



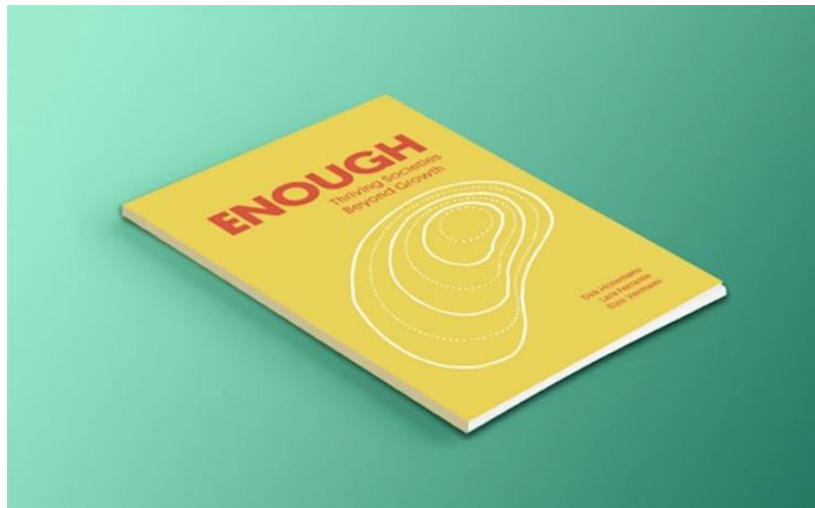
GREEN EUROPEAN FOUNDATION



REPORT

Green European Foundation, with the support of
Green Foundation Ireland, invite you to a
book launch and panel discussion

ENOUGH: Thriving Societies Beyond Growth



Guest Speaker:
Dirk Holemans (Co-Author)

Sunday 8 December 2024 – 18:00 to 20:00


Venue:
Teachers' Club, 39 Parnell Square West, Dublin, D01 T6V6

ENOUGH:

Thriving Societies Beyond Growth

BACKGROUND

In early 2024 [Green European Foundation](#) released [ENOUGH: Thriving Societies Beyond Growth](#). This publication sought to spotlight many of the ideas that the foundation has been exploring on post-growth and a just green and social deal, presenting them in an accessible and inspiring booklet. They have been taking it on a tour to spark conversations across the continent on how Europe can reconcile social and ecological justice in a wellbeing project for all.



ABOUT THE BOOK

This book, by Dirk Holemans, Elze Vermaas and Lara Ferrante, is a compelling narrative about a world with less inequality and fewer private jets, burn-outs and landfill sites, about a healthy planet with more quality of life, time for each other and sustainable products. In other words, about a good life for everyone within planetary boundaries.

"Enough is a brilliant combination of imaginative vision, conceptual clarity and concrete proposals. A necessary handbook for an ecological civilisation." – Roman Krznaric

Who is afraid of degrowth? The term alone scares the living daylight out of mainstream opinion makers and many economists in Europe. Growth is the lubricant of capitalism. As long as the economy is growing, all is well, we are told. But what do we mean by growth? Should everything just keep growing endlessly? The ecological crisis shows that infinite growth on a finite planet is impossible. At the same time, the current economic system does not guarantee a secure livelihood for all while social inequality is on the increase. A sufficiency economy offers an alternative. It provides for everybody's basic needs while tackling greed and overconsumption.

The EU can be a frontrunner in the ecological transition. The Green Deal was a great step forward but, with its core principle of competition in a single market, it remains locked within a growth-addicted economy and fails to address social inequality. We must imagine an alternative European economy, one rooted in a different paradigm, before we can actually build it.

Discover how societies can thrive when they no longer depend on economic growth.

This essay gives you the keys to one of the most important debates of our time.

