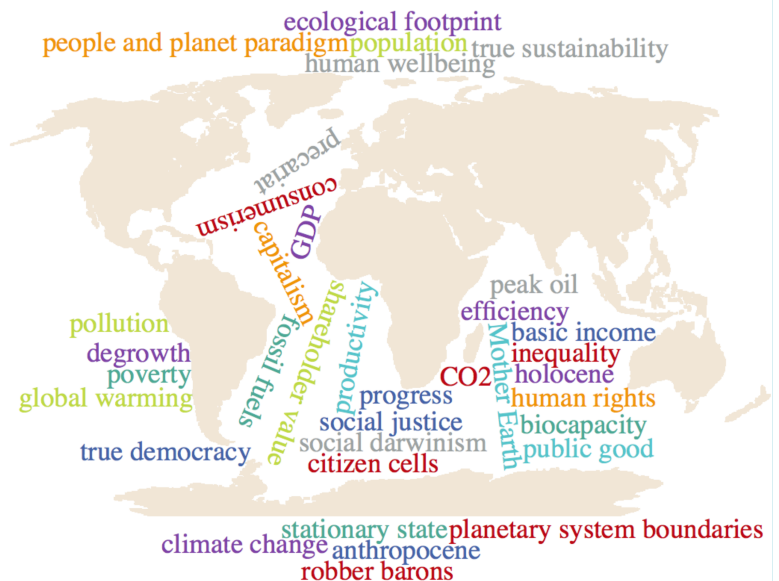


True Sustainability and Degrowth in the citizens' Imaginary — The People and Planet paradigm in a truly democratic ethos unburdened by capitalism

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The world is steadily going back to stages that we thought we had overcome. Democracy and its so-called democratic institutions are, for the most part, a complete mockery. In lieu of a democratic ethos, the market dictates the rules by which everyone must attempt to live, in complete contradiction with the most basic premise of democracy: to procure the welfare of every rank of society, and with special emphasis on the dispossessed. In most so-called democratic nations, their sovereigns are their citizens, the demos. Yet, governments have betrayed their democratic mandate to go in pursuit of the welfare of the citizenry, who has entrusted such a seminal responsibility on their livelihood in a cadre of elected public servants. Instead, the vast majority of public servants have become agents of the owners of the market and, in full connivance with them, work together in tandem to impose the ideal conditions to maximise the effectiveness of the wealth-extracting syphons of the institutional investors of international financial markets.

In this way, they have put together a very effective system of revolving doors that allows market agents and market owners to act both in the public and private arenas to perpetuate their wealth-extraction system on the ninety-nine percent for the very private benefit of the one percent. Consequently, we have back-pedalled to an ethos quite reminiscent of the Gilded Age of the nineteenth century and their robber barons. Through trade rules, trade pacts,



climate change accords as well as carefully-designed financial, public health and geopolitical false flags, the market agents have consistently bypassed the judicial systems of nations and have placed the interests of corporations and their investors above national sovereignties, so that they can unobtrusively privatise and exploit every aspect of life, every public good and every natural resource in their benefit. From a geopolitical perspective, their propaganda machines are working unrelentingly to convince billions of people that a number of non-declared wars are justified for the sake of peace, justice, democracy and human rights. Reminiscent of the 1930s, and notwithstanding other military conflicts mostly in the Middle East and Africa, we are on the brink of another world war. In fact, this war is already ongoing. It has not been formally declared but it undoubtedly carries powerful global economic and geopolitical interests for the contending actors; interests that have nothing to do with their propaganda argumentation. Indeed, not since WWII have there been so many nations involved in one single war theatre in Syria and Iraq. Thus, we are immersed in a prolonged capitalist recession and in a number of conflicts where the robber barons in command of nations are attempting to make their global interests prevail through war. It is all about greed; namely, economic imperialism.

The big difference with the Gilded Age and with the interwar period of the 1930s, however, is that we have reached a stage where the unrelenting consumption of resources –an indispensable condition for the protraction of capitalism– has become completely unsustainable. As a consequence of the ecological footprint produced by market-based societies, thousands of species have ceased to exist in the last one-hundred years. Likewise, our predominant use of non-renewable resources to provide the energy necessary for our consumeristic living standards, has not only brought fossil fuels to a dire state of diminishing returns and scarcity, but has triggered a dramatic climate change. We are witnessing a consistent warming of the planet, of which we are only beginning to endure its hardships, without knowing with any reasonable certainty what will be its worst consequences for humanity and the rest of the living beings. Furthermore, predictions point at the very likely probability that we have already crossed the threshold where we will not be able to return to the conditions of the planet that prevailed only half a century ago, even under the unrealistic scenario that we put a drastic end today to our sheer consumeristic system and radically build new truly sustainable life systems.

Parting from this context of rapidly escalating geopolitical conflicts and the patent reaction of the planet against the unsustainable anthropocentric consumption of resources by the global marketocratic system, the premise of this work is that we must start today to radically change our life styles to put them in harmony with what Mother Earth can provide in food, water, energy and other natural resources in a truly sustainable manner for us and for all living beings. This means that we must embark on a quantum leap paradigmatic change that puts an end to marketocracy. If there is any long-term hope for humanity and the rest of living creatures, we must replace the current marketocratic ethos with a truly democratic ethos. To put it succinctly, we will not be able to build a sustainable system without replacing capitalism, because the true sustainability of people and planet –social justice and a healthy planet– are completely incompatible with the premise of capitalism. True sustainability and capitalism are an oxymoron. Consequently, replacing the capital accumulation paradigm is the only way to make realistic the construction of a new paradigm anchored on the drastic

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degrowth of our ecological footprint. However, given that all national and international institutions have been captured by the market, we must start by rescuing them from the market-driven agents. In other words, we must start by legally and peacefully removing from power the owners of the market and their market agents entrenched in the halls of governments. This is the quintessential sine-qua-non condition to realistically attempt to build what for now I can best describe as the Paradigm in pursuit of the welfare of People and Planet and Not the market.

The mockery of representative democracy to impose marketocracy

Let us first deconstruct what I regard as the democratic hoax, which is taken for granted as the way democracy should be understood. This requires first establishing the current political and economic context in which most nations participating in the global market system are engulfed. Establishing such context inexorably exposes the overwhelming incongruence between established political discourse and the reality endured by societies all over the world. The established political dogma is that the inhabitants of a great number of nations, both in the metropolises of the system and the periphery, already enjoy the benefits of living in a democratic ethos. Such ethos implies that we belong to societies that have struggled to gradually build an agreement, the social contract, determining the rules of harmonious coexistence that the demos, the citizenry, has defined for the way in which all things belonging to the public matter must be conducted.

Consequently, conventional wisdom suggests that the way in which the public matter is conducted embodies the political will of the majority of the demos. The demos determines the realm of the public matter as well as what should be the common good, and elects, through an exchange of political discourse and an electoral process, the governmental formula that the majority deems to be the most beneficial for the common good, namely, the welfare of all social ranks. This political will is presumed to be materialised through the institutions of democracy, generally through the three governmental powers responsible for all things concerning the legislative, judicial and executive spheres of the public matter in so-called democratic societies. These are the political institutions of so-called representative democracy, whereby the demos entrusts the administration of the public matter to its democratic state, which represents the political-bureaucratic institutions of the overall institution of society –or, as Castoriadis would define it: the imaginary institution of society¹, without which there would be no political institutions of any kind, democratic or undemocratic.

Nonetheless, contrary to conventional wisdom, we do not live in democratic societies of any kind. We have lived and continue to live in oligarchic societies, where the will of the plutocratic class dictates the public agenda and determines the welfare of all ranks of society and not the demos as we are led to believe. Through endless class struggle the demos of many societies in the world has attained many civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that it did not enjoy before. Yet, this has not changed the basic equation in which the ruling class controls the distribution of the wealth generated by the economic activity of the entire demos. The appropriation by employers of the portion of the income generated by the economic activity that legitimately belongs to the workers; or the transformation of the surplus value into gross profits to fulfil the reproduction and accumulation of capital has always been and remains the rule. Capitalism is the real ethos of societies, not the agreement to procure the welfare of all, as in true democracy. Furthermore, within capitalism, this appropriation has become even more dramatic as the supply-side, the laissez-faire paradigm, that maximises the concentration of the distribution of wealth on the investors, was gradually and undemocratically imposed on so-called democratic societies. Hence, representative democracy has been rendered a mockery of what its pretence alleges it to be, since it has been transformed into a euphemism for the oligarchic ethos in which the demos struggles to survive. Despite the conspicuous collapse of global capitalism that has been unfolding since 2007, the context used by

¹ See: Cornelius Castoriadis: The Imaginary Institution of Society, The MIT Press, 1987 and Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy, Essays in Political Philosophy, Oxford University Press, 1991.

most actors participating in the debate within the UN and in member countries remains utterly triumphant and unrepentant. Capitalism's need for the unrelenting consumption of natural resources is inherently unsustainable. We are attesting worldwide the negative effects on people and on all living things due to climate change as a consequence of direct human activity. Yet, the marketocratic agents show no intention whatsoever of questioning the viability of the current system. They have and remain systematically involved in the use of military means to make capitalism prevail at all costs. They systematically deny the rapidly-deteriorating economic and social conditions of market societies. They disregard the more than evident unfolding of the rather negative effects of climate change, and manoeuvre to neutralise any attempt to reign in market forces in favour of the planet, just as it happened once again with the COP21 in Paris, last November. Thus, there is not a single sign that we can identify to presume that capitalism will eventually disappear, even due to a forced reconsideration amongst those in power, given the dramatic deteriorating conditions of Mother Earth and its effects on all its inhabitants. The pretence is that this is only a crisis but not an implosion of global capitalism directly caused by the main actors at its core. These actors are the root cause of the crisis: the speculators of the international financial markets of the casino-like economy. Instead, the root cause of the implosion of the system is barely addressed, implicitly, when it is argued hyperbolically that banks are too big to let them collapse and, thus, they need to be saved with tax payers' money.

For almost four decades all the structures that were designed to control the natural excesses of market forces have been gradually eliminated globally or at least neutralised. However, eight years after the start of the implosion of global capitalism no real policies to reign market forces in –by re-instituting effective controls to prevent a deeper meltdown– have been applied. No new instruments that directly address the inherent nature of sheer speculation of the system have even been considered, because they would irremediably require a change of paradigm. One paradigmatic case in point is the U.S. Glass-Steagall Act of 1933. This law was instituted at a time when, on average, five banks collapsed on a daily basis under a deluge of non-performing loans due to the sheer speculative and corrupt practices of their main shareholders and managers –any resemblance with the current ethos is a mere coincidence. The law imposed a strong regulatory framework on the financial sector. The law deliberately separated commercial banking from investment banking with the specific purpose of prohibiting that commercial loans and savings would be securitised in financial markets. In this way, investment banks were barred from participating in the management of commercial lending to businesses and consumers and the earnings derived from savings. Furthermore, the law virtually barred any lending intended to be used in speculative operations and eliminated the pervasive possibility of conflicts of interest. Moral hazard was under firm control. This law was instrumental in eliminating the main practices that triggered the 1929 debacle and played a fundamental role in the efforts for the economic recovery in the U.S. after WWII.

Unfortunately, human greed is unrelenting. In 1980, parts of the Glass-Steagall Act were superseded by the Deregulation and Monetary Control Act. Then, in 1998, the U.S. Congress attempted to regulate the derivatives in Commodity Futures Trading. But, Rubin, Secretary of the Treasury, Summers, his deputy, and Greenspan, Chief of the Federal Reserve Bank, adamantly defeated any controls. For their conniving deregulatory manoeuvres, economist Dean Baker regarded them as *the high priesthood of the bubble economy*.² Subsequently, in 1999, the core of the Glass-Steagall Act was repealed by the U.S. Congress as a culmination of a \$300 million lobbying effort by the banking and financial-services industries. Its worst effect was a cultural change replacing prudent traditional commercial banking practices into a speculative spree that sought to securitise commercial banking. Finally, in 2004, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission allowed investment banks to increase their debt to capital ratio from 12:1 to 30:1 or more, with the aim of enabling them to acquire more mortgage-backed securities, inflating the housing bubble in the process.³ Deliberately, nothing has been

² Dean Baker, *The high priests of the bubble economy*. The Guardian, 10 november 2008.

³ Joseph Stiglitz, *Capitalist Fools*, Vanity Fair, January 2009.

done to address the root cause of the problem: the imposition of marketocracy as the end in itself in the lives of so-called democratic societies. In the U.S. the Dodd-Frank Reform to protect consumers was passed in 2010.⁴ However, after much pressure from financial markets, it passed in a rather weakened form and it did not restore, whatsoever, the separation of commercial and investment banking to the previous ethos provided by the Glass-Steagall Act. In fact, since 2012 the Dodd-Frank law has been constitutionally challenged by banks and more than a dozen U.S. states and it remains in court proceedings. The Volcker Rule –section 619 of the Dodd-Frank Act– that specifically intended to separate commercial and investment banking, is still in its implementation phase and it is deemed to be ineffective and to need new solutions to adequately regulate proprietary trading, for it is argued that in contrast with Glass-Steagall it attempts to regulate actions instead of structures.⁵ Another criticism is that the current rules are too complex to understand. Indeed, Lord King, former head of the Bank of England points out that the regulations introduced after the 2008 crash are too complex. He explains that the Prudential Regulation and Financial Conduct Authorities in the UK have rulebooks exceeding 10,000 pages, while the Dodd-Frank Act runs to 2,300 pages. In contrast, the Glass-Steagall Act runs to only 37 pages. King argues that *only a fundamental rethinking of how we organise our system of money and banking will prevent a repetition of the crisis*.⁶

In the European Union there is much opposition to the calls to enact a European Glass-Steagall law.⁷ Some argue that the idea of *structural separation in banking is an old-fashioned, rules-based approach for what should be, under the capital add-ons of Basel III and its Pillar II, a matter of supervisory discretion*.⁸ They support discretionary measures, the preferred neoliberal do nothing idea, so that nothing really changes. Indeed, since 2010 governments everywhere have enthusiastically surrendered themselves to adopting the policies demanded by financial markets speculators, which have been materialising in the form of less labour rights, less social benefits, in the form of lower retirement benefits, and of other remnants of the quasi defunct Welfare State. The entirely undemocratic policies of the “troika” in Europe and particularly in Greece are emblematic of the sheer power of imposition of the market agents, and of the complete contempt for any attempt for the democratic say of the people, in the decisions to be taken on its behalf, which have a paramount weight on their livelihoods.⁹ In true democracy, the demos would demand that such an important issue as the separation in banking would be submitted, after a period of objective information, to a referendum. However, the market agents in the U.S., in the utterly undemocratic European Commission and elsewhere have adamantly operated to stop any attempt for the direct involvement of the demos in the decision making of the public matter, such as the regulation of the financial sector. Instead, they have unrelentingly consolidated the dictatorship of investors.¹⁰ Yanis Varoufakis, the former Greek finance minister during the brief attempt to build a truly democratic ethos to address Greece’s severe crisis, shared with the public a clear example of the blatant disregard for a truly democratically sanctioned mandate and sovereignty when Wolfgang Schäuble, Germany’s finance minister, told him blatantly that “Elections cannot be allowed to change an economic programme of a member state!”¹¹

Concurrently, the idea permeating U.S. culture for most of its existence, that companies ought to be regarded as legal persons with individual rights, as if they were natural persons, has been enhanced by the U.S. Supreme Court ruling, in 2010, that corporations have the right to the first amendment, which, otherwise, would be solely part of the Bill of Rights

⁴ [111th Congress Public Law 203] [From the U.S. Government Printing Office]: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ203/html/PLAW-111publ203.html>

⁵ R. Rex Chatterjee: DICTIONARIES FAIL: THE VOLCKER RULE’S RELIANCE ON DEFINITIONS RENDERS IT INEFFECTIVE AND A NEW SOLUTION IS NEEDED TO ADEQUATELY REGULATE PROPRIETARY TRADING. http://www.law2.byu.edu/ilmr/articles/winter_2011/BYU_ILMR_winter_2011_3_Dictionaries.pdf

⁶ Simon Neville: Banks face another crash if they do not reform, warns Lord King, The Independent, 29 February, 2016.

