

Introduction: Sustainable Consumption and Social Change

September 23, 2019

Prof Marlyne Sahakian, *Sociology Department, Institute for Environmental Studies*
Assistants: Rebecca Durollet and Katia Vladimirova

Today's class

1. What is “sustainable consumption” and why does it matter?
2. Overview of the course plan and and evaluation
3. Institutional perspectives, how SC has developed in the policy arena



Part 1: What is sustainable consumption and why does it matter?

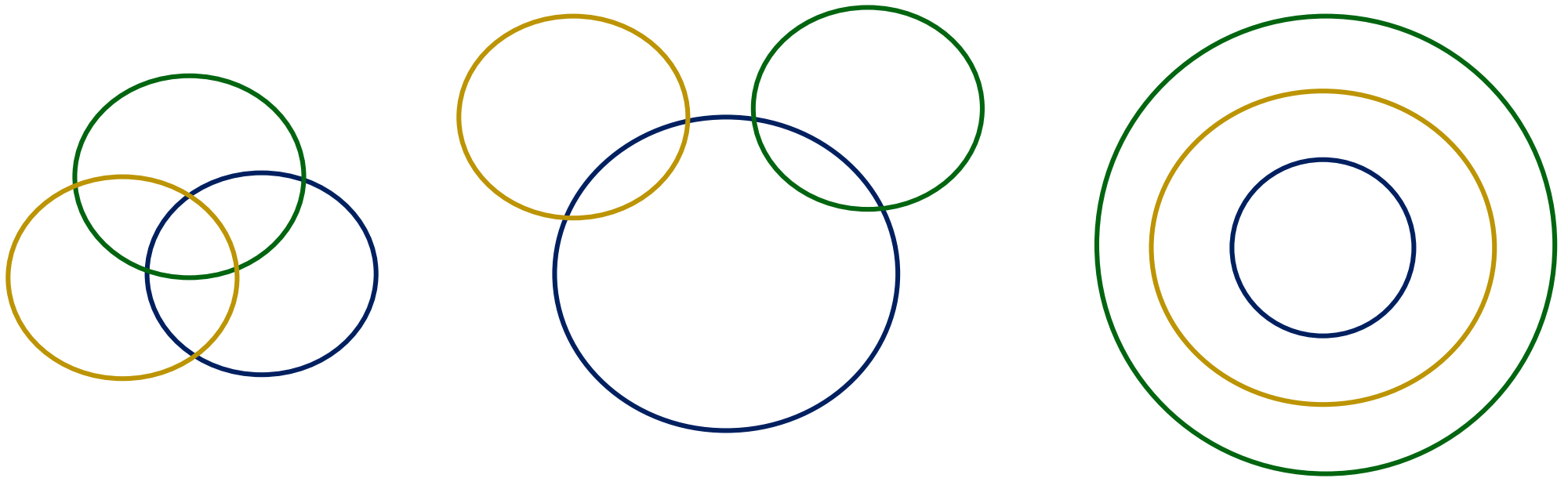
Different ways of apprehending consumption in relation to sustainability.

Three ways of defining consumption

1. **The using up of material and energy resources**, across the life cycle of products and services (from the extraction of resources, through production, transportation, consumption, and final waste)
2. **The procurement of goods and services**, by the public sector, the private sector, residential sector, etc.
3. **The consumption of resources by everyday people**, households, communities, etc. (also called final consumption)

Focus of the class

Three ways of defining sustainability

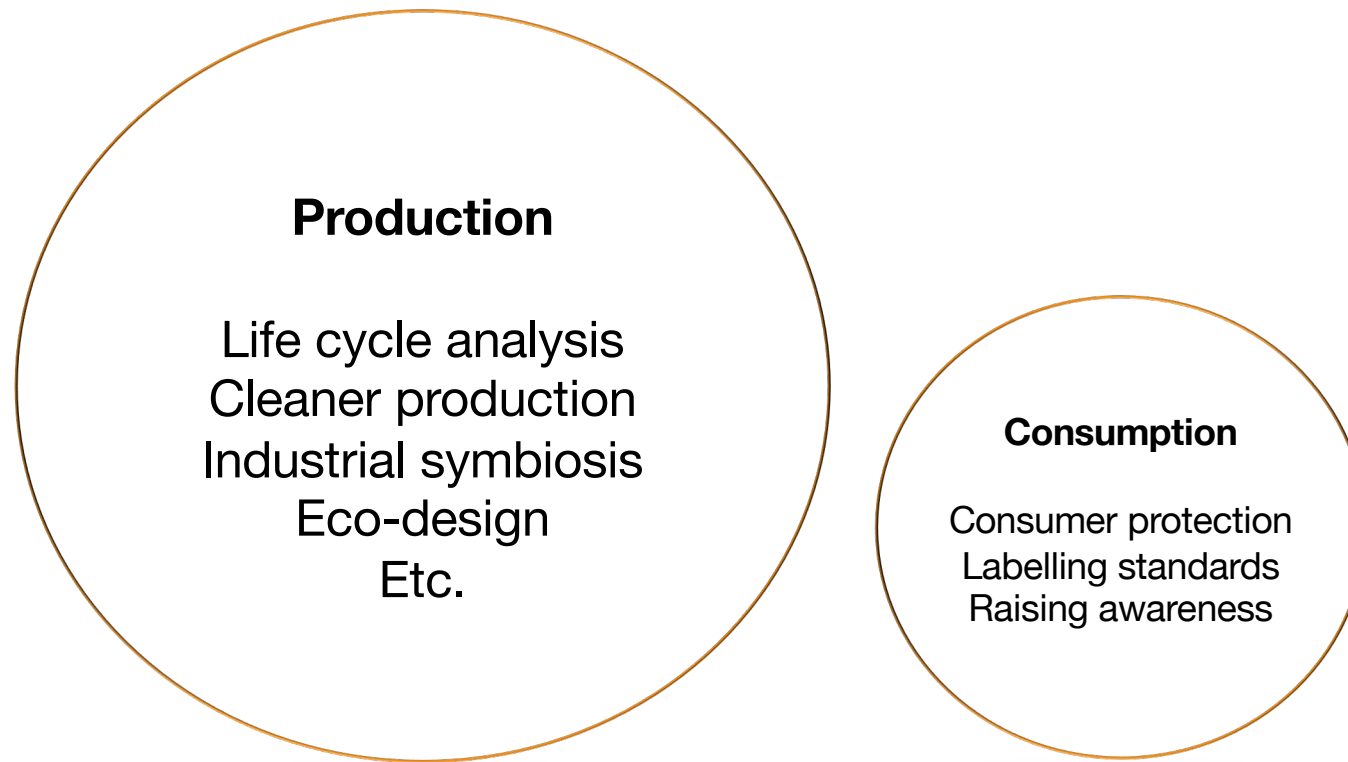


[Polanyi 1957; Georgescu-Roegen 1971]

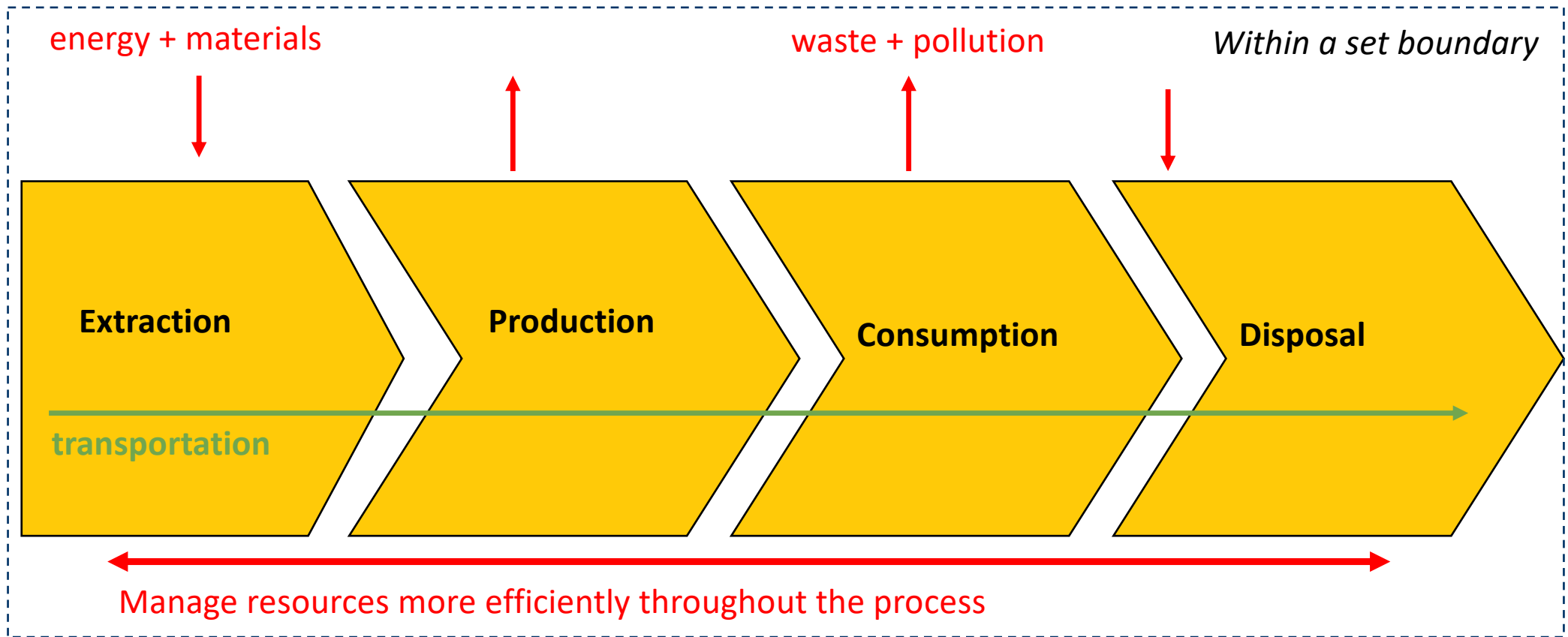
Three ways of understanding final consumption