ABOUT OUR EVENT

John Gormley introduced the event and spoke about some of the most important triggers in him joining the Green Movement. He remembered back to 42 years ago when he came across a film *Limits to Growth* which had a huge effect on him. It confirmed how it was impossible to have infinite growth in a finite planet. John also recalled the great work of Herman Daly with *Beyond Growth*, as well as the ecological economist [Tim Jackson](#) and, of course, not forgetting our own Richard Douthwaite's *The Growth Illusion*. You are almost an economic heretic if you suggest degrowth and, by all accounts, it is taking a long time to persuade people of this reality.

Dirk Holemans, who is also the Honorary President of Green European Foundation, was asked to respond to his book and began by referencing Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*, who asserted the ecological crisis was foremost one of our imaginations and how we also find it hard to imagine a much better society. We need to imagine a better society. He and his co-authors wrote this book in Dutch originally, while trying to find an appropriate English title around the notion of 'growing in another direction'. The core message of the book was about enabling everyone having just enough, so they settled on this title. Dirk emphasised that we need to remodel all systems and make them 'provisioning' systems, while striving to maintain a balanced ecological welfare system. He also recalled the very successful 'Beyond Growth' conference he helped organise in 2023 with the assistance of cross-party support in the European Union which helped spark this work. *[I attended online for the 3-day conference and speaking as an academic who has attended a lot of conferences in my time, I would argue using a concert metaphor – this was the 'Woodstock' of global environmental conferences. We even had our own response afterwards in Trinity recently, which was spearheaded by Feasta and other organisations, and which was also inspiring and provocative.]*

Some of my personal highlights in reading *Enough* include the forward by Philippe Lamberts: *'Why do the vast majority of holders of political and economic power remain wedded to the idea of permanent economic growth? First and foremost, it is because the idea of growth allows them to promise everyone more without asking anyone to accept less. If you can assume that planet earth can provide infinite energy and raw materials, that it is in effect a bottomless dustbin, then the fact that some accumulate more material wealth and do it faster than others is not a problem, since there will always be plenty for everyone else later on. This assumption of course denies the biophysical realities of our common home, but it has one key use: it sidelines the question of distributional justice.'*

In its introduction the authors affirm from the start that *'unless we collectively imagine a better society, we will not be able to realise one. We will need new visions of the good life we want and we will need to work towards it together.'* The research is clear: *'labelling the decoupling that has been achieved to date as green growth is misleading and a form of greenwashing – further economic growth in these countries is directly at odds with the targets set by the Paris Agreement. The logic underlying this conclusion is simple: it is much harder to quickly and comprehensively reduce greenhouse gas emissions when an economy is growing and producing many products and services.'*

It goes without saying that *'while both technological innovations and a circular economy are vital, we must recognise their limitations. We can never be 100% circular. A system predicated on growth, will always need new resources and this makes this especially difficult.'* Certainly, provocative within a European mindset which ostensibly promotes a circular economy and 'green growth' model that supports a 'business as usual' mindset according to many critics.

'The carbon budget is like money in your savings account: you can only spend it once. Every kilo or tonne of CO² that is squandered on luxury goods is no longer available for meeting people's basic needs. ... Enough should be a human right'.

John then asked a well-chosen panel of respondents to address the book's overall thesis, which provided insightful take-aways from an Irish perspective.

David Donoghue, a former Irish ambassador and diplomat who served as Ireland's Ambassador to the United Nations in New York from 2013-17 and who co-chaired the UN negotiations which led to the adoption of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) and the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). As the 'father' of the SDGs David, along with his counterpart in Kenya, helped to build consensus across all 190+ countries to agree on the final goals.

He fully endorsed the book and its provocations, while accepting that delivery of these goals has been less than successful. In his judgement, overall, they can be measured at only about 16% success so far. But it is likely they will be re-focused and re-targeted again into the future and he hoped there would be support across the world to reimagine them, especially from the Global South, who he believes will have a bigger say in what happens. Some hybrid measures of 'wellness' and other models of growth will also be adopted into the future.

John interjected to ask if the overall model to pay for these SDGs was basically to 'increase the cake'? David agreed with this assertion but suggested that into the future there will be a greater emphasis on more sustainable models of payment and 'narrowing the gap' between rich and poor.