⁷ Editorial, Page (July 3, 2012). “Restoring trust after Diamond” . Financial Times. Retrieved 15 July 2012. quoting FT Editorial Page.

⁸ Karel Lannoo: A European Glass_Steagall to preserve the single market, CEPS Commentary, 24 January 2014.

⁹ Debt Truth Committee: Truth Committee on Public Debt, Preliminary Report, June 2015.

¹⁰ Éric Toussaint: Bankocracy, Resistance Books and IIRE, CADTM, 2015.

¹¹ The long read – Yanis Varoufakis: Why we must save the EU, The Guardian, Tuesday 5 April 2016.

of the citizenry, in a political context. In this way, the court equated the persona of corporations to that of citizens, so that corporations can exercise their “right” to freedom of speech in political campaigns.¹² With this ruling, the court provided corporations unlimited influence over U.S. elections. Companies can now spend as much as they want to support or oppose individual candidates.¹³ The court did not even bother to distinguish between domestic and foreign-owned corporations. Consequently, corporations are now free to financially support the political agendas of their choice and, frequently, of their own design. With some variation, the halls of government have been overtaken by corporate power all over the world. Thus, with this kind of political ethos, it would be a complete delusion to expect governments to fulfil their so-called “democratic” mandate by moving forward and developing a strict regulatory framework to control the market and their owners, namely financial market speculators, namely the shareholders of all the major global banks. What has been happening for decades is exactly the opposite of what should take place in a truly democratic ethos: the market has overtaken the public arena and dictates over the lives of societies around the world.

Capitalism’s metamorphosis of democracy to produce social Darwinism

And so, the collapse of the so-called market economies of the so-called democratic societies is clearly due to the incontrovertible fact that democracy has been supplanted by the rule of the market. The capture –or usurpation– of the democratic ethos was bound to occur, for capitalism cannot coexist with real democracy, for they are inherently incompatible. Making believe that they are compatible is the greatest deception of our times. The argument in favour of the concept of a capitalist democracy or of a democratic capitalism is unsustainable, for we can hardly find a more direct antagonism between the *raison d’être* of democracy and that of capitalism. Democracy has as its only end to produce a tacit agreement for social coexistence with the sole purpose of creating an ethos of welfare for every rank of society, and especially for the dispossessed, for its main attribute – and the purpose of the inherent social contract– is the procurement of equitable welfare. In this way, democracy’s end is to reconcile the public interest (the common good) with the individual interest (the private good) in such a way that the individual’s freedom does not allow the individual to seek his own private interest in detriment of the public interest. The purpose of democracy is to serve as the regulating agent of an ethos that truly reconciles the public with the private interest, but always with the former with preeminence over the latter.

In contrast, capitalism is on the opposite end. Parting from individual freedom, it goes in pursuit of the individual’s private interest with no regard for the impact that such activity has on the welfare of all other participants in the system. There is no other consideration but profit. It is about all out competition, about the supremacy of the mightiest – euphemistically referred to as the fittest–regardless of whether it competes under equal conditions or what the consequences of its stronger position upon all other participants are. Furthermore, capitalism is intrinsically unstable for it is an extreme concept driven by greed. The purpose of all enterprises is the maximisation of shareholder value without limits; something that, by definition, defeats any possibility of building a balanced system. Beyond the boundaries legally established there are no limits, and these are often neutralised, or are at least under permanent threat when they are not openly violated by the owners of the system. Comparably, greed has no limits in this ethos. When the shareholders of an enterprise earn fabulous dividends in one year, they would never contemplate setting it as the limit for the future, taking into consideration that with such a bountiful profit they can enjoy a life of plentiful material wealth. They would never dwell on the idea of providing greater labour endowments to their workers or of granting better prices to their supply chains. This is anathema to capitalism. Thus, it always goes in pursuit of ever greater profits. If every year greater profits are achieved, the logic is to indefinitely seek ever greater profits with no consideration for what the system’s “externalities” may cause: the negative impact of a company’s business activity on its sphere of influence. As a result, the

¹² United States Supreme Court: Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, 21 January 2010.

¹³ Robert Barnes and Dan Eggen: Supreme Court rejects limits on corporate spending on political campaigns, The Washington Post, 22 January 2010.

capitalistic system that we now endure, which is taking us back to the times of the robber barons of the Gilded Age and the factories of Victorian England, so well portrayed by Dickens, has been creating unsurmountable inequality, both in developed and developing economies.

The best example of a consistent trend of growing inequality is found at the heart of the system. Contrary to the alleged well-being, the data exhibiting the growing inequality leaves no doubt about the mendacity of the triumphant postures adopted by the apologists of the neoliberal paradigm. A biannual report from the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) at the end of last century reported that U.S. workers' median income in 1997 was 3,1% lower than in 1989 and hourly real wages had dropped for 60% of workers. This forced the heads of household (particularly women) to work 247 more hours a year to sustain the same income level. This consistently widened the income gaps between wealthy families and the rest, including the middle class, and increased job insecurity whilst concurrently allowing businesses to establish record profits.¹⁴ Then, the EPI's 2006-2007 biannual report shows that economic growth in the U.S. bypassed everyone but the wealthiest: wages stagnated despite rapid growth in productivity; wages of younger workers were below those of their predecessors; there was less upward mobility than in similar economies; and the country had the greatest degree of inequality of all OECD countries included in its analysis. The study concluded that *if the findings in the hundreds of tables and figures that followed can be reduced to one observation, it would be that, when it comes to an economy that is working for working families, growth in and of itself is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. The growth has to reach the people. The benchmarks by which we judge the economy must reflect these distributional concerns, and we must construct policies and institutions to address them.* Evidently, the opposite has occurred.¹⁵ Finally, the EPI's 2008-2009 report focuses on the health of the U.S. economy for the 2000-2007 period. The report concludes that more than in any previous report the benefits of globalisation have eluded the great majority of workers. The report asserts that unless there is a miracle, this will be the first cycle showing the middle class with a lower income than at the beginning of the period (seven years prior), despite productivity increasing consistently and GDP growing more than 20% during the period. As could be expected, wealth is concentrated more than ever in the companies' captains and their bosses: the institutional investors. The EPI reported that this is no unexpected outcome, for between 1989 and 2006 wealth concentrated dramatically among the top 10% of the income ladder, which kept more than 90% of the income growth; and even within this bracket the differences are dramatic. This explains another measurement in the report: in 1965 the captains of the largest companies earned 24 times more than the average worker, 35 times in 1978 and 71 times in 1989; but in 2007 the ratio increased to 275 times. In other words, the president or CEO of a company earns more in one day than what a worker earns for the whole year, considering 260 working days annually.¹⁶ And then, the speculative bubble burst and the global economy collapsed.

The capture of democracy by the owners of the market explains why workers worldwide have seen their real incomes and labour rights systematically eroded for more than three decades now. In the US, up until the early 1980s, an annual minimum wage income (in real terms) was enough to keep a family of two above the poverty line. Today, at the federal minimum wage of \$7,25 per hour, a full-time annual income puts a family of two below the federal poverty line.¹⁷ In 2010, 15,1% of the U.S. population was officially below this threshold. The calculation of the poverty line, however, is widely accepted as being inadequate in capturing those who cannot make ends meet. Contrary to historical recovery trends, the recovery following the 2001 recession saw poverty increase and then further explode during the Great Recession that began to unfold in 2007. This makes the official threshold highly inadequate; thus many analysts consider

¹⁴ Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, John Schmitt, *The State of Working America 1998-1999*, Economic Policy Institute, Executive Summary, pp. 1-2, September, 1998.

¹⁵ Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein and Sylvia Alegretto "The State of Working America 2006-2007", Economic Policy Institute, Cornell University Press 2006.

¹⁶ Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein and Heidi Shierholz "The State of Working America 2008/2009" Economic Policy Institute, Press Release August 28, 2008

¹⁷ David Cooper, "The Minimum Wage Used to Be Enough to Keep Workers out of Poverty—It's Not Anymore," Economic Snapshot, Economic Policy Institute, December 4, 2013.

twice the threshold a more accurate benchmark. That is, 33,9% of the U.S. population currently would fall below this line.¹⁸ This loss of value is a result of the divergence of productivity and wage growth: since 1973, productivity grew roughly eighty percent while median hourly compensation improved by only eleven percent.¹⁹ This trend is not unique to the US. An outpouring of literature has provided consistent new empirical evidence indicating a downward trend in the labour share in most countries. Indeed, between 1990 and 2009, the share of labour compensation in national income declined in 26 out of 30 developed economies. In developing economies, the trend is much worse.²⁰

An untrammelled and undemocratically imposed marketocratic system

Even within capitalism's logic, the assertion that democracy has been captured by marketocracy is an incontrovertible fact. This becomes completely transparent by posing some questions to the way sheer laissez-faire economics has been applied in the world. Indeed, more than thirty years after demand-side economics was abandoned, no citizens of the "democratic" nations, where the so-called "new economy" of neoliberal supply-side globalisation was imposed, have been called to engage in a decision-making process and asked for their duly democratic endorsement of neoliberal economics. If there is any doubt, we should ask ourselves who decided that the so-called neoliberal globalisation was going to be applied in a given State? Were people asked to choose from a variety of economic policies so that governments in turn would obey the will of the people? At the very least, were people informed when governments decided to shift from one economic paradigm to another? Were people formally informed in layman's terms— that in the late 1970's their nations were beginning to shift from demand-side to supply-side economics? Were people informed, again in layman's terms, that the deregulation and privatisation of entire economic sectors was part of the neoliberal paradigm, and that this means that economic policy would stop supporting the generation of demand on behalf of the support of supply, which belongs to global capital? Were they informed that, to this endeavour, the neoliberal mantra calls for the reduction of taxes and the virtual dismantling of the Welfare State? Was it explained to them that, under, this ethos the role of government is greatly diminished and is reduced to act as an agent of the supply side by focusing on monetary and fiscal policy? Were people told that, during times of recession, governments would unlikely use public spending to energise the economy in order to maintain employment levels and eventually resume the aggregation of demand? Have governments explained that the most important value under this ethos is not the welfare of society but the permanent increase of shareholder value by increasing efficiencies and competitiveness at the expense of the welfare of millions of families who would lose their livelihoods? Were they informed that the government's proposal was to shift from an ethos where governments have a key role of regulating the economy to harness the natural predatory instincts of the market players in favour of an ethos where the outcome is left up to the forces of the so-called free markets controlled by financial market speculators? Did governments fulfil their most basic democratic responsibility of procuring the welfare of all ranks of society by explaining to people that there are different ways to apply capitalistic economic policy and convey an honest picture of the social and economic consequences of the use of demand-side or supply-side economics? In a participatory fashion, were people asked to select, through an informed referendum, one of the two paradigms? In summary, were people informed that the market was going to be placed more than ever above the people and that the primeval responsibility of so-called democratic governments was going to be ignored?

The answer to these questions is consistently "no" throughout the world. Instead of calling on the demos to reconcile the private with the public interest, subordinating the former in order to deliberately design public policy to guarantee the social welfare—such as the enjoyment of labour endowments that procure a quality of life worthy of human dignity—

¹⁸ Economic Policy Institute, The State of Working America, Key numbers, Topic-specific fact sheets of key findings, 12th edition, <http://stateofworkingamerica.org/files/book/factsheets/poverty.pdf>, accessed December 18, 2013.

¹⁹ David Cooper, "The Minimum Wage Used to Be Enough to Keep Workers out of Poverty—It's Not Anymore," Economic Snapshot, Economic Policy Institute, December 4, 2013.

²⁰ Global Wage Report 2012/13: Wages and Equitable Growth (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2013), 42-50.

these decisions, in real politics, are taken in “very private chambers”, in full connivance with the owners of the market and their public agents’ very private interests. It is then of fundamental importance to establish that the decisions affecting social and economic policy, as all others, are overwhelmingly taken by governments, as the norm, without a duly democratic process, because there is no real engagement and no debate between the branches of government and society, and the worst thing is that this norm keeps consolidating.²¹ Governments have betrayed representative democracy, and instead of responding to the interests of the people, they have become mere agents of the market who overwhelmingly respond to marketocracy’s will, with whom many politicians are in close connivance. Thus, the working agenda of governments moves in the opposite direction of true society’s demands. In this way, democracy has been almost completely corrupted to its core, including the functioning of the key multilateral institutions (Bretton Woods Institutions, UN, OECD), and only a democratic façade is kept to justify a legitimacy that has rapidly eroded.

Summing up, neoliberal globalisation has two distinctive features: first, it is rather evident that the neoliberal paradigm has not lived up to its claim of generating the most prosperity and is generating tremendous inequalities everywhere. It is inherently unjust and a self-serving paradigm for the centres of economic and political power. Moreover, this process has evidently not been implemented in a democratic way; rather, it has been imposed by the centres of power in their own economies and, especially, in the periphery. Such an unfair, authoritarian and asymmetric system could have never been the result of a duly democratic endorsement. Giorgos Kallis sums it up succinctly: *The “free market” is not a natural process; it has been constructed through deliberate governmental intervention. Repoliticisation of the economy will require hard-fought institutional change to return it to democratic control.*²² In fact, the very term globalisation is intrinsically antidemocratic, for it opposes the concepts of diversity of choice and of collective decision making.

The ethos of true democracy, sustainability and social justice

For those of us who want to put an end to the completely unsustainable dictatorship of the market, and build the new paradigm, we have a rather challenging conundrum. This is to determine how to reconcile the inherent *raison d’être* of democracy, which is social justice, and build its edifice in such a way that we achieve to produce a new ecological footprint that is permanently sustainable, regardless of any other consideration. If we want to build a new ethos of social justice, we need to drastically reduce inequality. This in turn requires providing greater consumption of resources to billions of dispossessed people around the world so that they can enjoy a dignified material life standard. However, this moves in the opposite direction of our urgent need to drastically reduce the ecological footprint of the human species. Thus, we need to first imagine how we can achieve both premises: social justice and ecological sustainability. The challenge is to imagine and build the new paradigm that fulfils both premises.

