

From *The Limits to Growth* to *Earth for All* - a sustainability perspective

Summary of 40-minute talk in Chemnitz on November 4, 2022.

What did the LtG say?

LtG presented 12 scenarios for the long-term future and warned about overshoot and collapse in the 21st century. Did not predict the future, but advised world society to pursue sustainability, that is, to live within planetary boundaries.

What happened since?

The world has followed the main scenarios from LtG. The human footprint has grown into overshoot, most clearly in climate. But no global collapse – yet. In other words, the world saw some response to the warning from LtG, but not enough to avoid overshoot.

What will happen next?

Unless there is extraordinary action, E4A warns that the human footprint will continue to grow towards 2060, but at slowing rates. Global temperatures will continue to rise, as will inequality within and among nations. As a result, the average wellbeing of the working man and woman will decline, and there will be increasing risk of social collapse (national breakdown).

What should be done?

World society should implement 5 extraordinary turnarounds during the next couple of decades. This would ensure rising wellbeing for the majority within planetary boundaries. Implementing the 5 turnarounds amounts to a restructuring of the world economy, moving 2-4 % of all labour and capital from conventional to green (“sustainable”) activities.

What will it take?

The 5 turnarounds will require significant increase in investment in private and public sector, especially in activity which is not profitable from the investor point of view. Rapid implementation will also require subsidies, bans and other legislative change. In sum, there is need for an active and well-funded state to make the 5 turnarounds happen.

How to win democratic support?

The government can cover the monetary cost of the 5 turnarounds in different ways (tax increase, government borrowing, printing money). Regardless, the government needs democratic support. To this end, the distribution of the cost must be perceived as fair by the majority. The simplest way is through higher taxes on the 10 % richest. The majority must agree to force the rich to pay the bill (=the extra cost of sustainability).

Conclusion

The world has a problem – the prospect of declining wellbeing in the decades ahead – partly because we are transgressing planetary boundaries. The problem can be solved, but achieving a more sustainable world will require 5 extraordinary turnarounds paid for by the 10% richest.