1. **A biophysical perspective**, or qualifying and quantifying stocks and flows of materials and energies, quantifying impacts, etc.
2. **An economic perspective**, understanding the forms of interdependencies between economic actors (green economy, social economy, etc.)
3. **The social dimension of consumption**, why people do what they do, in different contexts, related to diversity, social and environmental justice, inequalities, etc.

A historic emphasis on greening **production** systems



Life cycle thinking



Key environmental impact areas for consumption in Europe, based on life cycle analysis (LCA)



Mobility



Food (primarily
meat and dairy
products)



Buildings (in the construction
and usage phase)

Reducing private transport: not so easy!



Changing food consumption practices: don't touch my fondue!



Reducing energy consumption: don't touch my aircon!



Source: Sahakian 2014

The social dimension of final consumption

1. There is **no unique and unifying theory**: different disciplines understand consumption in very different ways
2. Approaches towards studying sustainable consumption tend to be **multi-disciplinary** (or even inter- and trans-disciplinary)
3. The theories of consumption studies have also **evolved over time**

Are we consumer zombies? (1940s)



Are we empowered consumers? (1980s)



Artiste: Barbara Kruger, 1987, « Untitled »

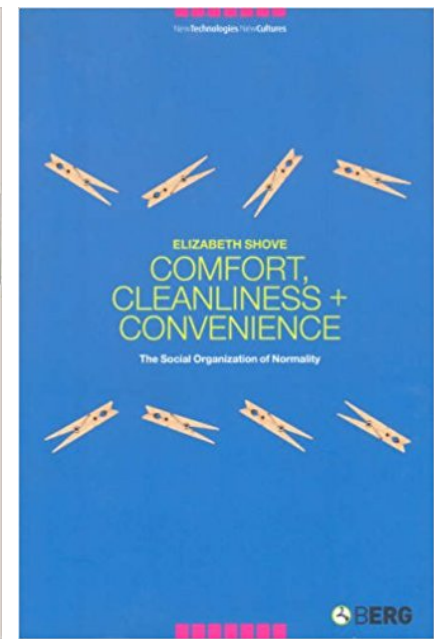
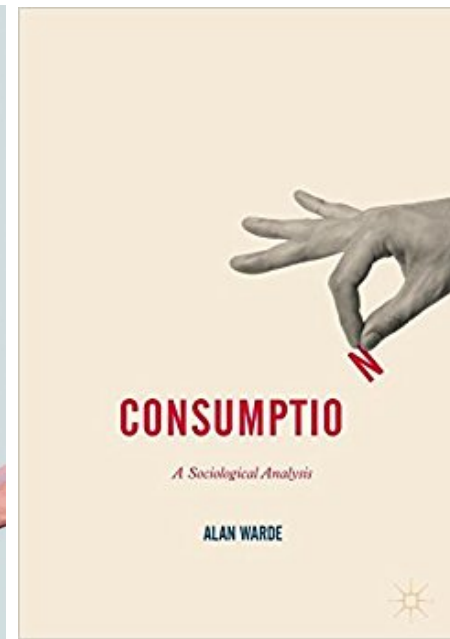
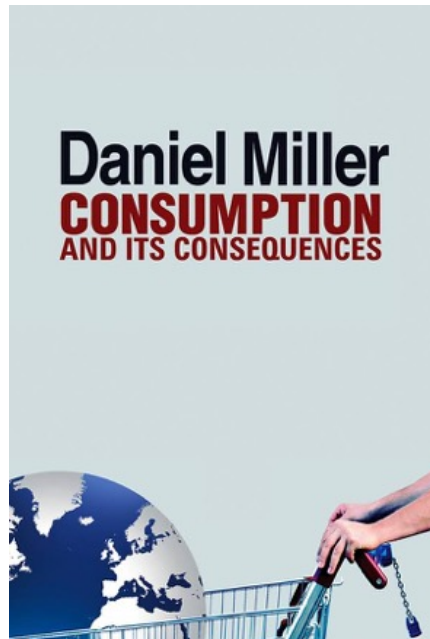
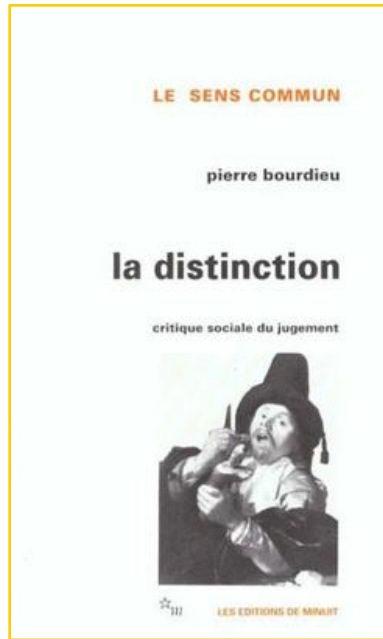
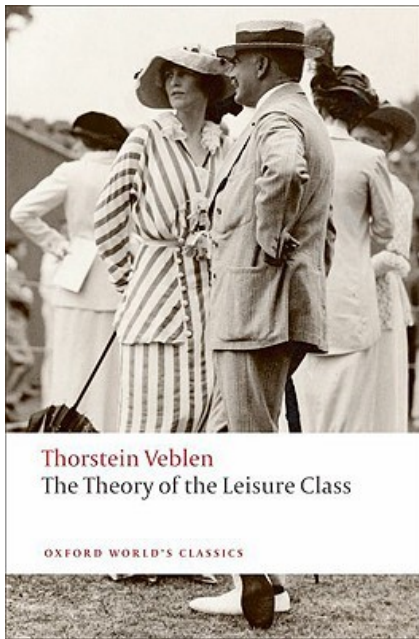


What is today's vision of the consumer?

