

Lørdagsuniversitetet i Arendal, 5 Januar 2019

My own private climate change. Welfare and wellbeing in a warming world

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1. Introduction: a historical reversal?



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Røros, in the late 1940s

Norway,

71 years later



Algarheim in Akershus, 2018

Introduction: a historical reversal?



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*Norway in **1947**, still a poor country with many people trying to find permanent homes and reunite with their families.*

1947: a very cold winter gave way to an extremely dry season. Summer 1947 was dry throughout Europe, but Norway was especially hard-hit.

71 years later:

2018: The fierce drought that has hit southern Norway has been declared the worst since **1947**. According to experts, the record is expected to be broken.

*In **2018** the standard of living in Norway is among the highest in the world.*

But what's the difference between 1947 and 2018? And what is it telling us?

- **In the past** people have always lived with weather and seasons. Cold winters and dry summers posed existential threats to pastoral communities.
- **For more than 200 years** welfare and wellbeing became *less dependent* on the weather
- **At the same time:** increasingly affluent lifestyles *affect* the climate and the weather
- **In a warming world individual welfare** (e.g. access to food, energy) and **collective wellbeing** (wealth of a nation, social cohesion) become *more dependent* on climate & weather again!



It is not easy to grasp this change because:

Climate in a narrow sense is usually defined as the “average weather,” or more rigorously, as the statistical description in terms of the mean and variability of relevant quantities over a period of time ranging from months to thousands of years. The classical period is **3 decades**, as defined by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). These quantities are most often surface variables such as temperature, precipitation, and wind. Climate in a wider sense is the state, including a statistical description, of the climate system (IPCC).

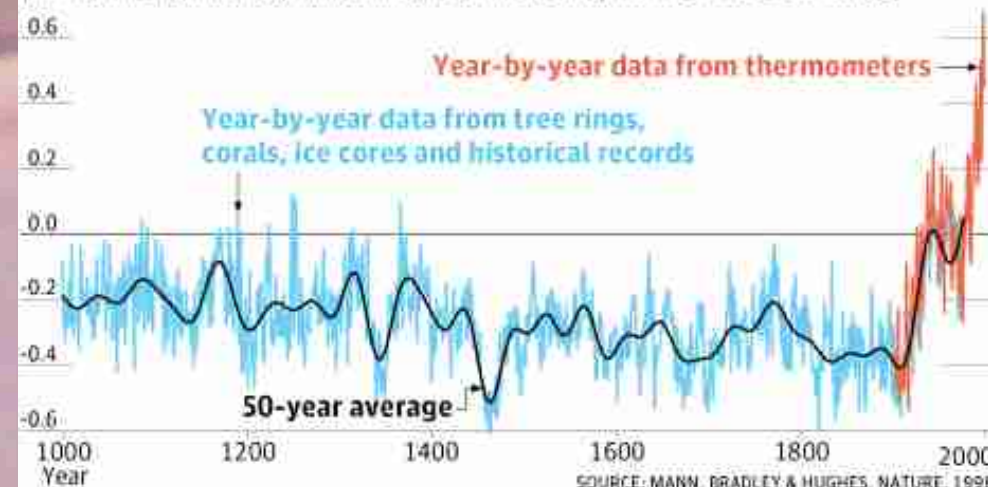
Hence, we cannot “experience” climate change, only weather.



GLOBAL CLIMATE
ACTION SUMMIT

Variations of the Earth's surface temperature

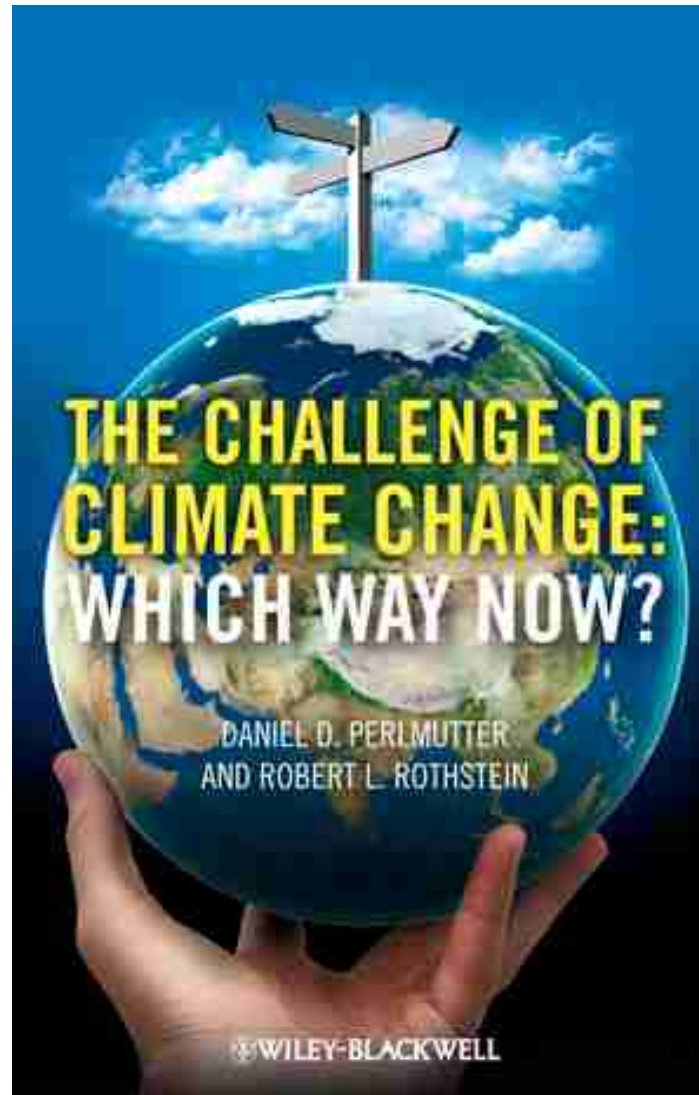
Northern hemisphere. Departures in temperature (C) from the 1961 to 1990 average