I propose that, to be truly sustainable, we must first start by becoming truly democratic societies, which is the only way to achieve social justice at a planetary sustainable level. This means that the citizenry must commit to change our life systems by making our aspirations for material wealth much lower. We must change our value scale and embark on a radical cultural shift where consumeristic values have no place whatsoever. They belong to the old unsustainable capitalistic paradigm. It is a huge challenge and it surely will take at the very least a generation (thirty years). Yet, if there is still any chance to make the planet liveable for us, creating a cultural revolution is paramount, and we must start immediately.

Let us first consider the following premise: inequality is never a choice while coexistence is. Yet, capitalist conventional wisdom embeds in us the idea of competition to have more, whatever that may be, as our purpose in life. This idea

²¹ Françoise Castex. Europe’s undemocratic Union. Le Monde Diplomatique, January 2007.

²² Giorgos Kallis, “The Degrowth Alternative,” Great Transition Initiative (February 2015).

thrives in the practice of commerce, an inherent feature of our human condition as social and rational animals. In this context, we are told to strive, through the natural practice of trade, to have more than the rest. From such conventional wisdom, we must discard equality from our purpose in life. However, we are not born to compete against each other to have more. We are born to enjoy a dignified quality of life spiritually and materially, and, despite our inherent individualism and selfishness, we generally strive to live in harmony with our fellow human beings. Living in harmony with the rest of the people is part of our spiritual wealth, and to achieve this everyone must enjoy a dignified life materially and spiritually. Throughout history we have customarily failed to coexist in peace, but inherently we have always aspired to fulfil such an ideal. Moreover, even if we accept the capitalistic assumption that we must strive to compete to possess more material wealth, we have never been born with the same opportunities and thus cannot compete on equal terms. Consequently, permanent conflict is the end result of a rather unequally level playing field. This is the inherent contradiction between capitalism and democracy. Fighting inequality to pursue social justice in capitalism is an oxymoron. The apologists of capitalism know it quite well, but they do not really care to fight inequality since their primeval interest has always been to defeat the rest to accumulate more wealth regardless of the social and ecological impact of such endeavour. Nonetheless, if we aspire to have a future on this planet, we must stop this self-defeating scale of values. Hence, human experience throughout history has shown us that democracy –however imperfect it may be– is the only idea that can let us keep at bay the permanent contradictions of our human condition by imposing a strict regulatory framework to harness the predatory instincts that are unleashed in the practice of commerce.

This is a central principle in the mission of a truly democratic ethos. People aspire to coexist by building harmonious and peaceful communities that provide, in as much as possible, equal opportunities to use our diverse talents to enjoy a dignified and blissful life. However, people do not choose the socio-economic and political conditions where they are born. Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis, Kurds and a long list of people did not choose to be born in extremely contended geopolitical places on earth. People in the world did not choose to be born in dictatorships or imperialistic nations. Did the billions of people born dispossessed choose to be born with no access to proper education, healthcare, housing, clothing, adequate and sufficient meals, and all the other basic things required to enjoy a dignified life? Obviously the answer is categorically no. However, to the supporters of capitalism such situations are a moot point, or in the best case a matter of bad luck. Evidently, the vast majority of the apologists of this system do not suffer a lack of any of the basic needs to live a dignified life and a majority of them were born enjoying an unlevel playing field to their advantage. To be sure, most of them would not think in this way if they were on the opposite side. Yet, this is the conventional wisdom of capitalistic societies. Everyone should fend for themselves regardless of the conditions into which each person was born. For capitalism to survive, we are all expected to compete to not only fulfil the basic needs to live a dignified life but to consume more and amass as much as possible, just for the sake of having more. This is so for this is how we energise the consumerist system that allows those who are in control to syphon more profit to their process of wealth accumulation. Furthermore, the only way to materialise this logic is by consuming more of all the natural resources available in the planet; but this is of no concern whatsoever to the owners of the system even if it has become blatantly unsustainable. They are obsessed with wealth and power today and could not care less about the kind of planet that will have to be endured by the surviving, if at all, generations of tomorrow.

Nevertheless, because the untrammelled consumption of resources in such a value system is absolutely unsustainable, contrary to its conventional wisdom, capitalistic values will not prevail regardless of whatever political, economic, religious or the like philosophies we use to defend our arguments. It is not a matter of ideologies or beliefs. Succinctly, it is a matter of physics. Indeed, Mother Earth is not going to ask us if we wish to stop consumerism or not. It is reacting and will continue to react in a way that we cannot expect to survive the natural forces that we are unleashing. We have

just crossed the two-degrees crisis level temperature for the first time in history. A new surface temperature analysis²³ from NASA's Goddard Institute shows that January 2016 has been the warmest recorded in history. If only for a few hours, the temperature crossed a line of more than two degrees Celsius above "normal" for the first time in recorded history. Thus, global warming is not a future threat but rather a present one with already dire consequences that we are only beginning to grasp.²⁴ Furthermore, we may have already crossed the threshold of no return. We have crossed, in geological terms, from the Holocene to the Anthropocene period. The Holocene provided 10.000 years of stability where the planet was able to sustain its regulatory capacity and replenish its resources within a narrow range. This allowed humankind to thrive. Even so, industrialisation, anchored on the extensive use of fossil fuels, has damaged the planet to the point that we have moved to the Anthropocene where the planet has lost its capacity to sustain the conditions necessary for humans to continue developing. Scientists believe that, without human activity, the Holocene could have continued for several thousand years. However, they also believe that we have already damaged three of nine planetary processes. We have crossed the boundaries of climate change, rate of biodiversity loss (terrestrial and marine) and industrial agriculture has greatly increased the amounts of the nitrogen cycle. We are also at the brink or we may have already crossed the boundaries of global freshwater use, change in land use, ocean acidification and interference with the global phosphorous cycle. These conditions could be irreversible and trigger abrupt environmental change.²⁵

Therefore, in a socio-economic context, if we aspire to have a life on this planet we must change our economic paradigm radically and urgently. In the context of the peaceful coexistence of all cultures, if we aspire to enjoy a dignified quality of life, we cannot allow capitalism to make the economic privilege of the mightiest prevail. If we reject human solidarity and peaceful coexistence, we can only expect unrelenting conflict and human destruction. Indeed, conflict and destruction have been escalating in the last few decades as the main contending metropolises of the system pursue their market-driven logic unrelentingly. And there is no end to this quagmire to be perceived on the horizon, for capitalism's natural antagonism with egalitarianism makes it completely incompatible with true democracy. Even worse, Mother Earth will guarantee that if we insist on the preservation of a marketocratic order, there will be only losers, including first and foremost humankind with our own self-provoked extinction. Consequently, we must begin by committing to build a true democratic ethos, where the market is harnessed in such a way that it no longer remains an authoritarian end in itself, but only the vehicle for commerce where economic activity is exchanged in an atoned and sustainable way. There will still be local, national and international markets, to be sure, but under a true democratic ethos, anchored on the long-term sustainability of people –social justice– and planet. This is the idea that we must pursue in the imaginary of the new paradigm that we must build if we want to bequest a dignified existence to our future generations.

What is a truly democratic ethos?

The comprehensive fulfilment of social justice demands a truly democratic ethos. This does not mean popular democracy or social democracy or any pseudodemocracy condoning mankind's systematic exploitation by the owners of the capitalist system. It is an ethos exercising the systematic and customary direct involvement of society in the entire public arena, so that all meaningful government decisions are reached by direct consensus with the demos and not just approved by the different branches of government. This government by consensus should include, preponderantly, the periodic ratification, in short intervals, of all popular elective posts in all levels of government, through referenda, with

²³ Goddard Institute for Space Studies, NASA: GISS Surface Temperature Analysis: <http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/maps/> accessed 7 March 2016.

²⁴ Bill McKibben: The mercury doesn't lie: We've hit a troubling climate change milestone, The Boston Globe, 7 March 2016, <http://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2016/03/04/why-degree-temperature-jump-more-important-than-trump-hands/ICyz5MHZkH8aD0HIDJrcYI/story.html?event=event25>, accessed 7 March 2016.

²⁵ Johan Rockström, et al., "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity," Nature 461 (September 2009): 472-75

the purpose of making those governing, as public servants, truly responsible before those who they govern. To be sure, this idea is absolutely despised by the apologists of capitalism since it directly clashes with the authoritarian essence of an inherently oligarchic system disguised in the thin veil of so-called representative democracy, a true mockery. Accordingly, this is about making proposals and initiatives emerge primarily from the social fabric towards the branches of government. The demos must have the social responsibility to be permanently involved in the public matter for its own vested interest, so that the wide spectrum of citizen interests reach the public arena and are debated to reach a majority consensus. This is about, as in the old Greek Agora, of establishing an ethos that truly reconciles the public with the private interest, always with the common good –the welfare of people and planet– with preeminence over the individual and private good. This is about establishing permanent communicating vessels between communities and governments at all levels, so that the latter truly command by obeying the people's will. In consequence, this is about processing all public matter decisions of significance (laws, trade treaties, budgets, economic, social, environmental, foreign, security policies...) through citizen consultations via referenda and plebiscites.

Yet these instruments of citizen-public service interactions must not be carried out as political propaganda campaigns, deprived of objectivity and filled with manipulation, in which the interests with the greatest power of manipulation generally win. Consultations should be carried out simply presenting the options objectively without campaigns for or against them. Obviously, this is about regulating elections in the same fashion. Thus, instead of propaganda, concrete and objective proposals for governance are presented. This is about proscribing all propaganda and all private financing of the candidates' efforts to make their own government plans reach the citizenry. This is about preventing factual powers (extra parliamentary political powers) from tipping the scale in their favour, proscribing in this way mercantilism's corrupting power over politics. This is about ejecting the corrosive power of capital and private interests from public matter. Lastly, this is about establishing a "level playing field" of democratic practice, capable of guaranteeing the full enjoyment of all rights for all members of society. Without a direct, comprehensive, and by consensus democracy it would be impossible to award preeminence to people and planet, establishing an ethos guaranteeing social justice. To be sure, it is rather easy to propose a paradigmatic change as sketched above, and to pretend to enforce it in the current paradigm of marketocracy would border on prestidigitation. Therefore, committing to gradually building an ethos of true democracy is an essential premise to go in pursuit of the new paradigm: the ethos where all civic, political, economic, social, ecological and cultural rights are enjoyed under equal terms of participation.

The People and Planet paradigm

The first step to achieve true sustainability is to work in pursuit of the replacement of the current market-centred ethos for one where people and planet are clearly and unequivocally placed above the market. In this ethos, the market acts only as a vehicle for sustainable material welfare and not as an end in itself. By the same token, governments truly fulfil their most basic responsibility: to procure the welfare of every rank of society, and particularly of the dispossessed. Consequently, a sine-qua-non condition for true sustainability is the replacement of capitalism due to its inherent and sheer predatory nature of human and natural resources. We must move from irrational to rational and sustainable consumption, to empower people not to consume more and equally per capita, but to develop their capacities to contribute to build dignified communities and protect the environment in an equitable and sustainable way. Such paradigm must guarantee conditions of life of a high-quality standard –which must be worthy of human dignity– for all stakeholders, and enable all participants to fulfil not just basic necessities, but to provide equivalent qualities of life for equivalent participants both North and South and without hurting the environment. In this ethos all stakeholders set the high-quality standard under conditions of equal say, through a duly democratic process as sketched above.

In this new ethos development entails the democratically-balanced development of all members of society, which will establish a culture of use of all natural and man-made resources to provide a high quality of life standard without the excesses associated with consumerism. Efficiency and productivity will no longer have meaning in terms of reproducing wealth but will be fundamental in consuming resources in the most efficient, balanced and sustainable way. Increments in the level of sustainability of systems and reduction of our footprint in all aspects of life of people and planet become quintessential and would be the new indicators and the true measure of development. Gross domestic product must become meaningless, for it is the antithesis of sustainability. We must not aspire to produce more, but to produce only what is necessary to achieve a high human development standard with a sustainable ecological footprint. Needless to say, the high quality of life standard would be completely redefined with high human development at its core.

In the People and Planet paradigm, development does not mean at all the capacity to possess material things and the improvement in the material standard of living per se. In that context sustainable development is an oxymoron. Wealth does not mean material wealth as such. Economic development and wealth lack a utilitarian meaning. What they mean is the development of human capacities in an egalitarian society;²⁶ human development is anchored on the premise of solidarity and true sustainability. Professor Harribey poses the idea of development as the increased wellbeing and the fulfilment of potential in a non-market framework. In this context, development does not mean growth in the current sense of more merchandise, more energy use and ever-greater inequalities.²⁷ In consequence, economic growth by itself is deemed nonsensical, and a balanced approach to sustainability, which includes rational growth as well as degrowth, when and where necessary, becomes the vehicle to achieve the wellbeing of all ranks of society. In this way, with the paradigmatic shift, marketing and advertising are completely recast –with radically different meanings and purpose– to be in sync with the new ethos, which bars the culture of hedonism that creates artificial needs. A balance is achieved. A global culture emerges to give preeminence to the sustainability of the community and the environment in solidarity instead of promoting sheer and irrational individualism. Yet, local cultures, especially indigenous cultures, are preserved so that they build their autonomy and achieve their own sustainability, in a context of global solidarity and cooperation. A balance between the needs of Mother Nature and the needs of all communities as well as a balance between the needs of the community and individual needs are achieved.

From a business perspective, the preeminent goal of all business entities in real democracy is to generate wealth through innovation, competitiveness and sharing to procure and sustain the welfare of societies and the environment. The entire social strata are investors in the business of private enterprise. Shareholder value, as we know it today, ceases to exist. The right to private property and wealth accumulation by individuals and business entities remains except that both events are permissible exclusively as the result of equitable and rational acts of commerce, where all stakeholders benefit, and not of unequal and asymmetric transactions. Capitalism becomes unequivocally obsolete. Productivity and efficiency also become moot points in the sense of increasing monetary gain. Yet they do have a rather important role in the sense of increasing the efficiency in the use of natural resources to consume less per capita and preserve more. To be sure, there is no longer the possibility for the excessive accumulation of wealth individually or for a corporation. Oligopolies and mega-corporations are dismembered into smaller entities to put them in line with the new paradigm if and only if they fulfil true and sustainable needs. There is no enrichment at the expense of the welfare of others or the planet. For the first time, an equitable distribution of wealth is gradually accomplished, where wealth means the development of wellbeing and not of material wealth per se. In a new meaning for development, wealth is not weighed on the basis of the quantity of goods and services owned but on the actual use of human potentialities to achieve wellbeing both individually and as part of the community. If the community has achieved an optimal level of wellbeing,

²⁶10 Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World, United Nations Development Programme, New York, 2004.