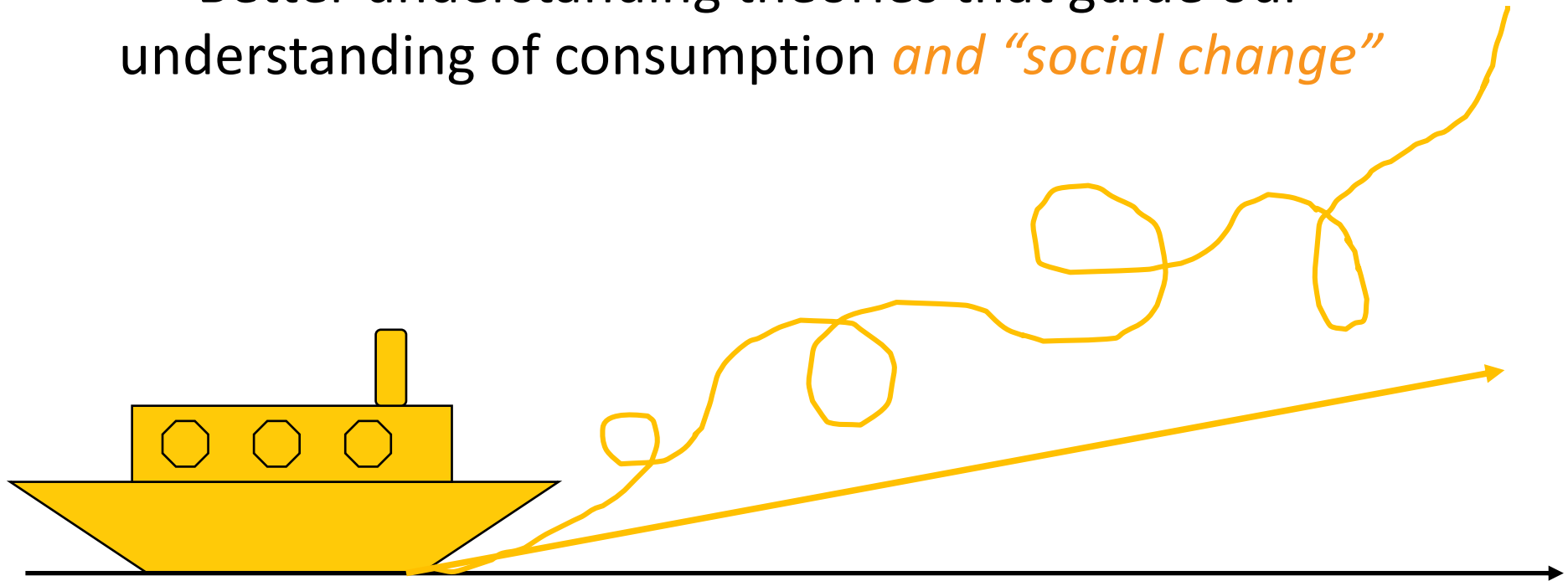


The ecological superhero, who can shop and recycle their way towards « saving the planet »

Sociology of consumption theories



Better understanding theories that guide our understanding of consumption *and “social change”*



From transitions to... transformations
From social innovation to... social change

In class exercise: what can you do to support more sustainable forms of consumption?

Completed by students in class: notice how many of our understandings of change tend to be individual and focused on buying or not buying

<div>+</div> <div>Environmental impact</div> <div>-</div>	<div> <div>Dont get a driver's liscence</div> <div>Buy second hand when you can / repair</div> <div>Eating vegan / local</div> <div>Make your own products</div> <div>Less car / more public transport</div> <div>Less food waste</div> </div>	VOTE
	<div> <div>Consume less paper / buy less</div> <div>Turn off appliances</div> <div>Buycotting / check labels</div> <div>No more clothes</div> </div>	Spread awareness
	Consumer	Citizen



Part 2: Course overview

Objectives and evaluation

Teaching objectives

Provide students with:

- 1) **The conceptual tools necessary for analysing and designing “sustainable consumption” initiatives** – across domains, in varying cultural contexts, and at different scales – towards transdisciplinary research and action.
- 2) **Knowledge around domains related to sustainable consumption**, and how they interrelate, including: sustainable lifestyles and social innovation, ethical consumption, food consumption and waste, household energy consumption, mobility and urban development.

Four parts to the course

1. Understanding different approaches to consumption and social change

- How and why we consume: e.g. rational choice or habitual practices?
- What form of social change: e.g. transition management or social innovation?

2. Deep dives into key thematic areas

- New economies, energy, food, ethical consumption, mobility, etc.

Four parts to the course

3. Workshops for « learning by doing »

- **Monday Oct 21**, in class workshop on sustainable food provisioning, divided into two groups: **MR040 with Rebecca, and M1193 with Katia.**
- **Wednesday Dec 18** (no class Monday 16); visioning mobility futures, 10h15-13h OR 14h15-17h00 (2 groups); Campus Biotech at Sécheron.

Four parts to the course

4. Two keynote lectures (mandatory attendance)

- **Tuesday Oct 8, 12h15-14h00, room SCIII 1S081 > time might change to the evening, to accomodate students who have another class during that slot.** Dr Katia Vladimirova, University of Geneva, "Sustainable Fashion, Social Transformation and the Changing Consumption and Production Patterns"
- **Tuesday Nov 26, 18h15-20h00, room UniMail M S160.** Prof Alison Browne, Manchester University: "Situating the significance of everyday life within debates on Chinese urbanisms and environmental pollution: A research agenda"



Student Evaluation 1/3

Continuous evaluations involving group work and presentations:

- 1) Workshop 1 and workshop 2 (40%):** reflexive exercise, article summaries and participation (20%) in two workshops, one on food consumption and the second on mobility.
- WK1: Preparatory homework due Oct 17, individual and group work
 - WK2: Preparatory homework due on December 16, individual work

Student Evaluation 2/3

2) Group written report (50%): developing a social change project/idea towards sustainable consumption, analysing your chosen topic through a conceptual framework, proposing further opportunities for social change in relation to urban planning and policy.

Deadlines:

- October 21: students propose a topic and begin to form in groups of 4-5 people
- November 11: groups and topics are finalized
- November 18: students submit an outline of the final written report
- Groups meetings with prof Sahakian and/or Assistants scheduled as needed between Nov 19 and Dec 21
- January 13: final group written reports due via email.

Student Evaluation 2/3

- **3) Participation in class and guest lectures (10%):** attendance and active participation in the Monday class (up to two absences are allowed per semester); attendance and participation in **two lectures by invited guests (2x)**.
- *For those students who do not receive the minimal grade required for passing this course, a second and individual paper (4-5,000 words including references and notes) will be required during the summer exam period.*

What I commit to

1. Prior to class, delivering clear and organized presentations, with a summary of key concepts and complete list of cited references
2. Making reading materials available week prior to class (mandatory reading and further reading); making all materials available via moodle
3. Recording the class and making it available via name: SCSi, password: SCSi 2019
(unfortunately visuals are not available the first few weeks, only audio; technical problem with the room)
4. Being available on email and for scheduled meetings in my office UniMail no. 4293
5. Drawing from the latest state of the art literature and bringing in examples from my own fieldwork (Philippines, Switzerland, India, etc.)

Can you commit to starting on time and being an active participant in the classroom?

Starting time: 8h30.



Part 3: Institutional perspectives on “sustainable consumption”

IPAT formula, rebound effects, inequalities, wellbeing, doughnut economics

Sustainable consumption timeline 1 of 4

1949 The UN Scientific Conference on the conservation and utilization of resources in New York addresses the depletion of resources and their **excessive usage**.

1972 At the **United Nations Conference on the Human Environment** in Stockholm, representatives take a stand against pollution and the wasteful **over-consumption** of natural resources.

In the same year, the Club of Rome sponsors the publication of the Meadows Report **“Limits to Growth”**, which states that one key element to a sustainable society is to

“(...) moderate not only their **demand for children**, but also their **material lifestyles** (...) To achieve this change would mean that the globe’s people **establish their status, derive satisfaction, and challenge themselves** with goals other than ever increasing production and ever-accumulating material wealth.”

IPAT formula and the raging debates of the 1970s

I: environmental impact

P: population, demographic growth

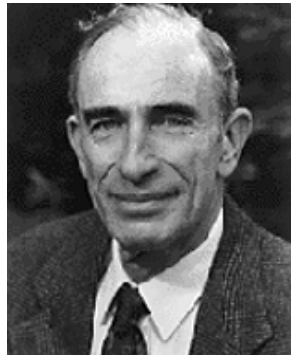
A: affluence, measured in GDP

T: type of technology or units of production

John P. Holdren



Paul R. Ehrlich



P vs. T

Barry Commoner



[Chertow 2001; Ehrlich video 2016, see link in references]

NEWS

Home Video World UK Business Tech Science Stories Entertainment & Arts

US & Canada

Bernie Sanders in climate change 'population control' uproar

5 September 2019

f Share

US election 2020



Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders has been criticised after arguing population control should be part of tackling climate change.

The Vermont senator told a TV debate that women "in poor countries" should have access to birth control.

Support The Guardian

Available for everyone, funded by readers

Contribute →

Subscribe →

News

Opinion

Sport

Culture

Lifestyle

Mo

Fashion Food Recipes Love & sex Health & fitness Home & garden Women Men Family Travel Money

Population

Would you give up having children to save the planet? Meet the couples who have

The environmental toll of having even one child is enormous - 58.6 tonnes of carbon each year. So is going child-free the answer to our climate crisis?



