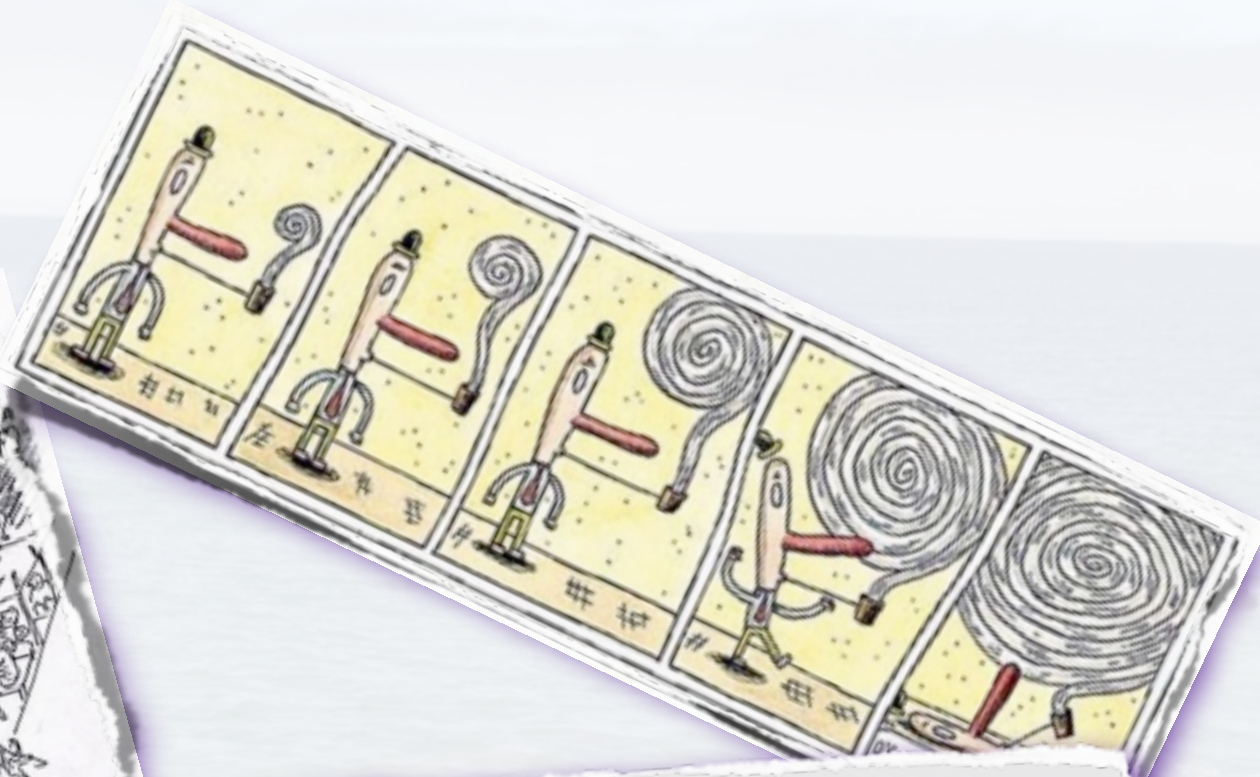
## 2. Sustainability or Growth: ... & Critique

The fundament is shaking: promise of growth no longer holds





## 2. Sustainability or Growth: ... & Critique



### Socio-cultural critique:

- ▶ Satiation in affluent societies:
- ▶ Creating new needs & dependencies:
- ▶ **emancipation --> alienation!**



## 2. Sustainability or Growth: ... & Critique



Environmental consequences -->  
intragenerational and intergenerational  
**Justice**