Janet Horner, Green Party Councillor for Dublin's North Inner City, also agreed strongly with the book's main elements and spoke of how global and local issues need to be interconnected. For instance, how to focus on the issues of a city, using Kate Raworth's [doughnut economics](#) as a model. We need to nurture all citizens, and she sees the role for imagination as a tool to challenge everyday society norms. There is an urgent need to connect with our overall creativity in a positive manner.

Dirk interjected to state that, since the majority of the planet's citizens now live in cities, focusing on promoting greening cities is essential. In his home city of Ghent in Belgium, for instance, one out of every three trips are now made via bicycles and the city is the biggest 'car free' conurbation in Europe.

Janet then asked for advice about how to promote new forms of 'leadership' to drive such radical change? Dirk responded in his gentle manner that it takes time to train and integrate new ways of thinking. He cited the growth of Citizens' Assemblies across Europe as promoting radical ways of changing mindsets which sometimes unintentionally led to very positive changes, in France for example.

We would argue that here in Ireland the Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change has had a major transformative role in legislative change, which has become mandated around climate change targets in the Irish legislature.¹ This would probably not have happened if we did not have the Assembly. Certainly, for difficult or more intractable political decisions and debates, a Citizens' Assembly model can help tease out the issues and help to kick-start effective change and transformation.

The next speaker, **Anne B Ryan**, who is Co-Ordinator of [Basic Income Ireland](#), a former Chair of the [Feasta](#) board of directors, mentioned her book [Enough is Plenty](#) and how she is now actively retired from Maynooth University. She affirmed how we need to be aiming for smaller, less disaster-driven societies and that, if we are to secure our planetary boundaries, we probably need to go back to our national energy use that we reached in the 1960s. She recalled the French saying: 'fewer possessions and more connections'.

She provocatively called out tensions between 'energy for affluence', as against 'energy for decent living' and a need to focus on 'sufficient consumption'. While striving to grow not-for-profit companies and working more effectively with the public commons, we can promote more effective caring communities and work practices within society at large. Anne questioned the benefits of Universal Basic Services as suggested in *Enough*, while alternatively favouring Universal Basic Income to more effectively drive sustainable environmental change. Dirk agreed that we still need money, but we can live a good life with less money.

After the formal talks and responses there was some time for questions from the audience including from:

- our own GFI chair **Donna Mullen** who asked how best to encourage support for nature without having to instrumentally promote nature capital solutions and thereby seek to monetise nature.
- GFI's patron **Duncan Stewart** asked how to mobilise political change in a very conservative climate in Ireland.
- **Borislav Sandov** of Bulgaria's Foundation of Environment and Agriculture (which is a member of GEF) asked, given that the labelling of degrowth just does not work for most of the public, how can we rebrand the concept and still get the message across.

Incidentally, Dirk would also take Higher Education out of 'commercial thinking' which he believes would make it more affordable and manageable.

Other questions alluded to but needing more time to tease out included:

- Prefigurative practices and how to respond to the reality of Green political parties doing badly because of the rise of populism.
- Uncovering new ways of promoting notions of 'degrowth' within the general population, which was seen as very difficult.

¹ Laura Devaney, Diarmuid Torney, Pat Brereton, Martha Coleman. [Ireland's Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change: Lessons for deliberative public engagement and communication](#) *Environmental Communication* vol. 14, issue 2 pp.141-146. 2020.

- Others wondered about what the positive role of the activist is going forward.

While not having clear answers to such intractable dilemmas, Dirk astutely concluded that fairness remains a key to any developments in the well-being economy. By any measure, this Green Foundation Ireland event certainly provided much food for thought in supporting active environmental engagement into the future.

You can [download 'ENOUGH: Thriving Societies Beyond Growth' here.](#)

You can [access our videos of the event here.](#)

You can [view photos of our event here.](#)

**Pat Brereton, Director
Green Foundation Ireland**

13 December 2024