

Declaration of the Paris 2008 Conference

We, participants in the Economic De-Growth For Ecological Sustainability And Social Equity Conference held in Paris on April 18-19, 2008 make the following declaration:

1. Economic growth (as indicated by increasing real GDP or GNP) represents an increase in production, consumption and investment in the pursuit of economic surplus, inevitably leading to increased use of materials, energy and land.
2. Despite improvements in the ecological efficiency of the production and consumption of goods and services, global economic growth has resulted in increased extraction of natural resources and increased waste and emissions.
3. Global economic growth has not succeeded in reducing poverty substantially, due to unequal exchange in trade and financial markets, which has increased inequality between countries.
4. As the established principles of physics and ecology demonstrate, there is an eventual limit to the scale of global production and consumption, and to the scale national economies can attain without imposing environmental and social costs on others elsewhere or future generations.
5. The best available scientific evidence indicates that the global economy has grown beyond ecologically sustainable limits, as have many national economies, especially those of the wealthiest countries (primarily industrialised countries in the global North).
6. There is also mounting evidence that global growth in production and consumption is socially unsustainable and uneconomic (in the sense that its costs outweigh its benefits).
7. By using more than their legitimate share of global environmental resources, the wealthiest nations are effectively reducing the environmental space available to poorer nations, and imposing adverse environmental impacts on them.
8. If we do not respond to this situation by bringing global economic activity into line with the capacity of our ecosystems, and redistributing wealth and income globally so that they meet our societal needs, the result will be a process of involuntary and uncontrolled economic decline or collapse, with potentially serious social impacts, especially for the most disadvantaged.

We therefore call for a paradigm shift from the general and unlimited pursuit of economic growth to a concept of “right-sizing” the global and national economies.

1. At the global level, “right-sizing” means reducing the global ecological footprint (including the carbon footprint) to a sustainable level.
2. In countries where the per capita footprint is greater than the sustainable global level, right-sizing implies a reduction to this level within a reasonable timeframe.
3. In countries where severe poverty remains, right-sizing implies increasing consumption by those in

poverty as quickly as possible, in a sustainable way, to a level adequate for a decent life, following locally determined poverty-reduction paths rather than externally imposed development policies.

4. This will require increasing economic activity in some cases; but redistribution of income and wealth both within and between countries is a more essential part of this process.

The paradigm shift involves degrowth in wealthy parts of the world.

1. The process by which right-sizing may be achieved in the wealthiest countries, and in the global economy as a whole, is “degrowth”.

2. We define degrowth as a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society.

3. The objectives of degrowth are to meet basic human needs and ensure a high quality of life, while reducing the ecological impact of the global economy to a sustainable level, equitably distributed between nations. This will not be achieved by involuntary economic contraction.

4. Degrowth requires a transformation of the global economic system and of the policies promoted and pursued at the national level, to allow the reduction and ultimate eradication of absolute poverty to proceed as the global economy and unsustainable national economies degrow.

5. Once right-sizing has been achieved through the process of degrowth, the aim should be to maintain a “steady state economy” with a relatively stable, mildly fluctuating level of consumption.

6. In general, the process of degrowth is characterised by:

- an emphasis on quality of life rather than quantity of consumption;
- the fulfilment of basic human needs for all;
- societal change based on a range of diverse individual and collective actions and policies;
- substantially reduced dependence on economic activity, and an increase in free time, unremunerated activity, conviviality, sense of community, and individual and collective health;
- encouragement of self-reflection, balance, creativity, flexibility, diversity, good citizenship, generosity, and non-materialism;
- observation of the principles of equity, participatory democracy, respect for human rights, and respect for cultural differences.

7. Progress towards degrowth requires immediate steps towards efforts to mainstream the concept of degrowth into parliamentary and public debate and economic institutions; the development of policies and tools for the practical implementation of degrowth; and development of new, non-monetary indicators (including subjective indicators) to identify, measure and compare the benefits and costs of economic activity, in order to assess whether changes in economic activity contribute to or undermine the fulfilment of social and environmental objectives.

Links:

- Conference Paris 2008: events.it-sudparis.eu/degrowthconference/

- Conference Proceedings: <http://events.it-sudparis.eu/degrowthconference/en/appel/>