

A Transition to Sustainability in Europe

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This vision encompasses a continuous, adaptable societal process which leads the world along the path towards sustainability. The vision rests on two pillars: efficiency and sufficiency. On the one hand, it is possible to produce almost all goods and services that make our life pleasant while consuming a great deal less material, energy, and land area; thereby appreciably reducing ecological footprints and rucksacks. This is the pillar of improved efficiency. On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly clear that the accumulation of material wealth contributes less and less to the good life for all those people who have reached a certain level of prosperity. The question must be asked whether it might be possible for us to dispense with a further increase in our supply of goods and still be able to live ever better. This pillar is the sufficiency strategy. These two strategies complement one another and, in the end, merge into one sustainable development.

By 2050 the dominant practices, rules and assumptions of the European Union have changed dramatically from those that were in place in 2008. The prices for energy, resources and land truly reflect the value of ecosystem goods and services. Society measures its progress not in terms of economic wealth but in terms of well-being of people and the environment both in Europe and worldwide. Paid work is distributed, so that all people who want a job have a job, while work that was previously unpaid (caring for the young, the old and the sick, voluntary work to support environment and society) is paid through a guaranteed basic income for all citizens.

The regime change has been brought about by an ecological tax reform in the European Union, new measures of progress and measures to introduce major changes in the “work-life-balance” of all European citizens.

Before 2008, some European countries had begun to experiment with ecological tax reform, but there were barriers to a European-wide introduction. At the same time, however, there was increasing public awareness of the dangers of climate change and a “sustainability wave” began to sweep across Europe. Between 2008 and 2012, a coordinated network of actors develops around three concepts: a European Ecological Tax Reform, New Measures of Progress and “Work-Life-Balance”. These concepts become increasingly used in individual countries and developed at the European level. In the acceleration phase, 2013-2022, the three concepts diffuse rapidly and major technological and societal changes result. By 2030, Europe is in the stabilisation phase, the speed of technological and societal change has decreased and a new dynamic equilibrium is being reached.