

THE VIENNA VEHICLES

HOW to transition towards thriving within planetary boundaries

Systemic thinkers from civil society, academia, business and cities talked at the 'Growth in Transition' Vienna conference on key leverage points for a positive post-growth economy. These "Vienna Vehicles" advise policy-makers at European, national, regional and municipal levels on ways to confront the still worsening crisis of climate change, mass extinction and inequality'. Neither the Paris Agreement nor the Aichi Biodiversity Targets nor the current tax regimes truly deal with the challenges we face. The Vienna Vehicles are bold shifts. Other big measures are not excluded, but these leaps are urgent, possible and game-changing. ⁱⁱ They require a visionary mindset beyond the incremental thinking. This is what making a leap looks like.

1) Dethrone King GDP, crown Queen WELL-BEING

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 municipalities show that putting social and environmental indicators *before* GDP really works.

Demands to the European Commission:

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

Demands to countries, regions and municipalities:

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

2) TAX PARADISES for the few? 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 rises and a growing feeling of (tax) injustice spills 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.

Demands:

- 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 transport^{iv}.
- 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. *Example:* Signify offers light instead of light bulbs, reversing the incentive from planned obsolescence to long lasting products. *Example:* 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 – thus going further than awareness raising, prevention, and support for reuse.

Demands:

- Support the development of better business models like the product-service economy.
- 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 6 original signatories come from civil society, big city government and academia:

Halliki Kreinin, Research Assistant, Institute for Ecological Economics, Vienna University of Economics and Business

Kate Raworth, Author of Doughnut Economics

Maria Langsenlehner, Project Associate, EU-Umweltbüro

Nick Meynen, Policy Officer Environmental and Economic justice, European Environmental Bureau

Patrick ten Brink, EU Policy Director, European Environmental Bureau

Toni Ribas Bravo, Ecology Group Coordinator, Barcelona en Comú

i We are losing the battle on climate change: <https://bit.ly/2BW37Dy>

We are in the sixth mass extinction event: <https://bit.ly/2tAWr9H>

We are experiencing fast rising inequality in Europe and US: <https://bit.ly/2Po7ieM>

ii We could add citizenship versus consumerism, financing the future, leveraging away the lock-ins, making the work-life balance norms sustainable, derail deregulation because laws aren't passed to burden business pockets, but to protect people and planet etc.

iii This was a demand by 238 academics published in 40 media across the EU and turned into a petition that gathered nearly 100.000 signatures: wemove.eu/postgrowth

iv 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>)