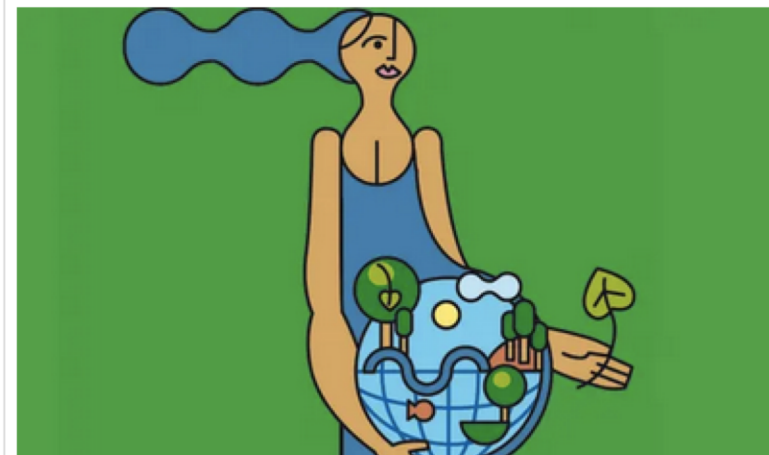
Amy Fleming

Wed 20 Jun 2018 06:00 BST



5769

1400



The problem with technological fixes: the rebound effect

The energy savings are less than expected by unit of production, due to:

- Increased usage of the same unit of production (direct rebound)
- Use of savings towards other energy-intensive activities (indirect or economy-wide rebound)



How to deal with affluence?

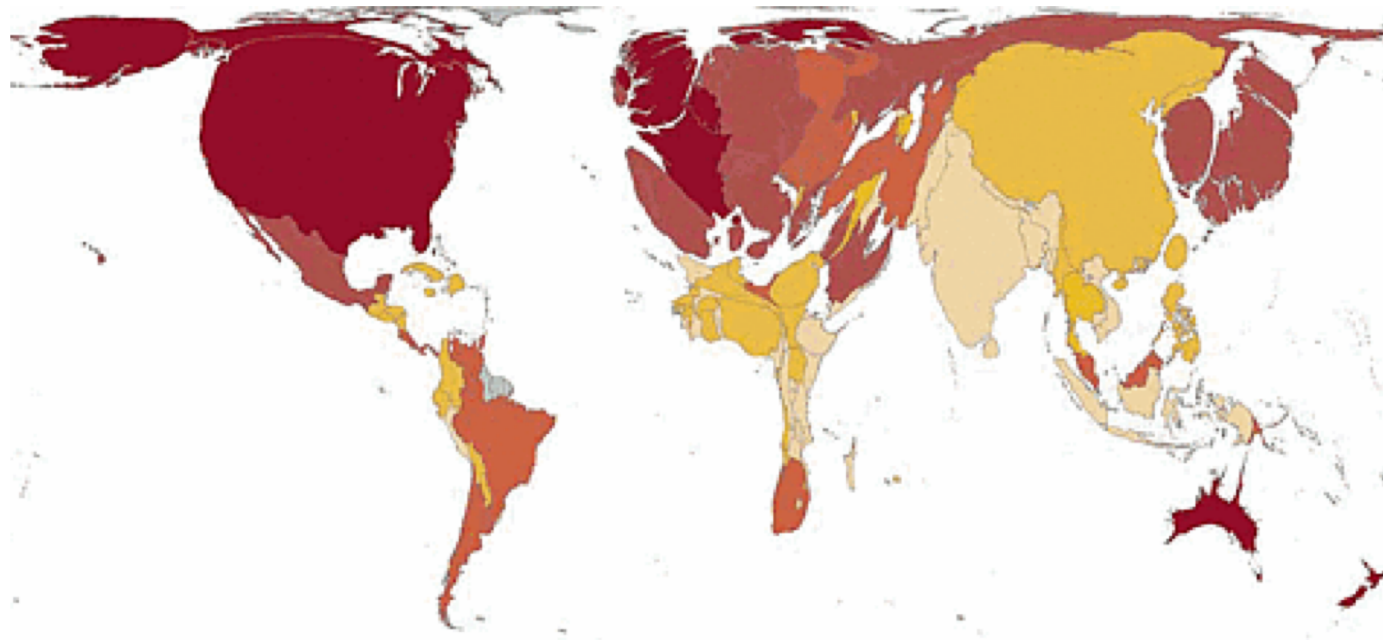
Population 2006



[Webb 2006]

How to deal with affluence?

Consumption of resources 2006

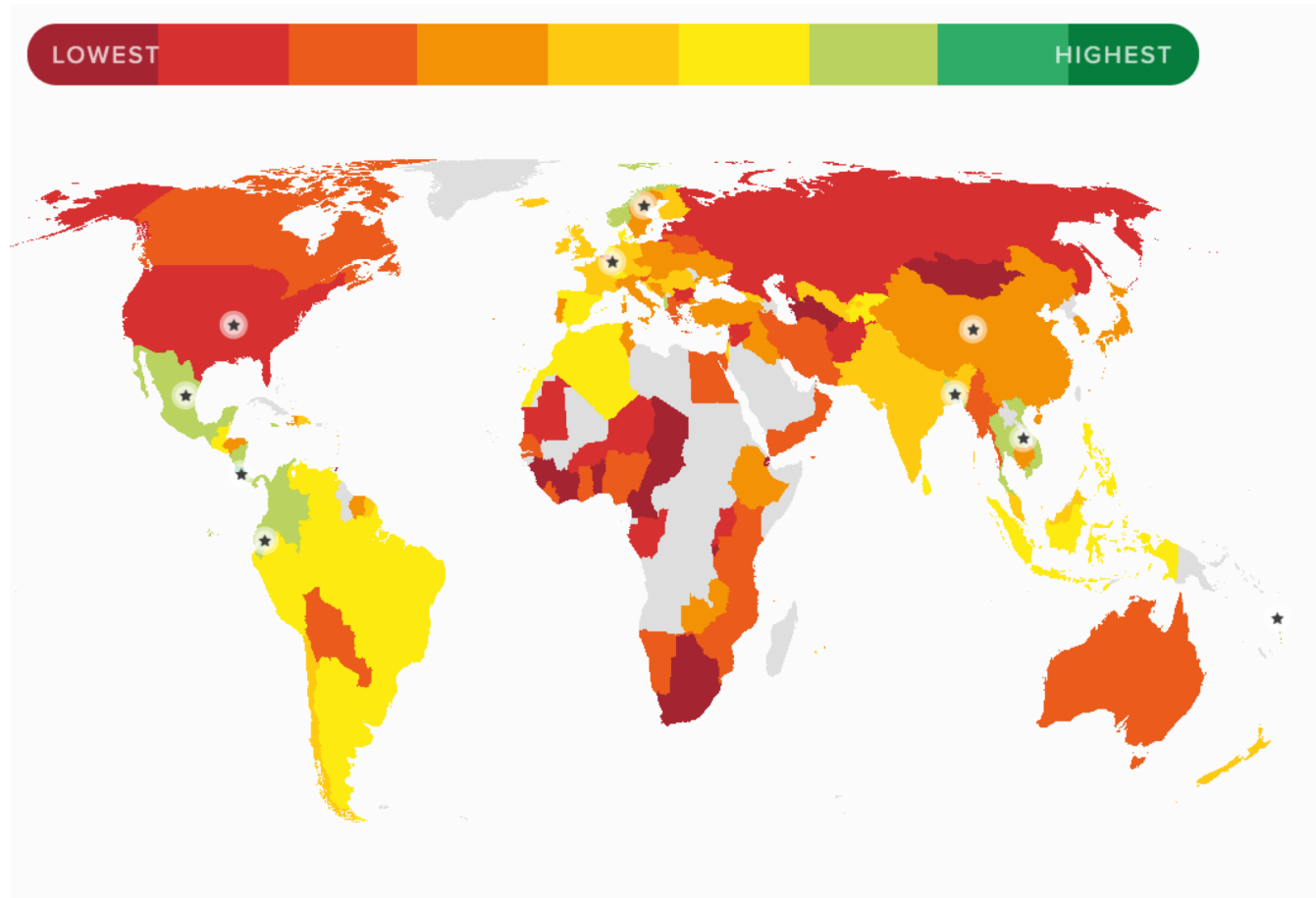


[WWF 2006]

Sustainable consumption timeline 2 of 4

- 1987 Brundtland Report, “**Our Common Future**”, states that: “Perceived needs are socially and culturally determined, and sustainable development requires the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecologically possible and to which all can reasonably aspire.”
- 1992 Rio Earth Summit; adoption of **Agenda 21**, UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) established; **Chapter 4: Changing consumption patterns.**
- 1994 **Oslo Symposium on sustainable consumption and production (SPC)**: defined sustainable consumption as “. . . the use of services and related products, which respond to **basic needs** and bring a **better quality** of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product **so as not to jeopardize the needs of further generations**”

What is quality of life? World happiness index



[<http://happyplanetindex.org>, based on subjective wellbeing, life expectancy, inequalities]