²⁷ Jean Marie Harribey, Do we really want development? Growth, the world's hard drug, Le Monde Diplomatique, August, 2004

then its members are also enjoying the same optimal level of wellbeing. That is, it is in the individual's self interest to pursue the welfare of the community, for in as much extent as this welfare is accomplished, the individual's self interest will be fulfilled. The privatisation of natural resources vital for life, such as water, air and plants, is stopped. By the same token, the privatisation of all public goods, such as the key elements of welfare systems (education, healthcare, secured retirement...) is reversed. They become basic, universal and legally-binding human rights. Other third generation rights, such as the right to a basic income are incorporated into the new standard of basic public goods. This is the only understanding of development that gives true meaning to the idea of progress. We do not progress by producing more and consuming more, we progress when we achieve a sustainable People and Planet paradigm that provides most people with the ability to materialise their human development with a quality of life worthy of human dignity.

In the social imaginary, this constitutes the replacement of the capitalist paradigm, centred on the market –as the teleological phenomena required for the sheer accumulation of wealth at the expense of all other participants. Human and environmental wellbeing emerges as the only meaning for development. Such a paradigmatic shift embodies the confrontation of two totally opposite societal ideas. This would be the replacement, in Castoriadis' words, *of the demented capitalist project of an unlimited expansion of pseudorational pseudomastery, which for a long time has ceased to concern merely the forces of production and the economy so as to become a global project (and for that reason all the more monstrous), that of a total mastery of physical, biological, psychical, social, and cultural data, by the project of individual and collective autonomy, the struggle for the intellectual as well as spiritual and also socially real and effective emancipation of the human being.*²⁸

From this perspective, the so-called emerging or developing countries in the periphery of the anachronic capitalist paradigm develop materially, for a time, to meet the basic needs that will generate an optimal level of wellbeing, whilst in rich countries growth and development per se will be gradually abandoned in favour of the pursuit of optimal levels of wellbeing for the community without compromising the environment. Thus, no indefinite production-consumption growth is pursued, but the necessary distribution in the old periphery to accomplish a sustainable balance; namely a balanced redistribution of the benefits of all human activity, with the preeminent goal of achieving the wellbeing of all members of society and the environment. Eventually, in the not-too-distant term, growth must be replaced by human development progress without more material growth in both the North and South. At such time, an optimal and balanced redistribution of the product of human activity is achieved and sustained, for indefinite growth is completely unsustainable, and sooner or later the world will have to replace it with a no-growth paradigm.²⁹ To be sure, the People and Planet paradigm must be a no-growth paradigm. Instead of more production we need to build a culture of reproduction centred on the sustainability of the life cycles and wellbeing of the communities. Unquestionably, cultural values are redefined to put the rational welfare of all ranks of society as the preeminent goal of a global community of sustainable societies. Clearly, none of this would make the least of sense without first building a true democracy ethos.

The meaning of sustainable

As is the case with democracy, the idea of sustainability has been manipulated to meet the needs of the so-called corporate citizens. Several thousand global corporations publish annually their sustainability reports in which they take pride in portraying themselves as organisations that interact with individuals and communities in a sustainable manner. Yet, with very few exceptions, most corporations do not meet the true standard of sustainability because in more than one way their business activity does not generate sustainability for all direct and indirect participants. In fact, in many

²⁸ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Rising Tide of Insignificance, (The Big Sleep)* Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: December 4, 2003.

²⁹ Serge Latouche, *Degrowth economics. Why less should be so much more?*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November, 2004

cases they generate the opposite. The most conspicuous example is the case of a living wage, an upheld human right and a fundamental issue with enormous repercussions in the livelihoods of millions of people. Yet, it is almost impossible to find a global corporation that pays a living wage to its workers or to those in its supply chain in the South. Most corporations like to boast that they pay wages above the minimum wage but, as we well know, a minimum wage is not a living wage at all, even in the most advanced economies. Not surprisingly, a living wage is not a standard of practically any social responsibility initiative and of no multilateral organisation whatsoever.

There are dozens of definitions of sustainability. Most agree that a sustainable ethos must provide a high-quality standard of existence to the economic, social and environmental dimensions with long-term sustainability. This entails that there must be balance in each of these dimensions so that its participants –human beings, nature and the planet as a whole– can enjoy a high-quality level of life. Balance requires that no participants thrive at the expense of others; a condition that is impossible to materialise under the current Darwinian capitalist paradigm, where savage competition is the standard and the logic of the market is to gain at the expense of other human beings, Mother Nature and the planet. An insurmountable amount of hard evidence, readily available to anyone who cares to look, including the reports generated by multilateral institutions, clearly shows that the logic of the market is completely unsustainable for all three dimensions and for all participants including the owners of the market; and unless we react adequately, it will take us in the not-too-distant future –as the planet's surface temperature data for 2016 indicates– to the irreversible demise of all species and our planet. Consequently, true sustainability can only entail the true commitment to our survival by the unrelenting pursuit of a high-quality sustainable system, in the three dimensions aforementioned, for all stakeholders.

In the case of businesses, truly sustainable business practices must guarantee this high-quality standard for all stakeholders and be able to sustain it through time. In the case of workers in the supply chains of large business entities and in smaller businesses and producers, sustainable business practices must provide a high standard to all, not just to barely lift them above the poverty line, not just enough to meet their basic necessities, but high enough to provide an equivalent quality of life vis-à-vis the quality of life of equivalent workers in today's so-called advanced economies, and without hurting the environment. Again, the context is that shareholderism and market logic would no longer operate, for there is a brazen dichotomy between the intended goals of the market and sustainability. They contravene each other. The world cannot operate under the schizoid logic of social Darwinism and concurrently aspire to be sustainable. That is a schizoid logic, to put it lightly. Thus, the meaning of sustainable can only be the ability to generate a new ethos that delivers conditions of life of a high-quality standard for all participants in the three dimensions of human activity. Now, what should this standard be? In true democracy all stakeholders set the high-quality standard of the new ethos –which must be worthy of human dignity– under equal say, through a duly-democratic process, instead of anachronistic corporations and their partners in government in pursuit of their very private interest. This new ethos in pursuit of sustainability must assure the equitable and balanced interaction of all stakeholders: people, nature and the planet as a whole, in all three dimensions: economic, social and environmental. Needless to say that any business entity cannot be a stakeholder in a truly democratic ethos, contrary to the demented arguments of the U.S. Supreme Court that awarded businesses the personality of individual persons with legal rights, as if they were human beings, deliberately upholding the supremacy of the market over people and planet. Hence, in the new paradigm, the only stakeholders are people, representing their own individual interests and people as communities representing the interest of all living things, and the preservation of all the non-animated (lifeless) organisms of Mother Earth as a whole; namely, of all natural resources.

The fundamental need for equitable and balanced interactions notwithstanding, another critical element of sustainability that cannot be emphasised enough even if to many it may seem obvious. Capitalism must be replaced, not just because it is incongruent with the high-quality sustainability of all participants but also because it is a sheer predator of resources. Like some sharks, it must be constantly moving and consuming energy to live. If the sharks stop swimming,

they die shortly thereafter. This is the case of capitalism, for it is an unstoppable irrational mechanism of consumption. It demands constant and ever greater levels of consumption to sustain its unrelenting pursuit of the reproduction and accumulation of capital, with no restraint to establish a balanced level of consumption that will allow it to stop depleting the resources that it needs to reproduce itself. Instead, it has created a culture of consumerism with a scale of moral values anchored on never ending and artificially-created needs, where people function as reality-alienated beings who are told to consume more and to feel the need for instant gratification to feel good. The clearly-evident consequences of its depleting and predatory nature are irrelevant for the institutional investors driving the market, to be sure, for all is based on irrational exuberant consumption –using as bait consumer’s instant gratification– to fulfil the market’s drivers short-term shareholder quarterly expectations. It is for these very reasons that entertaining the idea of true sustainability under capitalism bears an inherent and blatant contradiction and has no realistic possibility whatsoever.

Furthermore, true sustainability cannot be achieved only by eliminating capitalism’s economic injustice, by lifting people out of material poverty and incorporating them into the market as literally billions of new alienated consumers who would then have the consumer power to consume from thousands of products and services of which they are currently deprived. Under capitalism such a scenario would not only be unnatural but –in the utopian event of providing everyone with equal capacity of consumption– it would overwhelmingly deplete more resources than the current brand of capitalism. Embarking on demand-side Keynesian economic policies to put equivalent consumeristic power in people’s pockets worldwide would be counterproductive. As Peter Custers, another no-growth proponent argues, *a Keynesian Green New Deal isn’t a solution because Keynes took the economy of exponential growth as his starting point. Yet the capitalist economy with its drive to accumulate must fail since it will gradually lead to the exhaustion of raw materials, and to ever rising expenditures and energy use to extract raw materials. It is time for a transition away from the present economy of capital accumulation towards an economy that refuses to grow.*³⁰ Indeed, putting at par in the imaginary the consumer power of the periphery with that of the metropolises of the capitalist system would certainly be far worse than the illness. The U.S. has less than 5% of the world’s population but produced 15% of the world’s CO₂ emissions in 2014.³¹ The Global Footprint Network provides a very clear illustration of the case: *If everyone in the world lived like an average resident of the United States or the United Arab Emirates, the biocapacity of more than 4.5 Earths would be required to support humanity’s consumption rates. If instead the world were to live like the average South Korean, only 1.8 planets would be needed. And if the world lived like the average person in India did in 2007, humanity would be using less than half the planet’s biocapacity.*³² To be sure we do not want to live like the average U.S. resident or the average Indian. We need to live with a global ecological footprint of less than one planet, but that by changing our life systems would distribute far better the resources to allow everyone to live with dignity. Therefore, true sustainability would be in itself a new paradigm that must entail not only replacing capitalism with a system that is socially equitable, but it will need, at its very core, by altering its DNA, a new culture not based on irrational consumption but on building an ethos that allows people to develop their own capacities to contribute to their communities and to take from their communities in an equitable and environmentally-balanced way.

Along the lines of social scientists who have been advocating an ethos of no growth (Latouche, Harribey³³, Custers, Stoll, et al), development would mean the democratically-balanced development of all members of society who would enjoy access to the opportunities and resources necessary to develop and use their own potentialities to benefit themselves and their communities. Communities embody all living things and all lifeless resources provided by Mother Earth. In this new

³⁰ Peter Custers: Break with all history since the industrial revolution – Towards zero growth, Le Monde Diplomatique, June 2009.

³¹ "CO₂ time series 1990-2014 per region/country". Global Footprint Network, 2016. National Footprint Accounts, 2016 Edition. Available online at <http://www.footprintnetwork.org>, retrieved on 18 May 2016.

³² Ewing B., D. Moore, S. Goldfinger, A. Oursler, A. Reed, and M. Wackernagel. 2010. The Ecological Footprint Atlas 2010. Oakland: Global Footprint Network.

³³ Serge Latouche, Degrowth economics. Why less should be so much more?, Le Monde Diplomatique, November 2004, and Jean Marie Harribey, Do we really want development? Growth, the world’s hard drug, Le Monde Diplomatique, August 2004.

paradigm society would establish a balanced culture of use of all natural and manmade resources to provide a high quality of life standard. For instance, efficiency and productivity will still have enormous value in developing processes that would provide the amount of electricity needed for a city to function adequately by consuming far less energy and contributing far less as well to global warming, deliberately avoiding the Jevons Paradox³⁴. A city that functions adequately with far less energy consumption by definition generates a far smaller environmental footprint, which, concurrently, can be indefinitely sustained. This would be achieved by changing energy consumption habits, the technology used to generate the required electricity from less energy as well as the use of more renewable and less non-renewable sources of energy, until we eventually stop the use of any energy that pollutes the environment and contributes clearly to global warming, namely: the complete obsolescence of fossil fuels. Nonetheless, this does not mean producing more so-called “green growth,” which, through increased efficiencies, would be bound to produce more consumption and consumerism. Indeed, we must increase our efficiencies to produce the energy levels necessary to enjoy high-quality-of-life standards, but such standards must be clearly detached from the consumeristic expectations of the current marketocratic paradigm. Thus, once again, the high-quality standard would be the level set by all stakeholders –through true democratic interaction– that provides the maximum level of fulfilment of true societal needs. This high quality of life standard is inextricably linked to the consumption of energy in a way that produces a truly sustainable environmental footprint. This is done in such a way that the right equilibrium is achieved when non-renewable energy resources –that have already been depleted or rendered obsolete– are replaced with renewable energy resources that provide the energy required to fulfil the needs for the adequate functioning of the previously determined high level of life standard, and this is done in a way that secures long-term sustainability to all stakeholders of the community. To be sure, some non-renewable energy sources, such as oil,³⁵ inevitably will be depleted. But, under the People and Planet paradigm of the true democracy ethos, these resources would be depleted rationally, which means they would gradually be replaced by renewable resources that are used with maximum efficiency in their intrinsic value and in their long-term sustainability, with no regard for the then already redundant expectations of financial markets.

Transcending the market

Let us now address the role of business in the new paradigm replacing the marketocratic paradigm. The achievement of a sustainable high-quality-of-life standard is contingent on our capacity to transcend the contemporary market-centred paradigm. Transcending it in turn is contingent on building the new paradigm for the sustainability of people –in the context of social justice– and the planet –in the context of the balanced preservation of the environment. To transition to the new paradigm I reiterate that we must first build a new societal architecture of true democracy. Hence, establishing the new high-quality-of-life standard as the future universal standard is anchored on two paramount premises: (1) building a new truly democratic ethos, and (2) building the new paradigm of People and Planet. Transcending the market provides the radical paradigmatic shift to build our new edifice of true democracy through a systemic and gradual transition. This edifice entails a completely new conception of life and of our role as individual members of the new society.

In the sphere of the new businesses that belong to the People and Planet paradigm, there are no global corporations but only businesses that serve both the private as well as the public good. By design, if they exist it is because they have transcended the market. Consequently, their workers are also stakeholders in the mission, goals and management of any business, regardless of the size. Building the new paradigm inevitably requires conceptually redefining the purpose of business to make it congruent with an ethos of true democracy and to transform the market into a vehicle for generating the adequate level of sustainable welfare. This is to place people and planet over the market. Hence, the new raison

³⁴ The Jevons Paradox materialises when new technologies increase efficiency and –under a market logic– increase demand due to a rebound in consumption levels.

³⁵ Robert L. Hirsch, Roger Bezdek, Robert Wendling, Peaking of World Oil Production: Impacts, Mitigation, and Risk Management, National Energy Technology Laboratory of the Department of Energy, February de 2005.

d'être of enterprises must be to generate the people's welfare in a sustainable manner. Shareholder value, as the only purpose of business, is evidently eradicated given its absolute incongruence with the common good and its proven capacity to generate ever greater levels of inequality, exclusion, poverty and depredation of the planet, which are absolutely intolerable in true democracy. Two paramount features of the new enterprise: full respect for the entire spectrum of human rights and authentic sustainability require an equilibrium between the private and public responsibilities of business. As organs of society, businesses must take full responsibility for the impact of their activity on the social, economic and environmental dimensions.