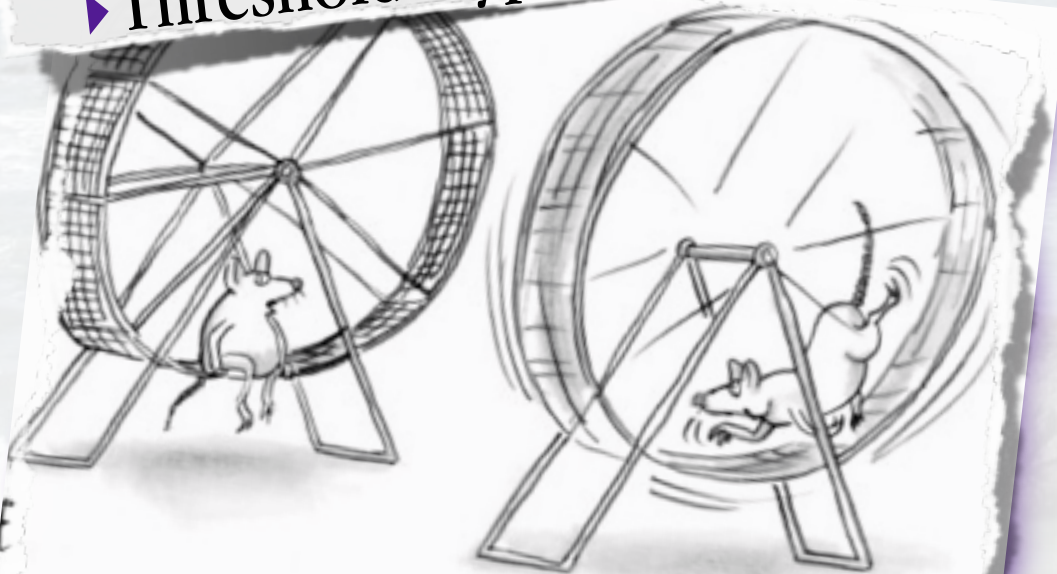
Growth does no longer automatically  
lead to employment (**jobless growth**)





## 2. Sustainability or Growth: ... & Critique

- ▶ **Decoupling** growth  $\leftrightarrow$  happiness/ quality of life:
  - ▶ Treadmills: positional competition, acceleration
  - ▶ Threshold Hypothesis



*"I had an epiphany."*



# 3. Sustainability beyond Growth: Chance

- ➔ **The end of 'easy' growth is approaching: either as a **destiny** in terms of recession, stagnation, authoritarianism...**
  - ▶ When growth-based society stops growing --> Crisis, destabilization
  - ▶ Inequality, injustice, & crisis of democracy,
  - ▶ Redistribution from bottom to top --> few revenues growing + majority destitution & impoverishment --> exacerbation of the ecological crisis!
  
- ➔ **... or we actively start **designing** a just & participatory society free from the addiction to and the reliance upon growth!**
  - ▶ Radical transformation of basis institutions
  - ▶ Long term transformation of our 'Social Imaginary' (*Metanoia*)



# 4. Challenges for a social ecological transformation

## Structural & Institutional Level:

- ▶ Economic Relations
- ▶ Institutional Settings

## Social Imaginary & cultural patterns:

- ▶ Justification background for practices, actions, & institutions
  - ▶ Creative, long-term process --> concrete Utopias as education of desire
- ▶ Good life as a collective, political project --> citizens  $\neq$  consumers
- ▶ Patterns of recognition --> participation

## Practices & Agency

- ▶ Individual, collective, & communal actions with long-term impact
  - ▶ experimenting & stabilizing novelty --> subversive potential
- ▶ Exploring alliances for a change



# 4. Challenges for a socio-ecological transformation

## Enabling democracy & participation:

- ▶ formal rights
- ▶ securing substantial & material conditions
- ▶ access to basic services
- ▶ reducing inequality --> maximum 'fair income'; ...

## Politics of Time and Work

- ▶ Decoupling revenue & access to basic services from income & work (UBE; DIA)
- ▶ New politics of time --> redistribution of care; life time accounts; socially meaningful activities; ...
- ▶ de-intensification; de-precarization; redistribution of work & other activities



# 4. Challenges for a socio-ecological transformation

## Reorganizing production:

- ▶ Fostering cooperation  $\neq$  competition
- ▶ Economic democracy --> democratic **participation** in shaping modes of production and consumption
- ▶ Support to & coordination of local production structures (cooperatives; solidarity economy, CSA, GAS) --> EU quality standards???
- ▶ Transforming agriculture (GAT; urban gardening; innovation; resilience; food sovereignty; peasantry; ...)
- ▶ Regional closure of bioeconomical & production cycles