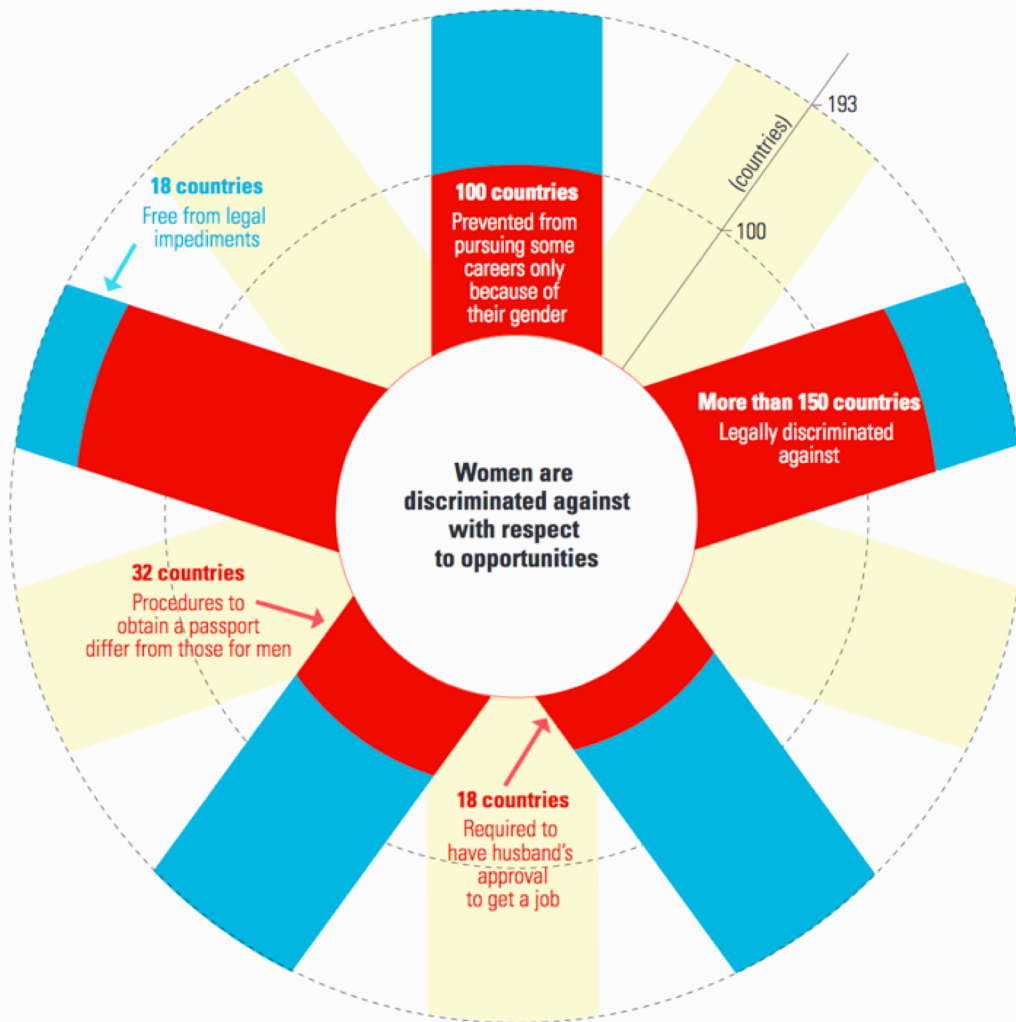
Unequal distribution of “affluence” et the global level

- Almost **half of the world's wealth** is now owned by **just one percent** of the population
- The wealth of the one percent richest people in the world amounts to \$110 trillion
- That's 65 times the total wealth of the bottom half of the world's population
- The bottom half of the world's population owns the same as the richest 85 people in the world
- Seven out of ten people live in countries where economic inequality has increased in the last 30 years
- The richest one percent increased their share of income in 24 out of 26 countries for which we have data between 1980 and 2012
- In the US, the wealthiest one percent captured 95 percent of post- financial crisis growth since 2009, while the bottom 90 percent became poorer
- ...

Unequal access to “affluence” at the local level



Occupy Movement, 2011



Gendered inequalities

Inter-sectionality: Kimberlé Crenshaw (lawyer and civil rights activist) on being a woman *and* being African-American

[UNDP Human Development Report 2016;
https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en]

Sustainable consumption timeline 3 of 4

- 2002 **Johannesburg Earth Summit**, underlines importance of consumption and production (developed countries must act first); Reaffirms Agenda 21's Chapter; calls for a 10-year framework of programs (10YFP)
- 2003 UNEP and UNDESA launch the “**Marrakech Process**” **10YFP for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP)**
- 2012 Adoption of the SCP 10YFP in Rio +20. Expanding on the Millennium Development Goals of 2001, Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the SDGs and **Sustainable Development Goals. 12: Responsible production and consumption**

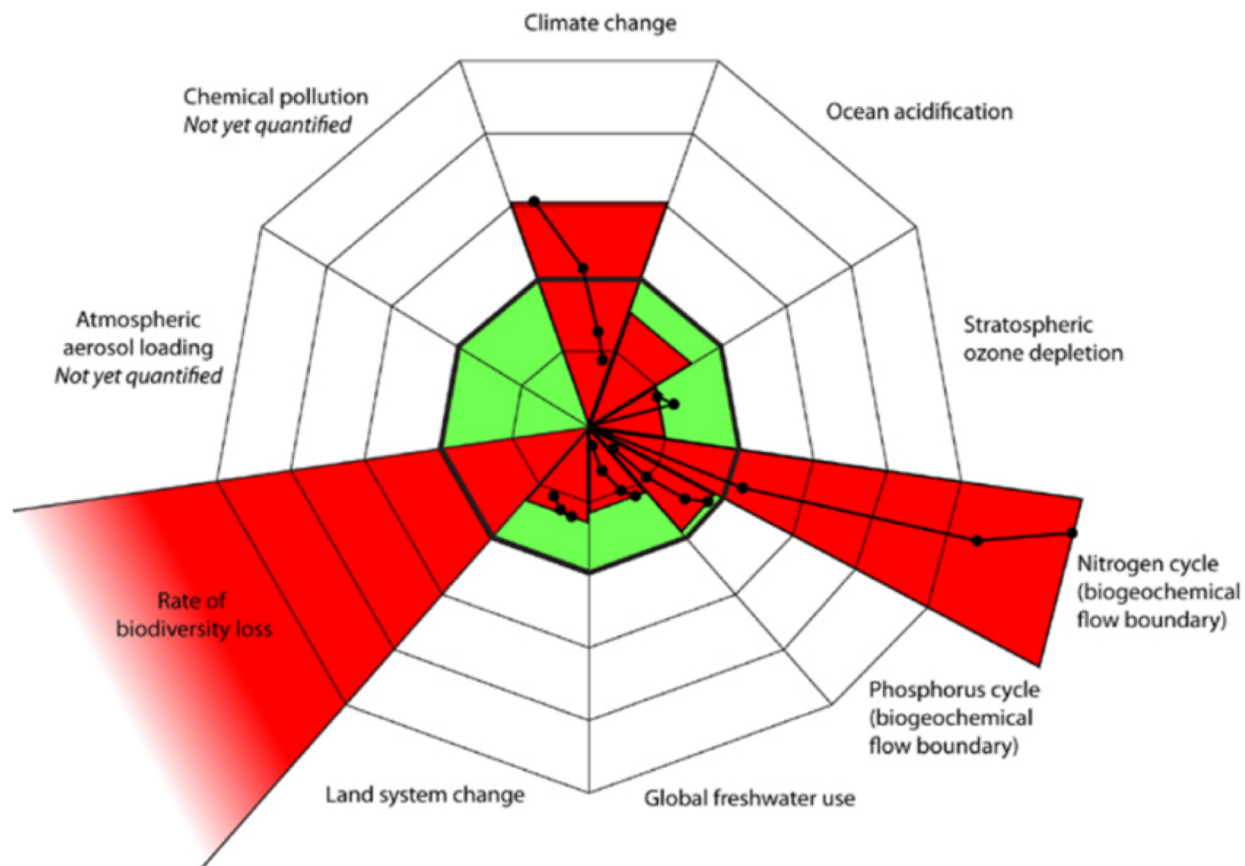
Sustainable consumption timeline 4 of 4



Sustainable consumption and production is about promoting **resource and energy efficiency**, sustainable infrastructure, and providing access to basic services, green and decent jobs and a **better quality of life for all**. Its implementation helps to achieve overall development plans, reduce future economic, environmental and social costs, strengthen economic competitiveness and reduce poverty. Sustainable consumption and production aims at **“doing more and better with less,”** increasing net welfare gains from economic activities by **reducing resource use, degradation and pollution along the whole lifecycle**, while increasing **quality of life**. It involves different stakeholders, including business, consumers, policy makers, researchers, scientists, retailers, media, and development cooperation agencies, among others.

