



New Energy For Europe

For a new Europe within
planetary boundaries and
for collective wellbeing

zerowasteurope.eu

The energy crisis laid bare a need for a new compass for European integration

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 acted as a catalyst to unleash the current energy and, to some extent, the price crisis by further disrupting various value chains. Yet the underlying fact that is laid bare is that Europe has exhausted the economic and political model built after World War II.

The energy crisis is just one more symptom to add to current heat waves, pandemics, biodiversity loss, reduced soil fertility, and droughts - they are all the result of consuming beyond the boundaries of our ecosystem. In fact, Europe's and the world's malaise is the same: our addiction to energy-intensive and environmentally hostile production and consumption models is killing us (and life on the planet) and contributing to increasing inequalities.

An economic model based on linear production and consumption with decreasing energy returns on investment, financed by ever-growing debt, is set to collapse. The above-mentioned symptoms signal the system's exhaustion. The era of unrestrained consumption is about to end. We just cannot afford it, and neither does the planet.

Europe is consuming way beyond planetary boundaries. An average European consumes the equivalent of 2 to 3 planets. If the laws of physics continue to apply, we are due for a rationalisation of consumption around the world, regardless of the outcome of the war in Ukraine.

The longer we maintain the current stage of ecological overshoot, the more we will degrade our ecosystems and the harder it will be to find a solution. This is why Europe must seize this opportunity to change course.

In order to provide peace and prosperity after WWII, European integration has used consumption-driven economic growth as its main compass. Ongoing events show that this model no longer provides prosperity, peace, or equality for all.

The European project has run out of gas and needs new instruments to move forward. We propose that, instead of aiming to repair a broken system, the EU launches a new compass for European integration based on resilience, sufficiency, and wellbeing for all. A just and inclusive Europe built on respect for ecological limits and human rights.



Wellbeing

While there is not consensus around a single definition of wellbeing, we consider wellbeing to encompass people's experience of positive emotions as well as their socio-economic situation, following the wellbeing framework developed by the OECD¹. The OECD framework measures wellbeing based on eleven topics: income; jobs; housing; health; access to services; environment; education; safety; civic engagement and governance; community; and life satisfaction.



Sufficiency

Sufficiency refers to the policies and daily practices that avoid demand for energy, materials, land, and water while delivering human wellbeing within planetary boundaries. This is important in order to reduce the "rebound effect" - or Jevons paradox² - so that, when we gain efficiency somewhere, we don't use what is saved to increase environmental impact somewhere else. For instance: the energy use in housing in Europe has gone down thanks to energy saving appliances and insulation; yet those savings in disposable income have been used to increase emissions elsewhere. We need absolute decoupling without outsourcing.



Resilience

Resilience is the ability of a system and its component parts to anticipate, absorb, accommodate, or recover from the effects of a hazardous event in a timely and efficient manner - including ensuring the preservation, restoration, or improvement of its essential basic structures and functions.

Note: OECD wellbeing framework. Sufficiency and resilience definitions based on IPCC.

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/wise/measuring-wellbeing-and-progress.htm>

² Named after the English economist William Stanley Jevons, this paradox refers to a situation in which, as technological advancements increase the efficiency of used resources, the use of those same resources can increase instead of decreasing.

2

Building a new European project based on wellbeing, sufficiency, and resilience

Waste is the prime example of badly managed resources and energy. Using scarce, expensive resources and energy to produce what is quickly going to become waste, when alternatives exist to avoid it, has always been reckless. Today, it is suicidal.

High energy prices make extraction, production, and recycling more expensive; and, as a result, former levels of consumption quickly become unaffordable.

Yet linear models of production and consumption are being subsidised at the European and national levels, adding to our colossal public debt — a burden we are foisting onto future generations — whereas real long-term solutions continue to be ignored or, at best, underinvested in. It is despairing to see how incineration plants are receiving tax exemptions for generating the most carbon-intensive source of energy, whereas companies working on resource optimisation and reuse (also causing energy savings/preservation) are having to close down due to a lack of legal certainty and financial support.

European and national governments are failing their citizens by pursuing both unrealistic and unscientific policies which cannot work. This destroys trust in traditional politics and pushes people to look for solutions in far-right parties, which in turn endangers the very core of our democratic models as well as the European project.

The real way to reduce exposure to high prices and instability, deliver on the climate commitments, and support peace and prosperity for all is to avoid unnecessary extraction, production, and recycling of products and packaging that are not crucial to increase wellbeing, sufficiency, and resilience.

This can be done by rationalising our energy use through the prevention of production/ use of products, goods, packaging wherever possible; and by preserving embedded energy via:

- Well-designed, affordable and reusable packaging;
- More durable and repairable products;
- More sustainable food production (focusing on local products and seasonality; reducing the consumption of meat and dairy products, ensuring accessibility and affordability for all); and,
- As a last resort, closed-loop toxic-free recycling.

We can't recycle our way out of this crisis, but we can prevent it from getting worse and eventually reverse the situation — but only if we rethink our objectives and tools.

Circularity and decarbonisation are insufficient to provide for wellbeing, sufficiency, and resilience — let alone to meet the climate objectives and advance social justice. Yet, there is just not enough oil and resources to continue the current trend, even if we achieve full circularity and decarbonisation. The future of Europe depends on the way we rethink our relationship with energy and resources.

“The planet provides enough for everyone’s need, but not for everyone’s greed.”

The old Gandhi quote seems to only increase its relevance as time passes.