To be sure, many people will consider these postulates outlandish due to the lethargy with which they live in the capitalist logic. However, there is a powerful current of voices that are advancing a new nature for business. In my research I have not found a position more clear on the need to harness business by the new truly democratic ethos than the argumentation of Theodor Rathgeber, a researcher and consultant on business, human rights and the environment. Rathgeber argues on behalf of the need for a *coherent regulatory system that requires an international institutional framework to ensure a minimum of democratic, transparent and participatory procedures*. He explains that this idea has been developed around a fundamental postulate aimed at a human and democratic business practice. In this way, *all economic structures and processes should be governed by democratic decision making instead of autocratic procedures*. Both *the employees, who are directly dependent on the production site, and the state, which is legitimised by democratic means, should have their say in the company's structure and basic orientation*. Thus, owners cannot decide unilaterally. By analogy, Rathgeber explains, the stakeholders who are thus affected should receive (quoting John Kenneth Galbraith) "countervailing powers;" such as unconditional opportunities to file complaints and launch legal proceedings. Ostensibly, transparency will lead to the participation of all stakeholders and victims.³⁶

Similarly, other arguments coming from the heart of capitalism consider it necessary to redefine the purpose of business with the objective of moving the social good from the periphery to the core of business culture. In a transformative scenario that societies embark on to transcend the market, the market's flaws as an agent of equity—work remuneration or otherwise—would be recognised by all parties as intrinsically inadequate. A new rights-based paradigm would inherently redefine the purpose of business. Once we transcend the market, its role must be completely deprived of any pre-eminence and of its untrammelled, undemocratic and unsustainable capitalistic essence. Markets will be strictly limited to becoming vehicles of commerce to provide the material quality of life that can be sustained by new predefined ecological footprints. Today's capitalistic logic of the market—anchored on supply and demand and sheer speculation—would be cancelled. Financial markets and their amoral casino-like mindset would no longer have a role in the new paradigm, for they would cease to exist. The commoditisation and privatisation of every aspect of life, including public goods, would cease to continue, and past privatisation of public goods must be reverted. In lieu, the new paradigm would guarantee these public goods as rights. In the sphere of labour, a shift from treatment of workers as commodities to workers as stakeholders would emerge as the established norm. The purpose of business would shift from shareholder value and profit maximisation toward public service. Competition, innovation and efficiency would remain core business attributes, but democratic control and transparency, anchored on long-term horizons, would direct enterprises toward creating and sharing wealth within a framework of justice and truly sustainable ecological limits. Therefore, businesses would be striving to compete, innovate and increase efficiencies in their pursuit of increased and sustainable welfare for all stakeholders, including prominently the planet. The six principles of corporate redesign advanced by the Corporation 20/20 initiative provide a solid foundation for such a vision.³⁷

³⁶ Theodor Rathgeber, UN Norms on the Responsibilities of Transnational Corporations. Dialogue Globalisation. OCCASIONAL PAPERS. N° 22. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Geneva April 2006. Geneva.

³⁷ <http://www.corporation2020.org/>, accessed on 6 February, 2016.

Corporation 20/20 Principles for Corporate Redesign

- ✓ *The purpose of the corporation is to harness private interest to serve the public interest;*
- ✓ *Corporations shall accrue fair returns for shareholders, but not at the expense of the legitimate interests of other stakeholders;*
- ✓ *Corporations shall operate sustainably, meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs;*
- ✓ *Corporations shall distribute their wealth equitably among those who contribute to its creation;*
- ✓ *Corporations shall be governed in a manner that is participatory, transparent, ethical, and accountable;*
- ✓ *Corporations shall not infringe on the right of natural persons to govern themselves, nor infringe on other universal human rights.*

Undoubtedly, to make business a democratic, ethical and transparent human activity that harnesses private interest in order to serve the public interest, we must break completely with the market-centred paradigm of shareholderism. In the new paradigm workers are no longer subject to unilateral decisions made by the owners of the business enterprise centred on their very private interest. Business owners now have at the core of their business mission the public good, both for all of their employees/workers, as well as for their suppliers and clients and all other stakeholders in their business sphere of influence, including the environment. Workers are now direct stakeholders in the purpose of their business with a direct say in the decision-making process.

As a consequence, in the new paradigm the workers' financial compensation is no longer a wage, but a shared remuneration for their contribution that guarantees to all employees/workers a life worthy of human dignity in line with the high quality-of-life standard that the community has democratically established as a legally-binding standard. Concurrently, this implies that in the sphere of work remuneration, we must completely redefine the concept to anchor it on the balanced use of resources. We cannot propose to close the living wage gaps from the old marketocratic paradigm across the world aspiring to provide to all workers the same consumption power of the well-off workers. Consequently, the concept of a work remuneration worthy of human dignity must assess both its lowest and highest thresholds. On one hand, it should determine the lowest level of consumer power that ensures that all remunerations are worthy of human dignity. On the other hand it must assess the highest possible level of remuneration that remains in sync with previously and scientifically defined levels of consumption of resources that guarantee long-term sustainability. In a new transformative model, the dignified remuneration must be envisioned with a new lens anchored on sustainability criteria that will inevitably cut drastically the materialistic expectations of all income earners, both in Centre and Periphery economies of the, to be replaced, marketocratic paradigm. Surely, Periphery workers will increase their consumption power to enjoy a good life standard but not nearly within the present unsustainable levels of consumption generated by Centre workers. As could be expected, these workers must cut their consumption patterns as much as necessary to put them in sync with predefined sustainable levels of resource use.

How do we transcend the market in practice? Two scenarios embody how they could enable us to rise above the market. The most desirable scenario is the organisation of the common citizenry as a global movement to act in a peaceful, legitimate and strategic manner to dismantle the system by actions of no cooperation, namely to boycott marketocracy, which –by applying the market's logic– is centred on the boycott of its consumerist economy. To be sure, the citizenry is

the party most interested in reconstituting markets to serve the higher purposes of justice, democratic control and ecological resilience. A peaceful, transnational mobilisation of citizens would serve as the catalyst for repurposing business, including the creation of an enforceable—legally-binding—international regime focused on advancing the transformation of the nature of the enterprise.

The second possible scenario is the crisis already happening worldwide. In many regions of the world, societies are already struggling against the dominant system with varying degrees of intensity and with outcomes still nebulous. Neoliberal orthodoxy sees these struggles as recurring cyclical crisis endemic to the dominant system. However, the degree of intensity and the clarity of the demands are exponentially increasing globally to levels that appear unprecedented. The Indignados Movement in Spain, the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement in the US, the Greek referendum against the diktat of the Troika, the French *Nuit debut* social movement, occurring right now, against the customary neoliberal labour reforms, and the Diem25 European Union movement to truly democratise its societies as well as many other social struggles across the world attest to the disenfranchisement of large sectors of the population and the shared sense of grievance over issues such as gross income disparities, the privatisation of life and nature and ubiquitous corruption of all national and multilateral institutions. Evidence attests to a consistent viral nature of such movements when timing, leadership and shared grievance converge to threaten prevailing power structures. This of course is the least desirable scenario, because demands, approaches and strategies will vary, despite the fact that the actions of the agents of marketocracy are very consistent across the globe. This will produce different results, many undesirable from the perspective of the new paradigm. Only time will tell if the unrelenting attack of the owners of marketocracy and their agents against societies will make both scenarios converge into a well structured global movement or if there will be only local and regional mobilisations that will struggle to remove from power the structures of the market-driven system.

The sustainable footprint of true progress

The workers's share of income in the economic activity is the most transcendental and morally fundamental factor in the pursuit of social justice and is equally important in determining the adequate level of consumption that provides both a high-quality-of-life standard and a sustainable ecological footprint. In the marketocratic paradigm, consumption is produced with high levels of inequality and renders an absolutely unsustainable ecological footprint. How would the living wage of the old paradigm evolve in the People and Planet paradigm to secure a sustainable level of consumption that concurrently guarantees a high-quality-of-life standard? The remunerations of the workers of the new paradigm would guarantee, from the lowest level upwards, a high-quality standard that, by definition, secures a sustainable life worthy of human dignity. These workers' remunerations provide the purchasing power necessary to meet the basic needs for food, housing, clothing, healthcare, education, transportation, and leisure. Yet, currently, this perception is greatly influenced by the expectations of a consumerist culture by contemporary commercialism. To transcend the market and build the new paradigm, such perception must be transformed in sync with the sustainable standards of the new paradigm to detach it from the excesses associated with consumerism. Because economic development and wealth no longer have a utilitarian meaning, they translate into new indicators that measure increments in the level of sustainability –by reducing our footprint in all aspects on the life of people and planet– to assess whether we are progressing in our new development goals. Daly asserts that growth is more of the same stuff, whilst development is the same amount of better stuff.³⁸ Yet the better stuff needs to be fairly distributed and truly necessary. These indicators, among other things, would measure the development of human capacities anchored on the premise of solidarity and true sustainability. The vision with greater emphasis on the sustainability of a future global society is embodied by the concept of progress

³⁸ Herman E. Daly: A Steady-State Economy: Sustainable Development Commission, UK (24 April, 2008)
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without more consumption or, as many proponents increasingly defined it, a degrowth economy.³⁹ This is about a post-capitalist economy that only consumes what is necessary to sustain a high level of welfare for all, where GDP growth becomes a moot point. True progress is then weighed through indicators that assess the quality of human life and the size of its footprint on the environment. Yet, this does not mean recession or depression. First of all, all the economic concepts (growth, development, progress...) are detached from the illusionary and unsustainable market-driven ethos and recast with new meanings and concepts that reflect the new People and Planet ethos. The measure of high progress is a high human development standard with an environmental footprint far below the current one, just enough to have a dignified level of comfort; not consumerist, not hedonist, not individualist, but with ideal health, nutrition, education, clothing, housing, leisure and community responsibility standards and anchored on the consumption of renewable energy sources instead of fossil energy. Human work is driven by the generation of welfare for people instead of the growth of shareholder value. Inevitably, capitalism must be replaced for its aforementioned antithetical nature in the material, psychosocial and humanistic sense. Fortunately, a values shift toward social and environmental responsibility that is slowly emerging could favourably intersect with a universal minimum “living remuneration” to reduce the current trajectory of a growing ecological footprint that threatens to overshoot nature’s regenerative capacity.

Addressing the issues of global warming and social justice in the new paradigm, in a true democracy ethos, requires sustainable human development. Thus, relative to the urgent need to materialise the social demands of one billion people who live in dire poverty⁴⁰ –and also to lift from poverty at least another 2,6 billion⁴¹ people that endure relative poverty deliberately ignored in the assessments of multilateral organisations– development policies affecting the entire population must be anchored on wealth redistribution and not on GDP growth as an end in itself. Today, if there were a reasonable degree of social justice, there would not be poverty keeping the same level of material and energy consumption currently recorded. Surely, the world would not have opulent societies but fair societies with a good quality of life. True democracy does not pretend opulent but just and sustainable levels of welfare. This implies, in practical terms, that we could have years of progress with no GDP growth, if the GINI index of inequality and the Human Development Index were to gradually improve while concurrently we increase efficiency in our energy consumption to decrease our ecological footprint. Certainly, as in the case of Keynesian economics, we need to aggregate demand in the pockets of the dispossessed, but not with the goal of putting net consumption per capita at par with those of the main capitalists’ metropolises. This is unsustainable in both instances. The goal must be to convert pervasive poverty into dignified levels of welfare, with a global ecological footprint that would have to gradually diminish over the next decades, but that would need to relatively increase in the strata stricken by poverty, until they reach dignified levels of welfare.

Concurrently, the social strata with an unsustainable ecological footprint would have to drastically reduce it. The trend of unsustainability is global. The ecological footprint in 2010 –the relationship between ecological impact and biocapacity, measured in hectares, recorded a deficit of 1,1 hectares per capita, equivalent to 65% of the world’s biocapacity (chart 1).⁴² In the U.S, the deficit was of 4,5 hectares per capita or 118% of its biocapacity, and China had a deficit of 2,4 hectares per capita or 267% of its biocapacity. These constitute two of the worst footprints in the world because their consumption of resources is far greater than their capacity to sustain them. In contrast, Bolivia, Brazil, New Zealand, Australia and Canada recorded some of the best ecological reserves in the world, (13,8, 6,0, 4,5, 7,3 and 7,3 hectares

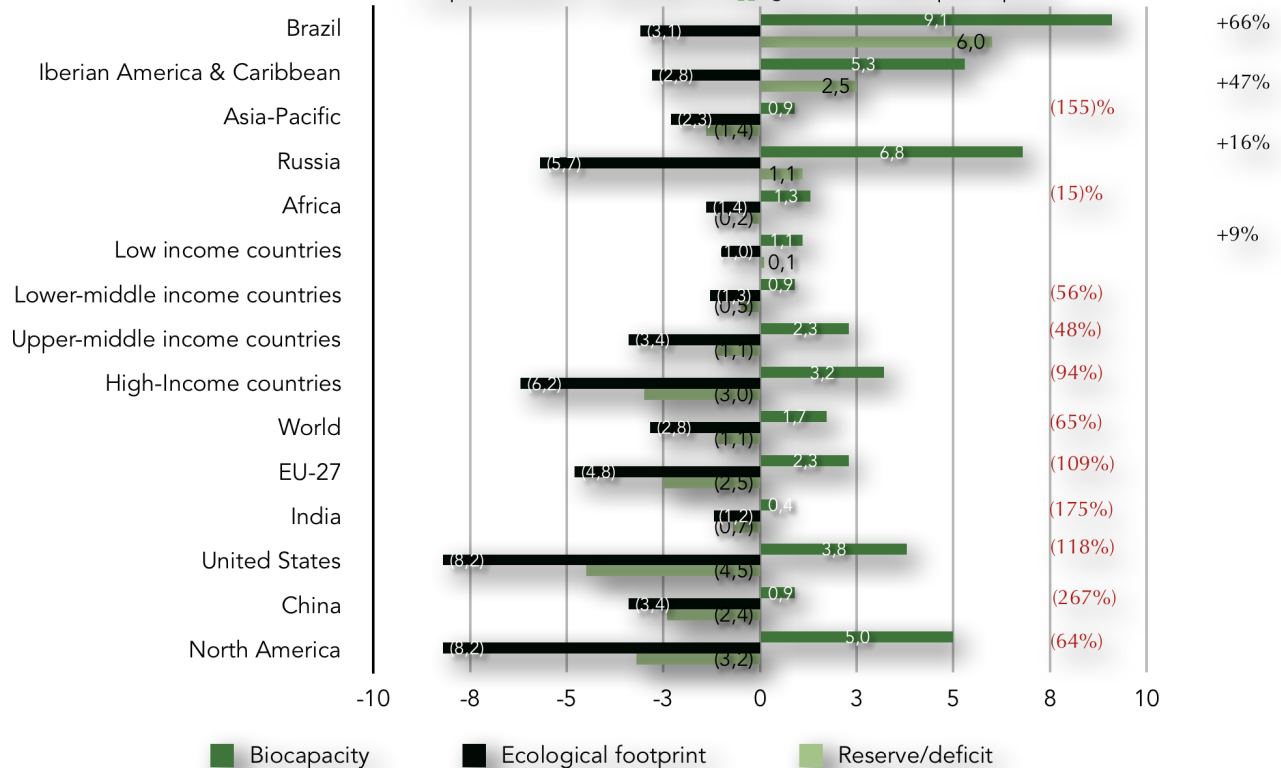
³⁹ Serge Latouche, Degrowth economics. Why less should be so much more?, Le Monde Diplomatique, November 2004, and Jean Marie Harribey, Do we really want development? Growth, the world’s hard drug, Le Monde Diplomatique, August 2004.