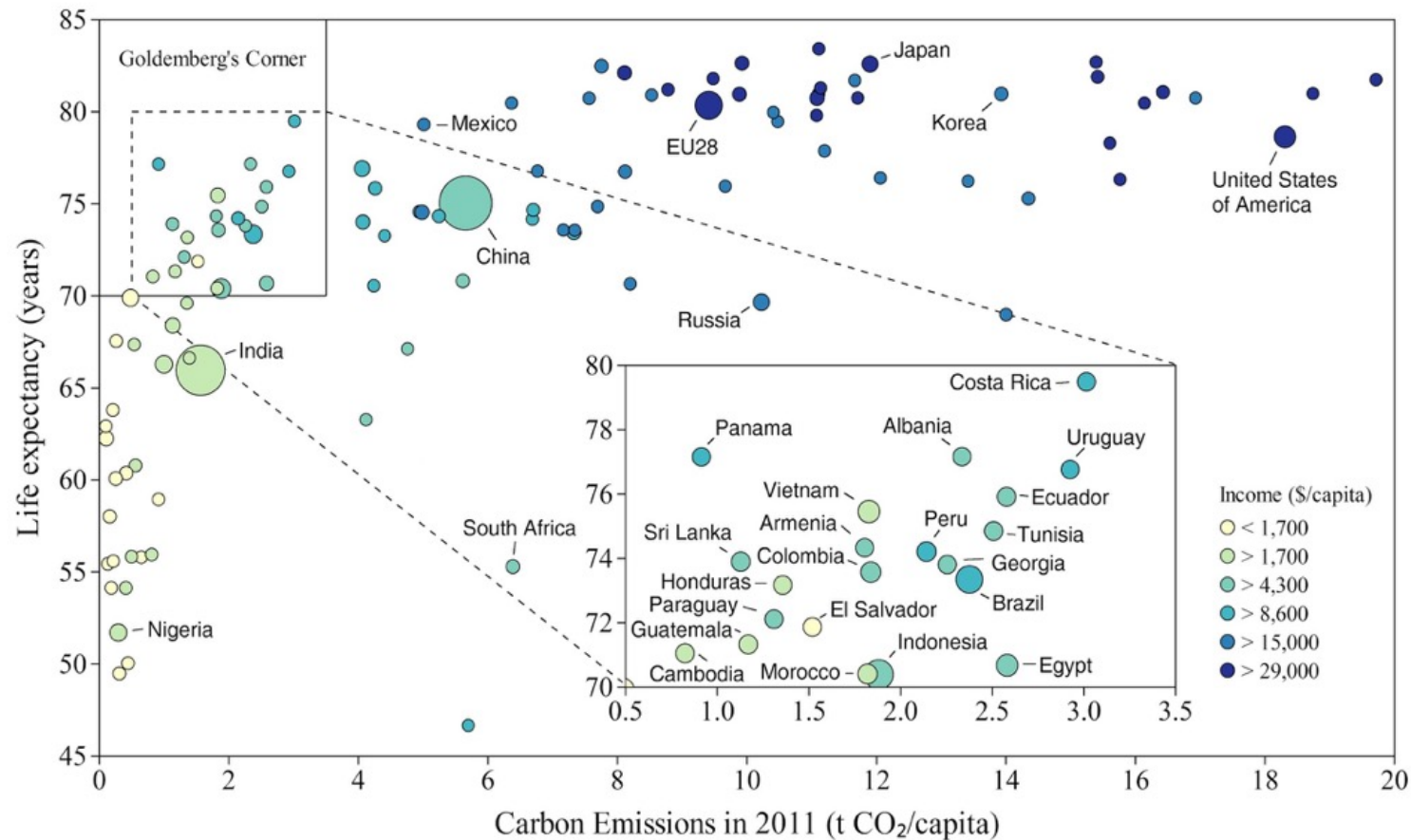
It also requires a systemic approach and cooperation among actors operating in the supply chain, from producer to final consumer. It involves engaging consumers through **awareness-raising and education on sustainable consumption and lifestyles, providing consumers with adequate information through standards and labels and engaging in sustainable public procurement**, among others.

Planetary boundaries: exploring the **safe operating space** for humanity



[Rockström et al 2009; updated 2015 – Stockholm Resilience Centre]

Trilemma - the triple dilemma of sustainability

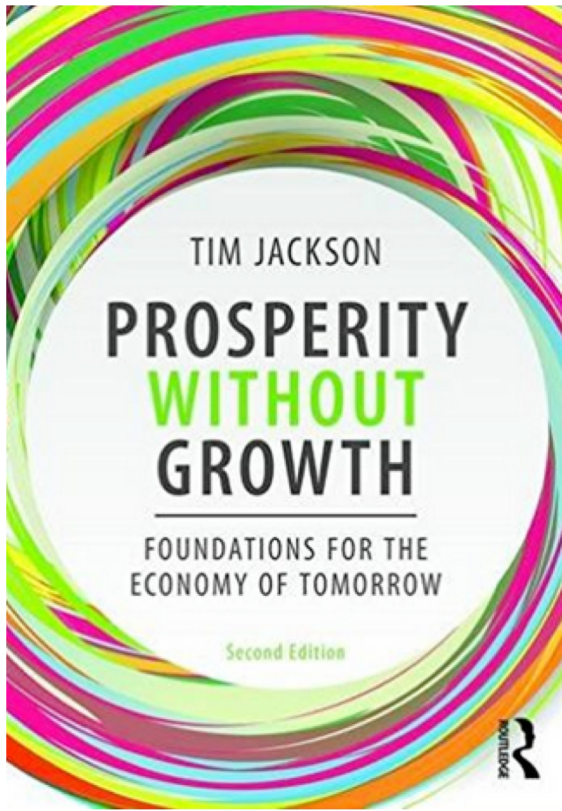


[2011 data, updated by W. Lamb, based on Steinberger et al 2012; Goldemberg et al. 1985]



UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE

Prosperity without Growth



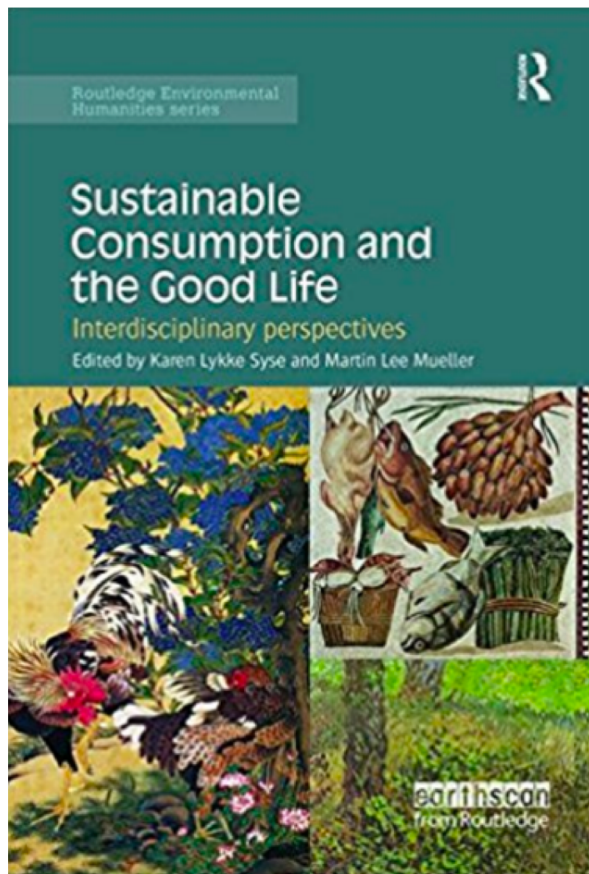
«*Foundations for the economy of tomorrow*»

Degrowth or post-growth movement

The symbolic significance of growth in policies and imaginations

GDP still matters, but it is solely a functional tool
Climate change, peak labor productivity, along with low wages and increased inequalities are all pressing issues

SC and the good life – Sustainable wellbeing

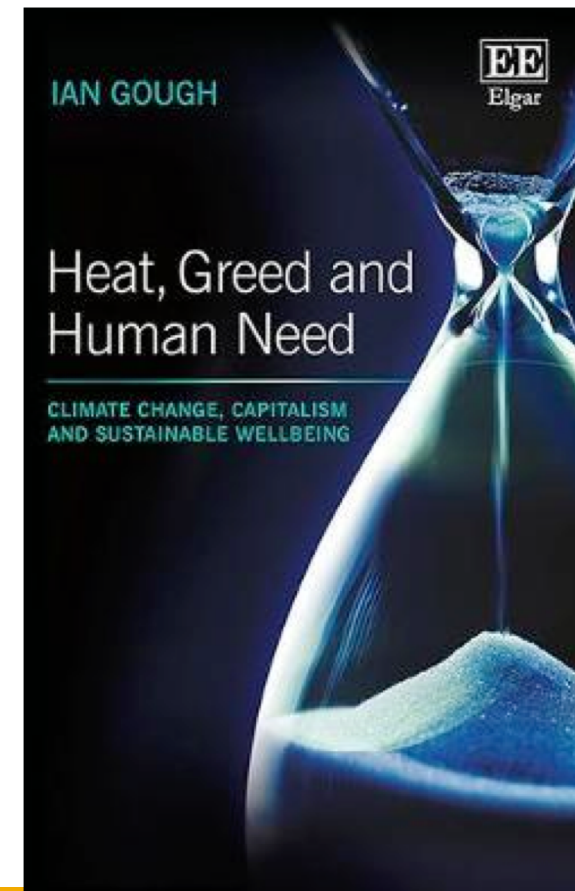


What is the good life, wellbeing, buen vivir...?