2. New challenges we have to deal with



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1. Global/Local Issue and Policy



- Global dynamics and feedbacks
- Differently distributed risks
- Differently distributed responsibilities
- Collective unpredictable effects
- Complicated policy and governance

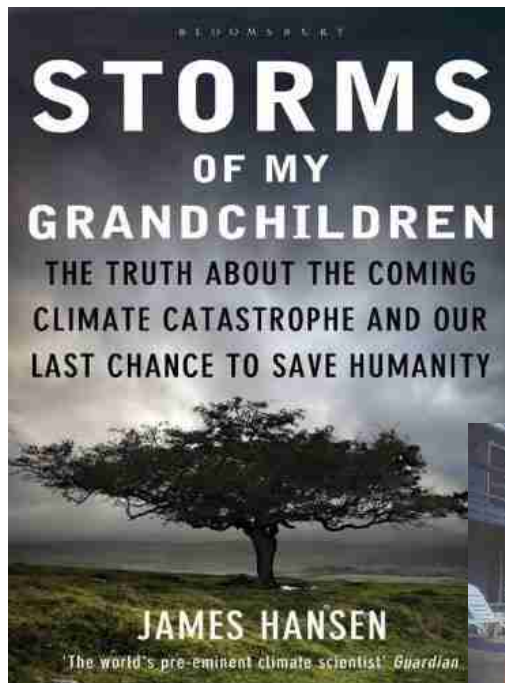
 **Tricky relation
actions ~ outcomes**



2. Multi-generational problem

Which effects for next generations?:

- Which ones? The next? The following?
- Which possible consequences?
- Which responsibilities towards them?



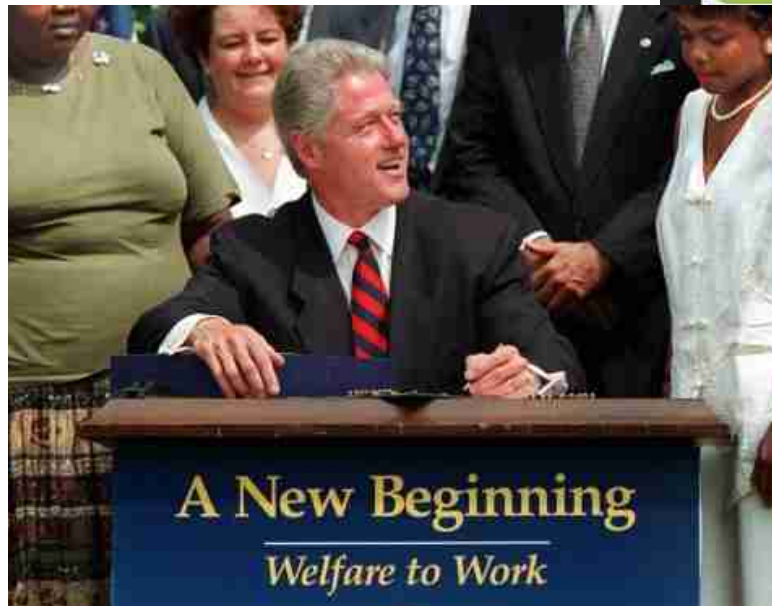
Earth is on
the verge of
disaster!