⁴⁰ According to the World Bank’s development indicators, one billion people lived with less than U.S. \$1,90 a day (about 13% of the world’s population) in 2012, using 2011 PPPs. This indicator excludes billions of people that endure relative poverty of some kind: food, clothing, proper housing, education, etc.

⁴¹ See KNOEMA website at: <https://knoema.com/atlas/topics/Poverty/Number-of-Poor/Number-of-poor-at-dollar5-a-day> measuring total headcount for people living with less than \$5 dollars a day. The data range is 2009-2012 and give a total of 3,648 billion. Source used is Poverty and Equity Database, based on World Development Indicators. Accessed on 18 May 2016.

⁴² © 2016 Global Footprint Network. National Footprint Accounts, 2016 Edition. Please contact Global Footprint Network at data@footprintnetwork.org for more information.

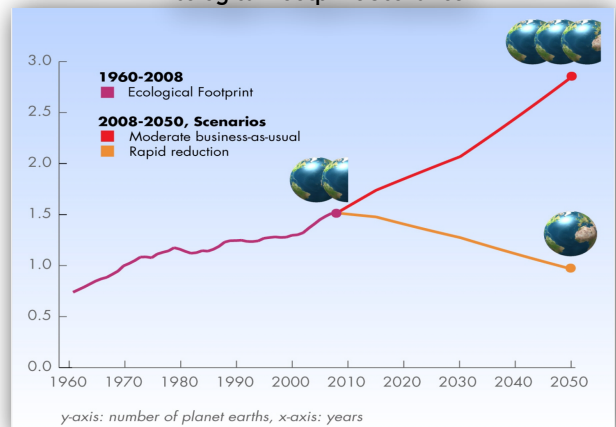
Chart 1: 2012 Ecological Footprint and Biocapacity
– surplus/deficit in hectares and % (global hectares per capita)



per capita respectively) tantamount to 83%, 66%, 45%, 44% and 49% of their biocapacity respectively.⁴³ Ecological deficits are prevalent in practically all of Asia, Europe, North and Central America and the Caribbean. Only South America and Oceania have good ecological reserves while Africa had a small deficit.

Nonetheless, all reserves are declining, thus the entire world is experiencing a clear trend towards unsustainable ecological footprints in the short term by turning resources into waste faster than they can be turned back into resources. This puts us into an environmental overshoot. This implies that the world must focus on the development of a wealth redistribution model with a long-term tendency towards much lower energy consumption levels than at this time. This does not entail a proportional reduction in the quality of the welfare of well-off strata per se, but a new conception of quality of well-being with a drastic reduction in energy consumption (chart 2), increasing efficiencies and replacing fossil energy use with renewable energy sources and exponentially consuming more recyclable materials that generate a rather small ecological footprint vis-a-vis the original materials. It entails as well a drastic change in consumer habits, in such a way that our civil responsibility gains precedence over our consumption, culturally transforming our

Chart 2: 1960 - 2008 Ecological Footprint and 2008 - 2050 Ecological Footprint Scenarios



⁴³ ibid.
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concept of material well-being. As Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi assert, the time is ripe for our measurement system to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being.⁴⁴

Indeed, in the new culture of true democracy, our consumption carries both rights and responsibilities. Thus, we ought to change our habits to make them compatible with adequate norms for sustainable consumption; from eating, cleaning and clothing habits to leisure and transportation habits. Norms that inevitably will also change the supply of goods and services offered by an, unequivocally, closely-regulated market. Consumer choices, consequently, must deliver far less hedonism and far more citizen efficiency and responsibility, in our role as socially and environmentally responsible consumers. Chart 2 provides a clear perspective on the challenge that we are facing under the current market-driven paradigm. The Global Footprint Network rightly asserts: *Today (2008) humanity uses the equivalent of 1,5 planets to provide the resources we use and absorb our waste. This means it now takes the Earth one year and six months to regenerate what we use in a year. Moderate UN scenarios suggest that if current population and consumption trends continue, by the 2030s, we will need the equivalent of two Earths to support us.*⁴⁵ *And of course, we only have one. Turning resources into waste faster than waste can be turned back into resources puts us in global ecological overshoot, depleting the very resources on which human life and biodiversity depend. The result is collapsing fisheries, diminishing forest cover, depletion of fresh water systems, and the build up of carbon dioxide emissions, which creates problems like global climate change. These are just a few of the most noticeable effects of overshoot. Overshoot also contributes to resource conflicts and wars, mass migrations, famine, disease and other human tragedies—and tends to have a disproportionate impact on the poor, who cannot buy their way out of the problem by getting resources from somewhere else. To end the overshoot, the Earth provides all that we need to live and thrive. So what will it take for humanity to live within the means of one planet? Individuals and institutions worldwide must begin to recognise ecological limits. We must begin to make ecological limits central to our decision-making and use human ingenuity to find new ways to live, within the Earth's bounds. This means investing in technology and infrastructure that will allow us to operate in a resource-constrained world. It means taking individual action, and creating the public demand for businesses and policy makers to participate.*⁴⁶

Steven Stoll, a proponent of a drastic reduction of consumption as the basis of sustainability, summarises his vision of U.S. society on the level of awareness about the need to drastically reduce our ecological footprint: *They are heading in two directions at once. They have accepted efficiency as the soul of what it means to be green, but they have not yet recognised a biophysical limit on the scale of their consumption.*⁴⁷ Many observers believe that we must cut our ecological footprint by one-third by 2050 at the latest, if not much earlier.⁴⁸ A universal living remuneration, if followed by reduced consumption by the affluent, would bend the curve of unsustainable consumption toward a sustainable trajectory. Chart 3 illustrates –paralleling the rapid reduction scenario of the Global Footprint Network that advocates the need to cut our energy consumption by about one third by 2050– how this trend might diminish our global footprint while achieving the equity outcome a living remuneration represents.⁴⁹ To accomplish this, the affluent would need to cut their per capita hectare consumption by about three-fifths whilst poor people would increase it by about threefold.

⁴⁴ Joseph E. Stiglitz, Chair, Amartya Sen, Jean-Paul Fitoussi, Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, The Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress" (CMEPSP) 2009.

⁴⁵ Planet equivalent(s) : Every individual and country's Ecological Footprint has a corresponding Planet Equivalent, or the number of Earths it would take to support humanity's Footprint if everyone lived like that individual or average citizen of a given country. It is the ratio of an individual's (or country's per capita) Footprint to the per capita biological capacity available on Earth (1.72 gha in 2011). In 2011, the world's average Ecological Footprint of 2.7 gha equals 1.54 Planet Equivalents. See: <http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/glossary/#overshoot>

⁴⁶ Global Footprint Network : World Footprint, 2010.

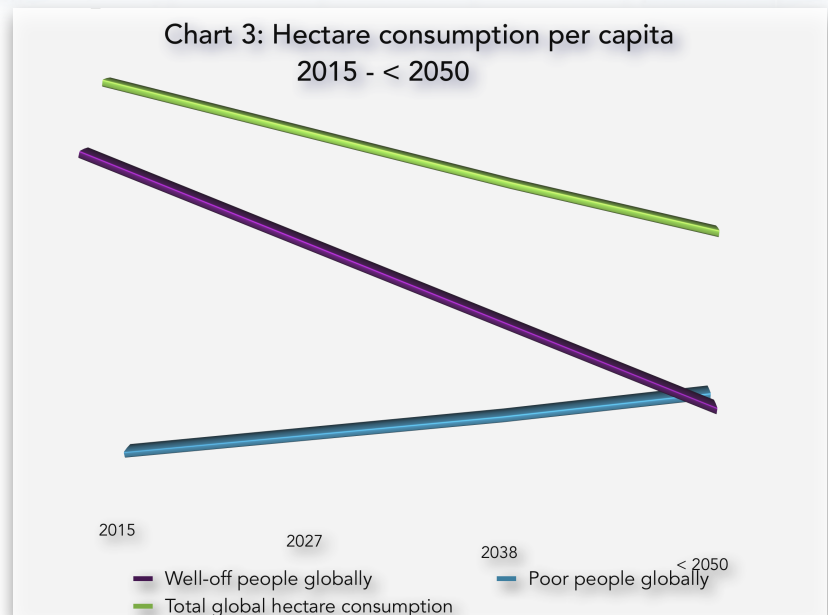
⁴⁷ Steven Stoll, "Fear of Falling: The Specter of a No-Growth world," *Harper's Magazine*, March 2008.

⁴⁸ Many environmental scientists consider that our footprint needs to be reduced substantially at a faster pace than by 2050. See David S. Wood and Margaret Pennoc, *Journey to Planet Earth – Plan B: Mobilising to Save Civilisation, Educators Guide*. (Washington, DC: Screenscope, 2010).

⁴⁹ Global Footprint Network, World Footprint, accessed on January 9, 2014, http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFNpage/world_footprint/.

Evidently, this could only be realistic if we radically change from the shareholder-driven paradigm to the People and Planet paradigm with a completely different consumer and energy use culture. This does not mean, whatsoever, that well-off people would cut their standard of living by three-fifths, but it means that they would need to drastically cut their energy use and their production of waste by three-fifths by radically changing their consumer habits. Concurrently, poor people would increase their energy use and, irremediably, their production of waste, because they would be lifted out of poverty, by working in local communitarian projects or contributing as stakeholders to the goals of the socially and environmentally balanced business enterprises of the new paradigm, as previously discussed. Yet, their consumer and energy use habits would also be

radically different from those prevalent today. The end result would be that the total global energy consumption footprint would decrease by about one-third. As a whole, consumer behaviour must be not consumeristic but fully socially and environmentally conscious. Hence lifestyles and their standards of living would, accordingly, be dramatically different.



Latouche provides a very sound argument explaining the basic premise that we cannot pretend to maintain a system that demands the infinite consumption of resources in a planet with finite resources. He supports his argument on Sadi Carnot's second law of Thermodynamics: *the transformation of energy is not completely reversible due to a quantity called entropy, which represents the unavailability of a system's thermal energy for conversion into mechanical work, often interpreted as the degree of disorder or randomness in the system*. This second law says that entropy always increases with time: *the sum of the entropies of all the bodies taking part in the process*. Consequently, if the diverse forms of transformation of energy (heat, movement...) are not completely reversible it is not possible to have any consequences in economics, which is based on such transformations. Yet this was customarily ignored by economists. Indeed, it was not until the 1970s, according to Latouche, that ecology was included in economics with the work of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen: "The economy excludes the irreversibility of time". So it ignores entropy, the irreversibility of the transformations of energy and matter. Consequently, residue and pollution are not factored-in in economic activity. They are completely disregarded. If they were regarded, Latouche argues, GDPs would be substantially lower and often enough they would be negative, when production slows down but the ecological footprint remains or even increases. In a nutshell, real economic processes, in contrast with their theoretical postulates, are not purely mechanical reversible processes, but of an entropic nature. They take place on the biosphere, which has limited time. This is why Georgescu-Roegen argues that it is impossible to have an infinite growth in a planet with limits, and, thus, the need to think out a bio-economy.⁵⁰ But, in a clear display of sheer hubris, this is customarily disregarded in economics and in public policy. We should not be surprised therefore, that, in this same way, the entire negative impact of business activity on people and planet, and on its sphere of influence, is completely disregarded. To this date, the neoclassical capitalist economics as well as the core principles of business culture, globally, send to oblivion the impact of economic activity as if there were no ecological limits. Daly puts it very clearly: *The neoclassical view is that man, the creator, will*

⁵⁰ Serge Latouche: La apuesta por el decrecimiento, Icaria – Antrazyt 2006, p.21-22.
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*surpass all limits and remake Creation to suit his subjective individualistic preferences, which are considered the root of all value. In the end economics is religion.*⁵¹ This explains why, to this date, the climate change summits have not been able to reach legally-binding agreements. All remains in the sphere of laissez-faire practice favoured by the apologists of the current system in the halls of governments, who really work as agents of the owners of the market and not as guardians of the common good. This is the scientific argument explaining the unavoidable *raison d'être*, beyond any ideological or philosophical inclinations, of why any market-driven system is completely unsustainable. This can be regarded as an axiom; succinctly: there cannot be unlimited consumption of limited resources.

In short, the gradual equalisation of our ecological footprint at a much lower level than the present, yet providing sustainable high-quality of life standards, is an imperative ecological as well as a moral responsibility. However, materialising this radical paradigmatic shift is contingent on transcending the market with all the social, democratic and ecological implications previously addressed. To be sure, there would not be one high-quality of life standard for all societies. It is conclusively impossible due to the human condition and the wide spectrum of cultures and psychosocial degrees of consciousness. For instance, relative to work remuneration, human nature will always produce different levels of compensation for varying degrees of intellectual capacity and physical dexterity. However, the dramatic differences in pay between the top and the lowest echelons of workers, often exceeding ratios of 200 to 1, would give way to far lower remuneration inequity and far greater wealth sharing. Remuneration for work rendered will never equate to equal remunerations. But the chasm between highest and lowest would be dramatically reduced, such that all forms of monetary compensations are at least sustainable living remunerations, socially and ecologically, a far cry from the current conditions. In this way, the lowest remuneration will always guarantee a sustainable standard of living worthy of human dignity. Anything less portends a future of increasing strife between the haves and have-nots, expressions of which are emerging worldwide with increasing, and ominous, frequency. Another example is the drastic decrease in our levels of consumption. If we eliminate excessive consumption, namely the expenditures we make for goods and services that are not necessary, we could reinvest that human energy spent in producing and consuming it in activities, including healthful and leisure activities, that enhance our high-quality of life standard. Clearly, high-quality of life standards will depend much less on material wealth and much more on intangible societal goods.

We are also pushed to replace fossil fuels because we are rapidly reaching their levels of exhaustion. Conventional oil production has already surpassed its peak-oil threshold. Many analysts warned, since the mid-20th century, of the arrival of the peak of conventional oil production in the seventies. This peak production, known as "peak oil" implies that once the peak-oil threshold of production is crossed, its decline will accelerate until it reaches its exhaustion. This bell-shaped trend of conventional oil production, is repeated in all centres of production; thus the vast majority of them arrive at levels of exhaustion or low production before or at the beginning of the XXI century. Since 1956 Hubbert –a geologist who pioneered peak-oil analysis– predicted the arrival at the summit of U.S. conventional oil production in 1970, which was met with a margin of error of a few months. Subsequent colleagues of Hubbert, refined their techniques and applied them to conventional oil deposits across the planet. As a result, they have predicted with a high degree of certainty that conventional oil production would reach its peak in the late twentieth century or at the beginning of this century. Thus, most conventional oil peaks in the world have already been surpassed or are about to be surpassed. Although there is still some uncertainty on the level of oil reserves in the world, most of the scientific community places all the world's peak-oil thresholds to be surpassed between 2005 and 2020. Therefore, Deffeyes, –quoted by Saxe-Fernandez– says that the depletion of conventional oil has already reached us; the world's oil production has stopped growing and by 2019 production will be reduced by 90% of its peak.⁵²

⁵¹ Herman E. Daly: A Steady-State Economy: Sustainable Development Commission, UK (24 April, 2008)

⁵² John Saxe-Fernández: Terror e Imperio / La Hegemonía Política y Económica, Debate, 2006.