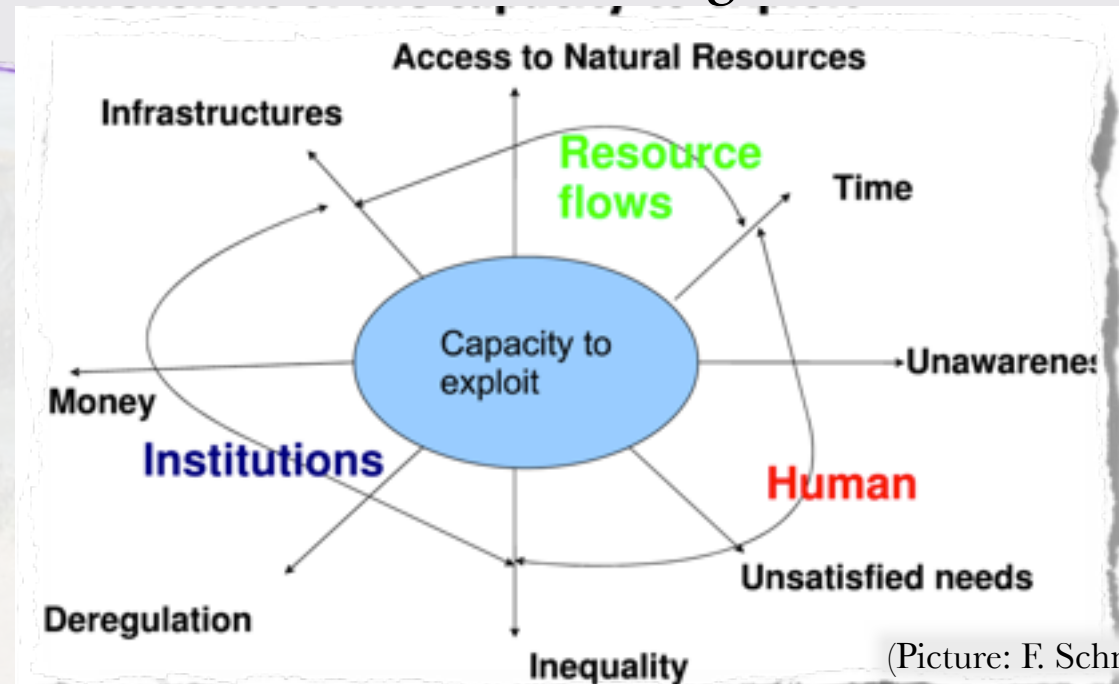
- ▶ Qualitative **diversification** of production on a local scale ( $\neq$  allocation through markets)
- ▶ Regulation: in-built-obsolescence; waste management
- ▶ Explicit and intentional generation of positive social externalities



# 4. Challenges for a socio-ecological transformation

## Reorganizing innovation & infrastructures:

- ▶ Convivial technologies & innovations (for the common good - viable - small scale - low-risk - empowering  $\neq$  reenforcing dependencies (see: EU-bioeconomy strategy?? Geo-engineering??)
- ▶ Alternative infrastructures  $\neq$  growth expansion strategies (reducing capacity to exploit) --> maintenance, conviviality, sharing
- ▶ Regulation/ taxation/ limitation of expenditures in marketing and advertising



(Picture: F. Schneider)



# 4. Challenges for a socio-ecological transformation

## Reorganizing education:

- ▶ Inter- & Transdisciplinarity beyond immediate operationalization  
≠ Horizon 2020
- ▶ Focus on value-oriented & value-orienting knowledge
- ▶ practical skills --> self-production & solidarity

## 'Sufficiency' as a political claim:

- ▶ Right to have less, to be slower without having to suffer a significant impairment of the possibilities to lead a good human life
- ▶ Acting against systemic drivers & social constraints for recklessness, squandering, & limitless accumulation





**Thank you  
for your attention**

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# Dimensions of the capacity to exploit

Access to Natural Resources