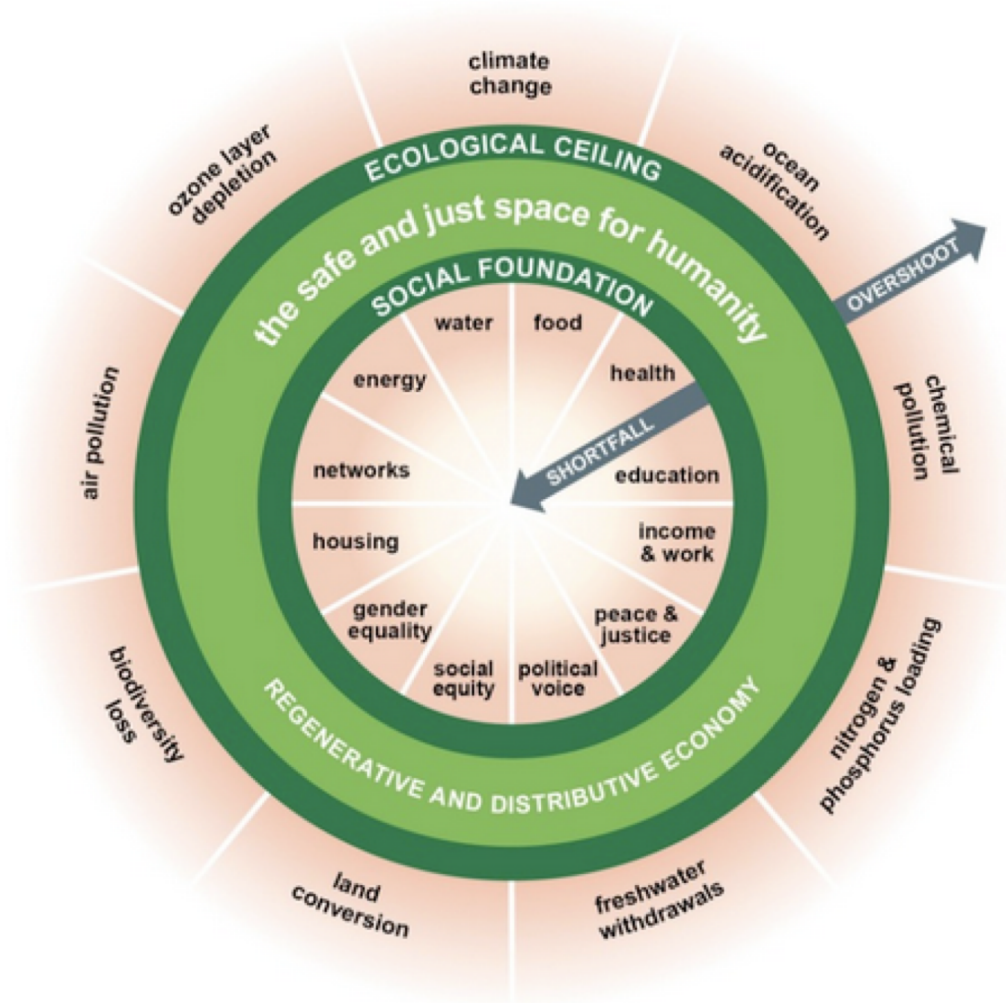
How can we satisfy universal human needs?

Can we live within a “safe operating space” and achieve greater freedom?

What are the implications for environmental justice?



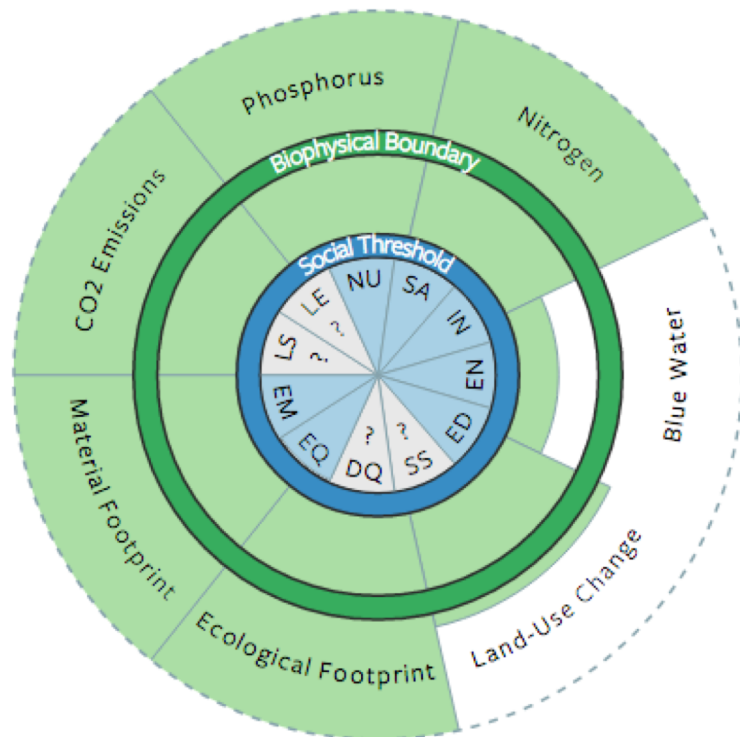
[Syse and Mueller 2015; Gough 2017]



Kate Raworth and Doughnut Economics

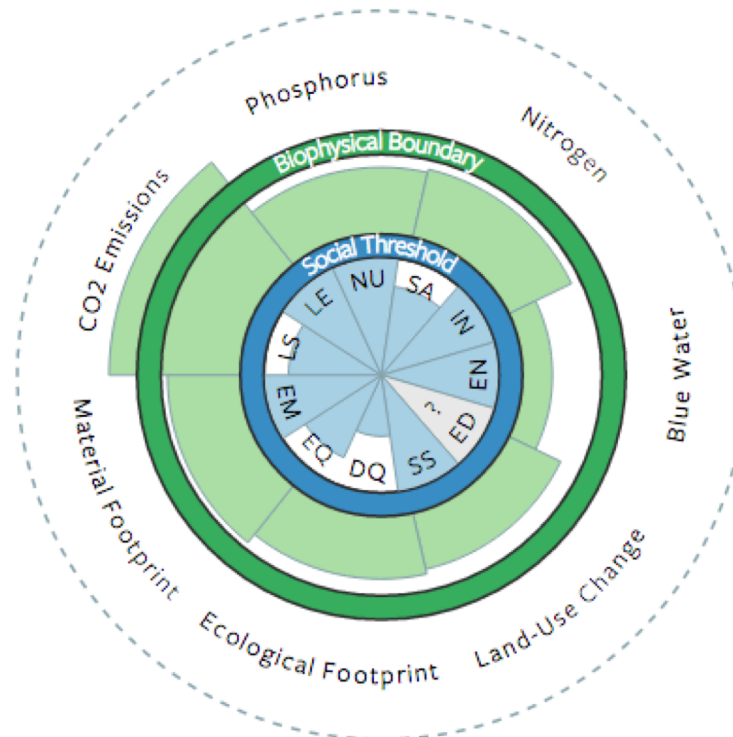
<https://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/>

Switzerland



LS - Life Satisfaction
 LE - Healthy Life Expect.
 NU - Nutrition
 SA - Sanitation
 IN - Income
 EN - Access to Energy
 ED - Education
 SS - Social Support
 DQ - Democratic Quality
 EQ - Equality
 EM - Employment

Vietnam



[O'Neil et al. 2018: <https://goodlife.leeds.ac.uk/countries/>]

Sustainable consumption timeline 3 of 4

- 2002 **Johannesburg Earth Summit**, underlines importance of consumption and production (developed countries must act first); Reaffirms Agenda 21's Chapter; calls for a 10-year framework of programs (10YFP)
- 2003 UNEP and UNDESA launch the **“Marrakech Process” 10YFP for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP)**
- 2012 Adoption of the SCP 10YFP in Rio +20. Expanding on the Millennium Development Goals of 2001, Agenda for Sustainable Development, with **Sustainable Development Goals. 12: Responsible production and consumption**
-
- 2018 IPCC 1.5 lifestyle report....WWF Living Planet Report....Greta Thunburg, student climate strike movement begins!**

Game
changer?