The hydraulic fracturing or fracking of shale oil and gas has not been feasible since the beginning of 2015 and already in 2014 its potential speculative reserves delivered a devastating death-blow to the industry hype about fossil energy bringing in a new era. The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) published a new estimate of U.S. shale deposits that revised the estimate, slashing it by 96% to a feeble 600 million barrels of oil from the previous estimate of 15 billion.⁵³ Nonetheless, the environmental footprint of this kind of energy is so devastating that even if reserves were higher and production feasible for oil companies, its impact on the environment includes risks of ground and surface water contamination, air and noise pollution, the potential triggering of earthquakes, and the consequential and already extensively documented health hazards.

Therefore, we have no choice but to transcend the market including prominently replacing our energy sources as part of our paradigmatic shift. If we succeed in changing our forms of social organisation and behaviour, we would be tackling two cornerstones of true sustainability: drastic reductions of poverty and of our environmental footprint and the construction and consolidation of the new People and Planet paradigm. If we fail to transcend capitalism, workers will continue to have the right to demand a living wage under the same unsustainable structures of energy use and production of waste, even if we provoke our own demise. Evidently, we must transcend the market for if we aspire to bequest a Planet worthy of dignity, we have no choice but to put an end to the completely unsustainable Darwinian essence of capitalism. Some may argue that our proposal is really an attempt to ecologise societies. But it should be evident that it seeks to serve two purposes that are indivisible. One is to build a truly democratic ethos to achieve a great degree of social justice. The other is to act in line with the very primeval fact that we cannot aspire to live in an ethos where we drool by exercising in a million ways an infinite consumption of resources in a planet with finite resources. Whether we like it or not, to achieve social justice we must take into consideration the constrained limits imposed by Mother Earth. Hence the new paradigm serves a dual purpose: social justice for the people and a sustainable ecological footprint for our Planet. Without both we are doomed and we will not survive this century, at least in any minimally humanistic way.

Degrowth in the context of the People and Planet paradigm

The idea of completely rethinking our forms of social organisation due to the evident oxymoron between the capitalist system and true democracy and ecological sustainability is not new. In the early 1970s Sicco Mansholt, at the time President of the Commission of the European Common Market, who pretended to reorganise an “inhuman plan for Europe’s agriculture,” unexpectedly and radically changed his posture and advocated for a systemic change. In an interview he said that *suddenly I realised that we needed to radically change the whole of our system; the humane Europe, with zero growth, must abolish the concept of gross national product to promote the gross national happiness*. Mansholt warned back in 1971 that we –humankind– were bound to suffer a great debacle if we did not change our philosophy and its system. He asserted that the “Great Crisis” would start around 1985-1990 and reach its climax around 2020. He considered that the first victims would be the peoples of the developing world, but soon after it would encompass the whole of humanity. Mansholt argued that all of this becomes so evident using simple algebraic calculus – without the help of computers– that he could not understand why the governments did not show much concern. Hence *I am convinced that we must completely and rapidly modify not just our policies but also our behaviour*. He said that given the limits that we have to face long term –in the production of energy, food, iron, zinc, etcetera– thirty years from now, when we double our population to more than seven billion, achieving zero growth would not be sufficient to cope with the problem. That is, we would need to replace our material growth for other growth anchored on culture, happiness and wellbeing.⁵⁴

⁵³ Louis Sahagún: U.S. officials cut estimate of recoverable Monterey Shale oil by 96%, Los Angeles Times, 20 May, 2014.

⁵⁴ Josette Alia, The Path to happiness, Revista Triunfo: Num 508, published 24 June 1972. Accessed on 26 April 2016 on <http://www.triunfodigital.com/mostradorn.php?a%F1o=XXVII&num=508&imagen=11&fecha=1972-06-24>

That we need to drastically reduce the ecological footprint of the current system if we want to bequest to the generations born in this century a future worthy of human dignity is an axiom. There is no future of any kind if we do not drastically cut our consumption of resources and our generation of CO₂. Therefore, what does degrowth really mean in practice? One definition that describes clearly what it is and what it entails is that proposed by Research & Degrowth: *“Sustainable degrowth is a downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions and equity on the planet. It calls for a future where societies live within their ecological means, with open, localised economies and resources more equally distributed through new forms of democratic institutions.”*⁵⁵ To accomplish this we need to stop our patterns and decrease our consumption levels of all resources, including foremost fossil energy resources and the resources necessary for life. Evidently, to build the new paradigm with a drastically reduced ecological footprint we need to completely rethink our ways to organise our societies, first politically and then socially, economically and environmentally as parts of an entire new social edifice, a new form of imagining how our species lives and interacts with the rest of Mother Nature. The first step in organising our societies must be politically. If we do not put together a truly democratic social edifice, we will never be able to transcend the market and build a system specifically designed for the welfare of people and planet and not the market.

This is essentially the idea of degrowth. We begin by thinking in terms of creating a network of communities centred around the idea of sharing work to provide for the things that really matter and not by the needs artificially created by consumeristic social structures immersed in the utopian spirit of cornucopia induced by capitalism. These small local communities, that we may call “citizen cells” (CCs), organise to create more cells convinced about building the People and Planet paradigm. These CCs commit to exercise direct democratic practice in a network of local, regional, national and global CCs whose only purpose is to care for the wellbeing of people and planet. They work through direct intervention in the creation of all the economic, social, ecological and cultural activities defined by their own citizen networks. They also commit to permanently exercise direct democracy by getting directly involved in all the areas of the public matter. They prepare and propose new legislation and subject every new legislative proposal –coming directly from the citizenry or from their legislative bodies– to plebiscites or referenda. They also get permanently involved in the periodical assessment of the performance of all elected public servants, so that they get confirmed or replaced. In essence, they commit to take care of their communities by taking care of the public matter. As Kallis puts it, degrowth is anchored on the idea of a caring economy, *that calls for the equal distribution of care work and the re-centring of society around it. A caring economy is labour-intensive precisely because human labour is what gives care its value.*⁵⁶ A caring economy requires a paradigmatic shift on our understanding of our purpose in life. It requires that we strip ourselves of the individualistic selfishness inherent in capitalism and that we think and act permanently in the context of communities where we all care for all the members, not just of our peer human beings but of all living things that share this planet. We also move from being passive “citizens” who only act when we are called to do so, to active and responsible citizens, who take control of the new paradigm driver’s seat so that we permanently take control of the public agenda. We transcend the current paradigm to move from being consumer societies to being sustainable societies. Thus, we no longer embody consumer individuals but truly socially and environmentally responsible citizens who consume only what is necessary to enjoy a sustainable and dignified standard of living. Essentially, we move from mock democracy to true and direct democracy. In the same way that the only true development is sustainable, the only true democracy is direct. If we do not start by building a truly democratic ethos, we will not be able to build the People and Planet paradigm –anchored on degrowth– as the only way to build sustainable life systems.

⁵⁵ Research & Degrowth (R&D): Definition, <http://www.degrowth.org/definition-2>, accessed on 25 May 2016.

⁵⁶ Giorgos Kallis, “The Degrowth Alternative,” Great Transition Initiative (February 2015).

Let's further elaborate on the idea of degrowth if we envision it as the keystone of the People and Planet paradigm. Let us debunk some misconceptions that have been intentionally thrown at this idea to weaken it. Degrowth is not about recession or regression but about a much lower consumption of resources that concurrently is much better distributed than in the market-driven system that we endure today. As we all know, the most prominent feature of capitalism is inequality. Inequality is at the core of its DNA, for capitalism is designed to compete and produce many winners at the expense of many times more losers. Consequently, the *raison d'être* of capitalism: the reproduction and accumulation of capital, cannot coexist with a degrowth economy. It dies, ceases to exist, immediately after degrowth takes preeminence. Latouche says that one way to explain Degrowth is that it is like "agrowth", in the same way we talk about atheism. So no creed and no growth are alike. It is also, and precisely, about the recantation of a faith, of capitalism, material growth, consumption, profit, progress, development.⁵⁷ We need to transcend the culture of having, of ownership, of possession, of a nihilistic conception of our existence except to own and consume for their very own sake, as an end in themselves. Thus, we need to move to the culture of being individual members of a community of living things that has rights and responsibilities in the context of caring for us, in a rather meaningful way, by caring for all the rest. Our purpose in life is to enjoy life by concurrently contributing as individuals to the welfare of all members of our community. In other words, we will only be able to care for us in as much we care for all members of our community, human and not human. If we do not commit permanently to a culture of caring for all, we will not be able to care for ourselves, for only by working for the welfare of all we will secure our own welfare. In a nutshell, just like Erich Fromm so clearly proposed, we need to move from the culture of having to the culture of being.⁵⁸

In my own view, development and progress are necessary, but evidently they need to be detached from capitalism and redefined in the same way that the only true sustainable development is development without growth. Development usually refers to a specified state of growth or advancement. In the new paradigm, development needs to be redefined to imply always advancement; a better state than the present one, yet without requiring more growth, ergo more consumption and more accumulation of resources, material and pecuniary. The same goes for progress. We progress when we get closer to our aspiration of a better quality of life not just for our species but for all living things with less consumption of resources. Thus, we achieve progress every time we advance in our goal to reach a general level of welfare that is truly sustainable in the long-term. In other words, progress must be directed at developing the state where we reach an equilibrium between a generalised level of welfare and a sustainable ecological footprint. We progress when we lower our consumption of resources but enhance the general level of welfare by increasing efficiencies by in turn distributing far better the consumption of the resources required to achieve such a state. This will also allow us to concurrently achieve social justice. This would give a new meaning to development for the new paradigm. True development and progress take place in perfect sync with the purpose of true democracy: The welfare of all ranks of society, and the planet, in a sustainable manner, regardless of private interests.

From this new perspective, the public good always has precedence over the private good. We cannot pursue our private interest at the cost of the public interest. But what is the public interest? In the new paradigm, this can only mean the exercise of truly democratic actions to accomplish the general and sustainable level of welfare that we define as human communities. True development is the development of Human wellbeing –in terms of being able to enjoy our rights and comply with our responsibilities– and of a material quality of life in harmonious coexistence with the environment, so that our global ecological footprint becomes sustainable at a stationary state much lower than at the present level of ecological impact. Degrowth is a project to reinvent the way humanity should be organised to make it worthy of human dignity, respectful of Mother Earth and sustainable through time. Today, we are enduring the worst state of capitalism.

⁵⁷ Serge Latouche: La apuesta por el decrecimiento, Icaria – Antrazyt 2006, p.16.

⁵⁸ Erich Fromm: To have or to be? Bloomsbury Academic, 2013

Corporations have overtaken control of the halls of governments and are immersed in the appropriation and depredation of all natural resources in their demential pursuit of greater shareholder value. The rapacity and squandering of capitalism have destroyed what Orwell called common decency.⁵⁹ The commons, have been privatised and all of that, driven by sheer greed, has made the dominant system absolutely unsustainable now, not in the distant future.

We also need to clarify a persistent confusion between degrowth and a stationary or steady state economy (SSE). There is an ongoing debate about the two concepts, which some considered incompatible. Yet, there is also the position that they are complimentary. In my view, they are both part of the same idea. First, we need to drastically decrease our ecological footprint for it is completely unsustainable. This would be stage one. However, many decades later -perhaps more than a century later if Mother Earth grants us the time– once we descend to the desired plateau, which is scientifically deemed to be sustainable, we move into a SSE or stationary economy, namely a zero-growth economy. This would be stage two and the final one. One of the first economists to think about the concept of SSE was John Stuart Mill. He devoted an entire chapter to it. He wrote: *It must always have been seen, more or less distinctly, by political economists, that the increase of wealth is not boundless : that at the end of what they term the progressive state lies the stationary state, that all progress in wealth is but a postponement of this, and that each step in advance is an approach to it.*⁶⁰ Consistent with his socially-sensitive ethics, he thought about the SSE as a positive and ideal state. *But the best state for human nature is that in which, while no one is poor, no one desires to be richer, nor has any reason to fear being thrust back by the efforts of others to push themselves forward.*⁶¹ The fact is that, parting from the unquestionable realisation that we are part of a planet with limited resources, we are forced to drastically cut our consumption of resources until we reach a state where we can sustain our ecological footprint. In other words, until we reach a state where we –and all other species– consume no more energy than what the planet can replenish in the same span of time. This would be the moment where we reach a sustainable SSE after many generations of a consistent decrease of our energy consumption. However, in the process, because our goal is to build the People and Planet paradigm anchored on a truly democratic ethos, which its fundamental raison d'être is to provide a universal sphere of social justice, we need to shift some consumption from the rich metropolises of the market-driven system to the periphery countries. Therefore, while we must decrease the ecological footprint of the former, we must increase the one for the latter, as previously illustrated in chart 3, until we lift them out of poverty; thus reaching a sustainable global standard of living worthy of human dignity. Hence, both degrowth and SSE are part of the same vehicle driving our quest for the new paradigm. Degrowth and SSE are not an end in themselves but the medium towards the new paradigm. This position is shared very clearly by Kerschner in his paper addressing degrowth and SSE. He asserts that both concepts are complimentary. Albeit he obviously agrees with degrowth authors that degrowth is essential because rich countries have an unsustainable footprint, he argues that the SSE is necessary at some previously agreed global level of throughput. And more importantly, he correctly asserts that *In order for the SSE to be equitable not only on a national but also on an international basis, the rich North will need to de-grow in order to allow for some more economic (vs. uneconomic) growth in the poor South.*⁶²

With all things considered, the goal of true sustainability can be defined as the point in time when there is no scarcity of all the natural resources indispensable for life, but not just for human life, but for the life of all living things. Consequently, if we seriously address what is the imaginary of sustainability, this must be a revolution in which we make a quantum leap in cultural change to live in a very different way, with quite different indicators of progress and wealth based exclusively on ecological viability and social justice. We cannot limit ourselves to a degrowth of GDP and a

⁵⁹ Serge Latouche: La apuesta por el decrecimiento, Icaria – Antrazyt 2006, p. 17.

⁶⁰ John Stuart Mill: Principles of Political Economy, August M. Kelley Publishers, reprinted in 1987, p. 746.

⁶¹ *ibid*, p. 748.

⁶² Christian Kerschner: Economic de-growth vs. steady-state economy, Journal of Cleaner Production 18 (2010) 544–551, 2009.

degrowth of fossil fuels. We must cut from its root the market-driven system of capitalism and build a completely new societal edifice with new structures and institutions anchored on a truly democratic ethos. Bellamy Foster makes it clear that degrowth and capitalism are incompatible: *As valuable as the degrowth concept is in an ecological sense, it can only take on genuine meaning as part of a critique of capital accumulation and part of the transition to a sustainable, egalitarian, communal order; one in which the associated producers govern the metabolic relation between nature and society in the interest of successive generations and the earth itself.*⁶³ This is how a culture of degrowth embedded in the People and Planet paradigm makes it possible to transcend the market.

