What Europe needs is a Sustainability and Wellbeing Pact

The echo from the streets of Europe and beyond is 'system change, not climate change'. When climate activist Greta Thunberg met European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, she told him to talk to the experts, but what should they say?

We, system change experts from academia, civil society and cities, have some answers. Last autumn, a group of <u>238 scientists</u> and <u>90.000 citizens</u> asked for an end to Europe's growth dependency and at a <u>Growth in Transition</u> conference in Vienna we made this more concrete. We look beyond increasing GDP towards a positive plan for a post-growth economy.

Our three key leverage points on HOW to launch a transition towards a thriving society within planetary boundaries advise policy-makers at European, national, regional and municipal levels on ways to confront the still worsening triple crisis of climate change, mass extinction and inequality.

Let's be honest. Neither the Paris Agreement nor the Aichi Biodiversity Targets nor the current tax regimes are capable of dealing with these existential threats. As a group of scientists <u>just wrote in Science</u>: "The current measures for protecting the climate and biosphere are deeply inadequate".

Deep changes are not only needed, but also wanted. A recent and massive poll taken all over Europe showed that <u>a majority of Europeans now consider that the environment should be a priority even at the expense of growth</u>.

Broad agreement was found on three major systemic changes. These three leaps are not excluding other solutions, but they all three are urgent, possible, needed, wanted and game-changing. They do require a visionary mindset and a can-do attitude. They require a mindshift away from incremental thinking, the mindset that has brought us to this point of crisis.

1) Dethrone King GDP, crown Queen WELLBEING

People want to thrive in a living world. Policies catering to GDP growth often sacrifice people and planet alike, while policies towards well-being help us heal.

Prosperity without growth is possible. Growth by over-exploitation of resources, safety shortcuts and pollution drive both people and planet to burnouts. Examples from Bhutan to New Zealand and Barcelona show that putting social and environmental progress *before* GDP really works.

Demands to the European Commission:

- Turn the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) into a Sustainability and Wellbeing Pact (SWP).
- Change from "Jobs, growth and investment" to "Wellbeing, jobs and sustainability"
- Establish a DG for Wellbeing and Future Generations led by the first vice-president

Demands to countries, regions and municipalities:

Create a wellbeing and future generations portfolio at the heart of governance

2) From TAX HAVENS for the few to REDISTRIBUTION for the many

Tax wealth more and labour less. Tax pollution progressively and stop subsidizing it.

Two post-war decades of +-90% top income tax rates in US & UK became a rate (far) under 50% now. Most EU countries followed, leaving the rich off the hook. As a result, inequality has been rising

steadily and a growing feeling of (tax) injustice has spilled into social unrest and populism. The Gilets Jaunes uprising in France showed that you can't tax pollution without a fair taxation system. Subsidies supporting pollution and resource overuse need to end immediately and pollution/carbon taxes must be used to promote welfare for the poorest.

Demands:

- Set top income tax rates above 80% for redistribution to low- & middle-income families.
- Tax air travel for redistribution to better and low to zero-cost public transport¹.
- Launch progressive carbon and resource taxes at the source and redistribute.
- Provide tax incentives for the use of recycled materials.

3) EFFICIENT products are good, SUFFICIENT solutions are great

Efficiency gains are important, but only the beginning of the solution

Social and cultural exclusion can undo efficiency gains. We don't need to sell more products, we need sufficient solutions that are long-lasting. Some companies already sell the service of having light, instead of the product of a light bulb, reversing the incentive from planned obsolescence to long lasting products. Barcelona's zero-waste strategy includes advanced separate waste collection systems with smart waste containers to identify users and reduce residual waste as well as boost biowaste catchment – going much further than awareness raising, prevention, and support for reuse.

Demands:

- Support the development of better business models like the product-service economy.
- Implement zero waste strategies at all governance levels following the waste management hierarchy for operations and extended producers' responsibility schemes.
- Decrease the VAT on labour-intensive services such as repairing.
- Leap from efficiency to sufficiency policies to make sustainable lifestyles the default.

The six first signatories drafted this letter. All signatories come from academia, civil society and city governments

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¹ With Luxembourg making all public transport free (https://bit.ly/2UjEaJ1) there are now at least 100 fare-free public transport networks around the world, 58 in Europe (https://bit.ly/2QPyoMQ)

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