From climate
change to
climate crisis

Support The Guardian
Available for everyone, funded by readers
[Contribute →](#) [Subscribe →](#)

Search jobs Sign in Search

News Opinion Sport Culture Lifestyle More ▾

Environment ► **Climate change** Wildlife Energy Pollution

Climate change

Matthew Taylor
Wed 18 Sep 2019 23.00 BST

[f](#) [t](#) [e](#)

281

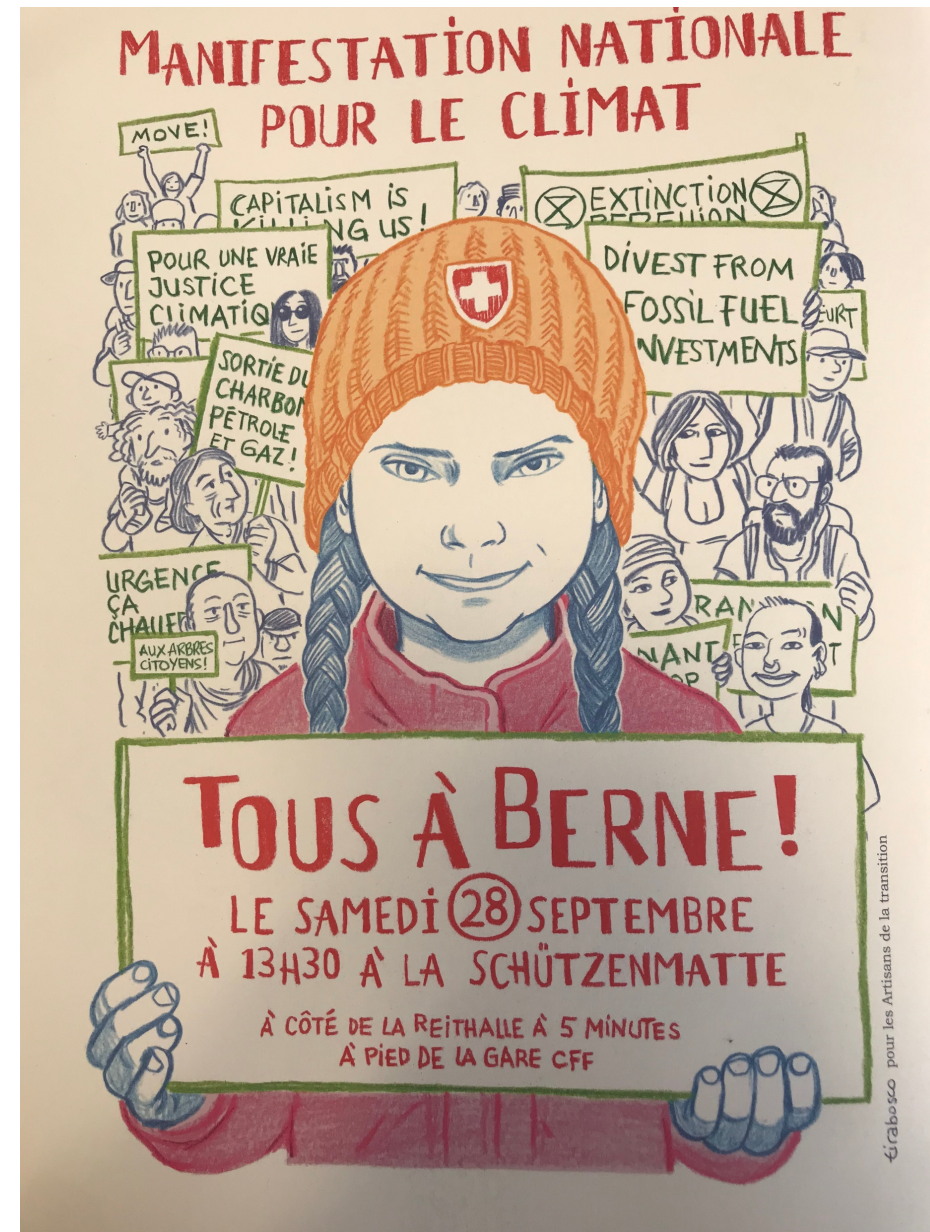
Climate crisis seen as 'most important issue' by public, poll shows

Eight-country poll shows people view climate crisis as priority over migration and terrorism



▲ The survey showed that the public were 'way ahead' of politicians in recognising the scale of the climate crisis.
Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Citizen action for the 'climate crisis'
Saturday 28 september, 2019
Bern!



Key concepts and terms

Life cycle thinking

The IPAT formula

The rebound effect

The Marrakech process

The Oslo Symposium

Sustainable Development Goal 12

“Sustainable wellbeing”

Cited references 1/2

- Chertow, M. (2001). "The IPAT Equation and Its Variants: Changing Views of Technology and Environmental Impact." *Journal of Industrial Ecology* 4(13-29).
- Ehrlich, P. R. (2016). "Population, environment, ethics: where we stand now." Retrieved 16 september, 2016, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVOW7knhLmE>.
- Fuchs, D. A. and S. Lorek (2005). "Sustainable Consumption Governance: A History of Promises and Failures." *Journal of Consumer Policy* 28: 261-288.
- Fuentes-Nieva, R. and N. Galasso (2014). Working for the few: Political capture and economic inequality. Oxfam briefing paper. UK, Oxfam International.
- Georgescu-Roegen, N. (1971). The Entropy Law and the Economic Process. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- Goldemberg, J. and T. B. Johansson (2004). World Energy Assessment. Overview 2004; Update 1–85, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the World Energy Council.
- Gough, I. (2017). Heat, Greed and Human Need: Climate change, capitalism and sustainable wellbeing. UK, USA, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Hertwich, E. G. (2005) (a). "Life Cycle Approaches to Sustainable Consumption: A Critical Review." *Environmental Science & Technology* **39**(13): 4673-4684.
- Hertwich, E. G. (2005) (b). "Consumption and the Rebound Effect: An Industrial Ecology Perspective." *Journal of Industrial Ecology* 9(1-2): 85-98.
- Jackson, T. (2009/2017). Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet, Earthscan.
- Lorek, S. (2016). Strong Sustainable Consumption. Sustainable Consumption Teaching Series. M. Sahakian and R. Orzanna. University of Lausanne, Switzerland, SCORAI.org: 5 minutes. <http://scorai.org/teaching/videos/>
- Meadows, D. H., et al. (1972). The Limits to Growth. London, Earth Island; Compton Printing Ltd.
- Polanyi, K. (1957). The Economy as Instituted Process. Trade and Market in the Early Empires. Glencoe, IL, Free Press.

Cited references 2/2

- Raworth, K. (2017). Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist Random House Business
- Rockström, J., Steffen, W., Noone, K., Persson, Å., et al (2009). "Planetary boundaries: exploring the safe operating space for humanity." *Ecology and Society* 14(2): 32.
- Sahakian, M. (2014). Keeping Cool in Southeast Asia: Energy use and urban air-conditioning. New York, London, UK, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Steinberger, J. K., et al. (2012). "Pathways of human development and carbon emissions embodied in trade." *Nature Climate Change* 2: 81-85.
- Syse, K. L. and M. L. Mueller, Eds. (2015). Sustainable consumption and the good life. Oxon, New York, Routledge.
- Tukker, A., G. Huppes, J. Guinée, R. Heijungs, A. d. Koning, L. v. Oers, S. Suh, T. Geerken, M. V. Holderbeke, B. Jansen and P. Nielsen (2005). "Environmental Impact of Products (EIPRO): Analysis of the life-cycle environmental impacts related to the final consumption of the EU-25." European Science and Technology Observatory and Institute for Prospective Technological Studies Summary of the Final Report.
- UNDP (2016). Human Development Report 2016, Human Development for Everyone. New York, USA, United Nations Development Programme
- Webb, R. (2006). "Cartography: A popular perspective." *NATURE* Vol 439. from <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v439/n7078/pdf/439800a.pdf>.
- WWF (2006). Living Planet Report. Gland, Switzerland, World Wide Fund for Nature, Global Footprint Network, ZSL Living Conservation.

Next week's class



**Consumption is meaningful *versus*
Production systems create meaning**



Marlyne Sahakian, marlyne.sahakian@unige.ch
UNIMAIL office 4293

Thanks for being an active participant in this class