Population and degrowth

Global warming due to climate change is completely anthropocentric in nature. We are fully responsible for the consistent deterioration of all ecosystems across the globe. Consequently, we must seriously consider a drastic degrowth of population. This does not mean a drastic decrease in the rate of population growth but an actual decrease in the world's population. Although this is a very sensitive ethical issue it is not a new topic in the quest for true sustainability. It has been addressed many times and continues to be addressed by many authors. To be sure, for ethical reasons, there is much debate, often passionate, around the issue of decreasing population growth. Most authors do not endorse a Malthusian approach, which basically condemns helping the poor and implicitly suggests decreasing their population with a survival of the fittest undertone. In fact, Darwin took Malthus' arguments into consideration when he gradually put together his evolutionary thesis. I do not think that in a truly democratic degrowth paradigm, we can enforce the drastic reduction of the population. Yet, it is unquestionable that to achieve our ideal of a sustainable system, we need to reduce our population gradually but substantially. It is a matter of survival of our species, given that our planet has been subject to the unrelenting impact of completely unsustainable anthropocentric activity. The first goal –because climate change is cutting our time to bring about a truly effective solution– would be to stop the net growth of the population, ideally, within one generation (30 years), but then we need to continue implementing duly-democratic-endorsed-policies to reduce our population by the end of the century or at the most by mid next century, if we still have time.

The unknown variable is of course –if the institutional investors of international financial markets, who think they own the world, come to their senses– if the planet will grant us enough time to reach this goal so that we can achieve a sustainable equilibrium. That is, so that we can build an eco-anthropocentric system vis-a-vis the current anthropocentric system. The eco-anthropocentric system puts the planet and human kind on equal terms. The planet would be healthy in the sense that it would be able to meet the conditions necessary for our species to extract what we need to live with a level of dignity and comfort that can be sustained indefinitely. We may call it eco-anthropocentric because it seeks to establish an equilibrium between the actual fulfilment of the needs of the planet and of humans through time. Yet, in a way it still is anthropocentric because we would be managing the planet in a rational and responsible manner for our benefit to sustain the life of our species. In drastic contrast with how we behave today, we would be taking good care of the hand that feeds our mouth. The great challenge, however, is that we ignore if we have already run out of time. Indeed, we have no idea if we have enough time to even stop the net growth of the population within thirty years without our planet's backlash to what we have been doing since the dawn of the industrial era. We ignore if Mother Earth's reaction to our presence, which is already ongoing, will be in such a way that global population growth will not only stop but the world's population would collapse drastically and harshly due to a reaction of cataclysmic nature triggered by the effects of the anthropocentric climate change. Scientists keep sounding the alarm as I write. Saxe-Fernández, a specialist from UNAM in Mexico, reports that data from NASA shows that the past 11 months have broken all temperature records, and that the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

⁶³ John Bellamy Foster: Capitalism and Degrowth: An Impossibility Theorem, Monthly Review, volumes 62, issue 8, 2011.

asserts this is the longest sequence of increase in temperature, every month, ever recorded.⁶⁴ He questions if this is reversible. He goes further and relates that the astonishment of scientists is even greater, such as Lonnie Thompson, when observing the speed with which huge ice sheets are melting in Antarctica, as well as the shock of the paleo-climatologists that, since the 1990s, are detecting the disintegration of ancient ice in the orb; for example the disintegration of ice in the Quelccaya glacier in Peru revealed that the ice cap is now smaller than it has been in at least 6600 years. Saxe-Fernández argues that this explains why the call by scientists on governments to agree on an urgent regulation of emissions of greenhouse gases is becoming ubiquitous.⁶⁵ Indeed, Lonnie Thompson asserts that a majority of scientists are now convinced that global warming poses “a clear and present danger to civilisation.”⁶⁶

Given the axiomatic nature of our predicament, that we have to drastically cut the consumption of the limited resources of our planet, we have to seriously reflect on how we are going to address the demographic issue. There are a number of factors that, in attempting to address the reduction of the human population, take us into a conundrum. How are we going to take care of the growing mass of old people if we cut the size of the young segments? How are we going to feed the younger and the older segments if they keep growing in a planet with limited resources? How are we going to address the ethical issues of human rights, including the right to procreate if the planet cannot physically sustain us? There are of course proposals that call for a drastic drop of the population to bring it down to pre-industrial times. One calls for completely disregarding any ethical issues and cutting down the population through drastic policies, evidently undemocratic and politically incorrect. This is the case of William Stanton who estimated that the optimum sustainable population for the United Kingdom in 2005 was two million, down from 60 million, and of 200 million for the world, down from 6,5 billion, which must be reached in the next 150 years.⁶⁷ His main argument was that peak oil has been reached and its progressive depletion will inevitably force the drastic reduction of the population. In his book: *The Rapid Growth of Human Populations 1750–2000*, he stated that we built our population –currently around 7,2 billion– on fossil fuels. Thus, given that scientists estimate that we only have 50 years of oil and natural gas left and 50 to 100 years of coal, we will not have the resources to sustain even the world’s current population. Thus, to accomplish this he proposed a Darwinian plan for the UK including the following actions: immigration is banned; illegal immigrants are treated as criminals; every woman is entitled to raise one healthy child; no religious or cultural exceptions can be made, but entitlements can be traded; abortion or infanticide is compulsory if the foetus or baby proves to be handicapped; Darwinian policies will weed out the unfit; the life of anyone who becomes more of a burden than a benefit to society, through old age, accident or disease, must be humanely ended. Voluntary euthanasia is legal and made easy –Stanton and his wife actually attempted suicide together; imprisonment is rare, replaced by corporal punishment for lesser offences and painless capital punishment for greater. Stanton believed that this should be carried out with no regard to sentimentalisms since the human race has been completely irresponsible by always assuming that there was no limit. He asserted that population reduction must be single minded to succeed, for the alternative would be letting nature take its course, which includes human nature to account for wars and nuclear war.⁶⁸

Stanton’s proposal is absolutely incompatible with the people and planet degrowth paradigm, to say the least. However, we must internalise the idea that we need to reduce the world’s population drastically in the next 100 years. How to go about it is something that we must come to terms with for simple ethical reasons. If we do nothing, those who survive in

⁶⁴ For further detail on these data see Damian Carrington: March Temperature smashes 100 -year global record, The Guardian 15 April 2016, accessed on 16 May 2016 at <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/apr/15/march-temperature-smashes-100-year-global-record>

⁶⁵ John Saxe-Fernández: Capitalismo y colapso climático VI, La Jornada, 12 May, 2016, accessed on 16 May, 2016 at: <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/05/12/opinion/018a1eco>

⁶⁶ Greg M. Schwartz: Science and Politics Clash as Humanity Nears Climate Change Tipping Point, 13 March 2016, accessed on 16 May at: <http://ecowatch.com/2016/03/13/climate-change-tipping-point>

⁶⁷ William Stanton: Editorial: Fossil Fuel Depletion Will Reverse the Population Explosion, Population Review; Sociological Demography Press, Volume 44, No. 1, 2005, pp. 75-76 (article).

⁶⁸ William Stanton: *The Rapid Growth of Human Populations 1750–2000: Histories, Consequences, Issues, Nation by Nation*, Multi Science Publishing Co Lt.s. 2003

future generations will endure a terrible planet and then nature will take its course, including human nature, in a very Darwinian way. To be sure, we cannot act by disregarding the entire spectrum of human rights. But, by the same token, what would be the ethical justification to keep bringing more children to the world, if the vast majority will be condemned to a life of misery because they will not be able to enjoy most or any of these same human rights in a Planet stifled with pollution, with thousands of species exterminated and great scarcity of many of the resources vital for life? Bringing children into a life of misery just because of our primeval instincts and religious and philosophical considerations would be a rather selfish and antithetical behaviour relative to our pledge to respect and protect human rights. Hence, we better start now to come to terms with the need to change our systems so that we can reach a sustainable footprint that can provide the necessities to live with dignity to as many people as possible indefinitely.

To determine how many billion human beings Mother Earth can sustain is hard to say at this point. Latouche claims that our ecological footprint crossed the threshold of no sustainability in the 1960s when the world population was three billion. He bases his argument on the assessment of the availability of the biomass of renewable energies. According to this, even if we take into consideration a lower efficiency in energy production, a stable population of three billion would be realistically sustainable. Another reason is that the potential use of the soil available for agriculture would be far from being depleted because not all the land viable for agriculture is being used.⁶⁹ Latouche reckons that it is possible to gradually reduce the population to bring it down to a steady state around three billion.

What needs to be done is to mobilise people by provoking their social consciousness about the dramatic situation of our planet and our future, and hold as many sustainability summits as necessary to address all the issues: the intricacies of a truly democratic ethos, the respect of the entire spectrum of human rights as the norm, the sustainable ecological footprint to reverse the anthropocentric global warming, the size of the population...– to arrive at a consensus that will give us the power to force our governments to change the course radically. What needs to be done is to take all these variables into consideration and –with the direct participation of expert analysts not controlled by the system– make a specific assessment of what would be the size of the world's population –in our best estimate– that can enjoy a sustainable life worthy of human dignity, at a stationary state. In essence, what size –at a steady state– of the human population can be sustained with dignity ecologically? Some of the key variables that need to be taken into account are the current political-economic paradigm with a completely unsustainable footprint; the effects of global warming triggered by the anthropocentric footprint; the growth of inequality and the emergence of hundreds of millions of *précarariat*⁷⁰ in addition to the billions of dispossessed, which ensued from the lack of social justice and democracy across the world; and the available land for agriculture in line with a sustainable footprint. One sure premise for the steady-state stage is that births need to equal deaths. Moreover, from a national perspective –if there are still nation-states in the future– given that in most countries there is both migration and immigration, then births plus immigrants must equal deaths plus migrants at whatever steady population level is defined as sustainable. This has to be the kind of truly democratic discussion that needs to be carried out to arrive at a consensus to tackle the population issue. It must be a truly collaborative and consensual decision. Many analysts increasingly agree that population controls cannot be imposed. They must be the product of collective choice that coevolves with a deepening of democratisation.⁷¹ However, contrary to what some analysts suggest, this must be done in the context of the change of paradigm. We cannot envision strategies, such as a Pigouvian taxation to put caps on carbon emissions or advertising. This would simply endorse the market's logic and represents an actual licence to continue polluting and promoting consumerism at a financial cost.

⁶⁹ In Silvia Pérez-Vitoria book, "The return of the peasants", 38% of land in the world is viable for farming but less than a third is actually used. See: Silvia Pérez-Vitoria: Le paysan sont de retour, Actes Sud, 2005.

⁷⁰ Précarariat: social group suffering multiple forms of insecurity formed by people suffering from precarity, which is a condition of existence without predictability or security, affecting material or psychological welfare. See: Guy Standing: The Precariat – The New Dangerous Class. Bloomsbury Academic, 2011.

⁷¹ François Schneider [a,b,*](#), Giorgos Kallis [a,b,c](#), Joan Martínez-Alier: Crisis or opportunity? Economic degrowth for social equity and ecological sustainability. Introduction to this special issue, Journal of Cleaner Production 18 (2010) 511–518, ELSEVIER.

It is clear that we cannot sustain the current footprint, and that in order to drastically cut it in the shortest period of time the reduction of the world's population is of essence. Nonetheless, it is imperative that we understand that we need to do it gradually and by consensus instead of autocratically. However, to achieve this we first need to rescue our institutions, which have been captured by the owners of marketocracy, and build a new edifice with a truly democratic ethos. To come to a consensus we first need to educate people, to make them aware of the consequences of our passivity. We need to do this by building a new culture of social and environmental responsibility as citizens of this planet. We cannot accomplish this if we do not first recover our institutions and create new ones that will be responsible for the creation of the new paradigm for the exclusive welfare of people and planet and not the market. This is a condition sine-qua-non for saving us by saving the planet. Consequently, the first step is that all of us who are already aware and concerned, begin to converge and organise to call on the people to join us and create as many millions of CCs as possible. We cannot succeed until we reach the critical mass necessary to remove, peacefully, legally and strategically, the current structures of power that are entrenched in the halls of government.

Conclusions

It is imperative that we incorporate into our consciousness the dramatic unsustainability of the market-driven paradigm so that for our own self-interest we react immediately to seriously address the possible solutions. Parting from the extensive scientific documentation that has been consistently emerging, despite the efforts of many private interests to deny the anthropocentric climate change, we must become aware that we need to completely change our life systems so that we can drastically reduce our unsustainable ecological footprint. Concurrently, we must continue to fight for social justice in a world with an undemocratic entrenched system designed to customarily exploit people, plunder natural resources vital for life, exhaust the riches of our planet, violate the entire spectrum of human rights and produce ever more levels of inequality for the benefit of a tiny cartel of plutocrats, the global robber barons of today. To accomplish this we need to work to provoke a radical transformation of society so that we can build the radically different paradigm, whose only purpose is to go in pursuit of the welfare of people and planet and not the market. We cannot pretend to fix the problem by a degrowth of GDP, fossil fuels, population, consumerism without replacing capitalism. However, to materialise this we must first establish a truly democratic ethos, for currently all governmental and multilateral institutions have been captured by political opportunists who have betrayed their mandate to serve the public good and from the start operate as market agents. For this reason, governments have been deliberately operating to impose the ideal conditions demanded by the institutional investors of financial markets for the maximisation of their shareholder value. Consequently, it is imperative that we, the demos, first start by organising across the world to liberate our national and multilateral institutions from their abduction. We cannot establish a truly democratic ethos, where the people are directly and permanently involved in the public matter to protect both our common and individual rights if we do not rescue our institutions and rebuild them from their wreckage to put together a new edifice designed to provide conditions of life worthy of human dignity and for the sustainability of the planet and all its members. Many people sincerely regard such imaginary of social justice and ecological sustainability as completely utopian, and it is indeed utopian today. However, there are many realities today that were utopian yesteryear. Nonetheless, we have to very seriously consider that we have no choice. The anthropocentric climate change is continuing unabated and unless we stop it and recover the conditions necessary for the long-term sustainability of our planet, we will not be able to bequest to future generations –of all living things– a planet where they can live and thrive or even survive. We must change our moral ground, even if it is for our own self interest, if not for a sense of solidarity. We must care for our Mother Earth as the hand that feeds our lives. We must climb to a high moral ground and work together, or else we will surely continue to witness a persistent growth of authoritarianism everywhere, both in the metropolises and the periphery –just like in the interwar period of the 1930s– as a consequence of today's moral decay until we reach our own demise.

Useful links:

- <http://www.jussemper.org>
- <http://www.degrowth.org>
- <http://www.corporation2020.org/>
- <http://www.footprintnetwork.org/>
- <http://www.degrowth.de/en/>

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