Some facts about today:



About **20%** of **food production** in Europe is **wasted**³



Textile garments are worn for **36% less time** than 15 years before⁴



Over **90%** of **packaging** becomes **waste** after only one use⁵



Most **cars** are used **less than 10%** of the time, wasting space and resources⁶



Chemical pollution has **halved fertility rates** in the last half-century⁷

At the same time, people in Europe work more hours for less money, happiness rates have stagnated or gone down, and inequalities have increased.

The list can go on and on, but the point is clear: **there is no “business as usual” worth going back to.**

The story of humankind is a story of a fight for resources. As access to resources gets more difficult, tensions between countries will only grow and the more vulnerable communities will be hit the hardest. Europe has to prepare for this scenario by building sufficiency and resilience inside the continent, and by leading by example.

Our ideal is a world where resources are shared instead of fought for; yet given the current global governance — or, rather, lack thereof — things are likely to get worse before they get better. However, it is in everybody’s interest to have countries become more self-sufficient and resilient. **Proving the success of a different model of consumption and a socially and ecologically just economy, capable of encompassing increased wellbeing with sufficiency and resilience, is the best contribution that Europe can give to the world.**

We ask European and national policy-makers to dare to change a broken system that is only delivering frustration, violence, inequalities, discrimination, and decadence for a new one that can provide hope, peace, prosperity, equality, and justice to all. After all, this was what the European Union was set up to achieve.

The Paris agreements indirectly set a cap on the carbon budget for the EU; respecting it not only requires carbon neutrality and circularity, but also a reduction in resource consumption. **Given the system’s boundaries, rationalising resource consumption can happen by design or by collapse. The current unfortunate circumstances offer the EU the possibility to increase wellbeing and resilience whilst downsizing the economy in an organised way.**

Europe has enough resources to provide for everyone’s needs, but not for everyone’s greed. Europe can get organised to ensure health, education, housing, food, and mobility are provided for everyone – just not with the current system.

3 <https://www.eu-fusions.org/phocadownload/Publications/Estimates%20of%20European%20food%20waste%20levels.pdf>

4 <https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/a-new-textiles-economy>

5 <https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/the-new-plastics-economy-rethinking-the-future-of-plastics>

6 <https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/a-toolkit-for-policy-makers>

7 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/mar/28/shanna-swan-fertility-reproduction-count-down>

4

The future we need – a call to action

By focusing on wellbeing, sufficiency, and resilience, the EU can rationalise resource consumption and offer a sustainable and just future to all Europeans.

This manifesto is a call to:




Ensure a new focus on increasing wellbeing, sufficiency, and resilience instead of maximising short-term consumption at the expense of future generations.



Stop exhausting the current system in the pursuit of endless consumption, which only leaves pollution and war to future generations.



Ensure a system capable of providing for our social and economic wellbeing within planetary boundaries, adjusting consumption to what is needed to meet our needs while taking into account those of the next generations.



Recommendations for European and national decision-makers:

- **Focus on ensuring all people in Europe get access to quality and sustainable health, education, housing, food, energy and mobility.**
- **Shift taxes from labour to resources** — contrary to when taxes were first implemented, today's world is one where resources are limited and labour abundant. Consequently, rationing labour through taxation doesn't make sense anymore. Taxes and economic incentives must be used to ration access to resources according to the available stocks.
- **Invest in new social and industrial infrastructure** and progressively divest from the old system. This includes reorganising exemptions, incentives, and subsidies to invest in the new infrastructure and an economic transition that favours collaboration by boosting locally-driven processes and value chains.
- **Promote, financially support, and create legal certainty for business models** which are local, resilient, build social fabric, design out waste, and contribute to the community.
- **Declare fossil fuels a scarce strategic resource** and ration/use them wisely. We must stop using them for non-essential operations such as single-use plastics or fast-fashion textiles.
- **Support European quality products** with policies that make them longer-lasting, safer, repairable, recyclable, and cheaper than the disposable options. Change taxation so that taxes on less nutritious/durable/repairable/recyclable, more toxic products and packaging are raised and the money is used to subsidise the consumption of locally produced, high-quality/nutritious products.
- **Ban the market placement of non-essential products and packaging** which cannot be repaired or recycled with existing technologies.
- **Reorganise agriculture and farming** with a clear phase-out date for fossil fuel-based pesticides, fertilisers, and any practice that reduces biodiversity and harms people's health.
- **Stop aiming to continue with "business as usual"**, and start planning for a new paradigm which is compatible with planetary boundaries and upholds human rights.
- **Abandon policy-making "as usual"** and short-term patches; and adopt long-term measures targeting wellbeing, sufficiency, and resilience.
- **Food sovereignty strategies** — the EU should aim at self-sufficiency in food production; and municipalities and regions should be aware of their dependency on global supply chains and develop plans to reduce it.
- **Reuse infrastructure** — build the ecosystems that allow a relocalised economy to function in parallel with, or in isolation from, global supply chains.
- **Promote zero waste strategies** with regenerative and people-focused solutions that restore and conserve our resources.



JOIN US

The European project as we know it is running out of steam and it is not capable of delivering on its objectives of peace, prosperity, and equality. In order to stay within the commitment of 1.5°C degrees warming, the broken paradigm based on economic growth should be replaced with a new one focusing on building resilience, sufficiency and wellbeing for all.

This is our vision for Europe - and, by extension, for a better future for the entire planet and its inhabitants.

Join us in turning it into a reality.



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