That's a shame,
it was such a
competitive
planet

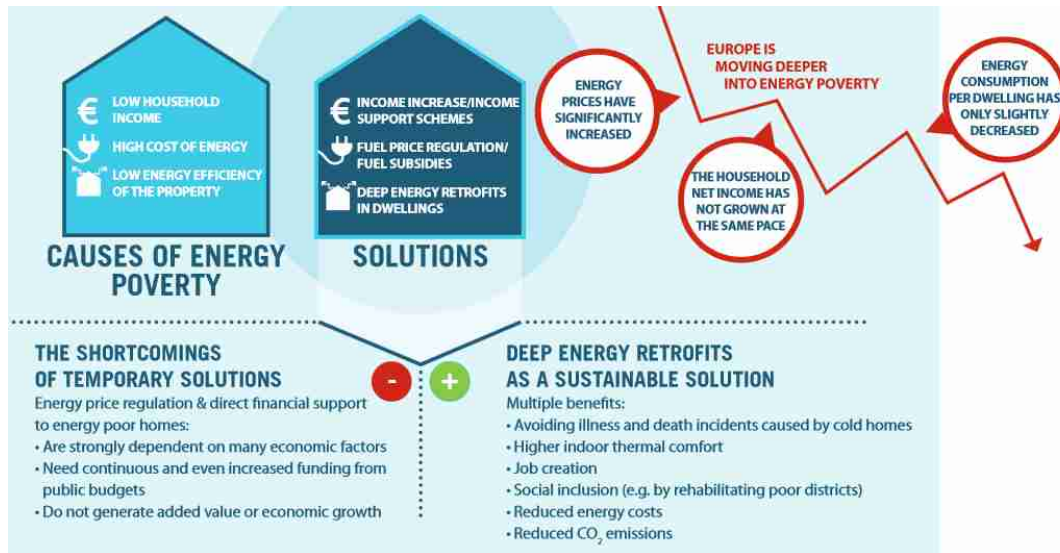


3. An unsustainable welfare system

- Dependent on growth and fosters growth
- Based on / Functional to a consumeristic and productivistic ethos
- Top-down, inefficient and dissipative
- Not always effective against inequalities classes, countries, generations



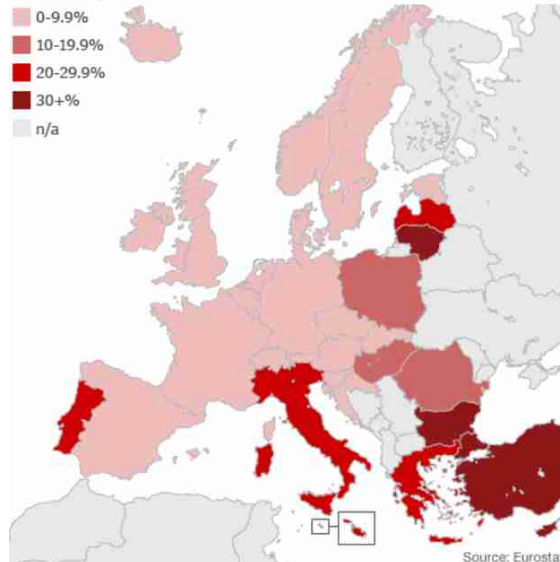
The example of energy poverty in Europe



As most European countries have no official definition for the term "energy poverty", this state is often described as the "inability to keep homes adequately warm".
(European Commission)



Percentage of population unable to heat home adequately



Energy poverty is a widespread problem across Europe, as **between 50 and 125 million people are unable to afford proper indoor thermal comfort**. A common European definition does not exist, but many Member States (MS) acknowledge the scale of this socio-economic situation and its negative impact translated into **severe health issues and social isolation** (European Commission)

3. What does Gilet Jaunes mobilization reveal?

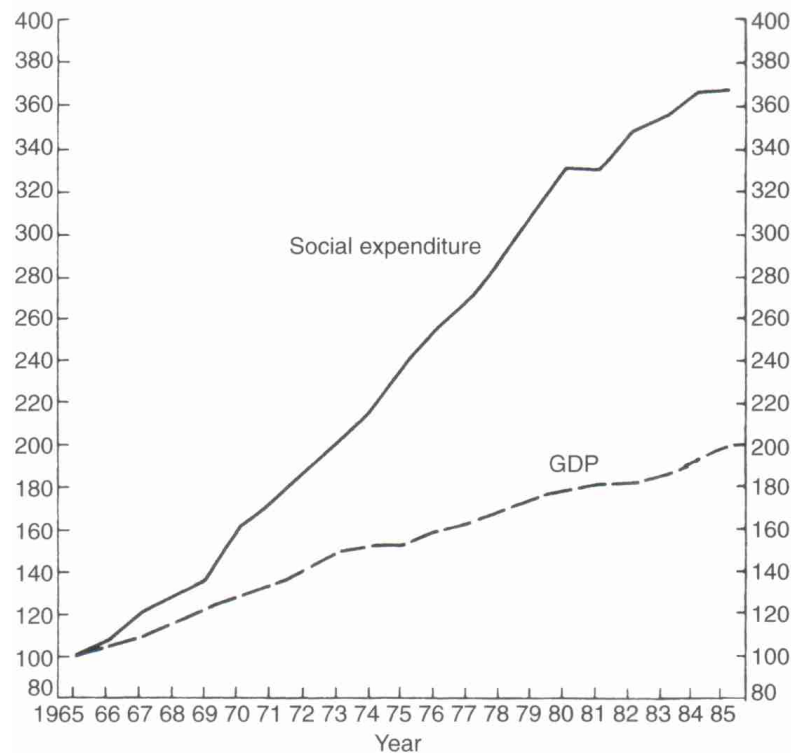


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The environmental paradox of the welfare state

Contradictions of growth:



(Pierson 2007)

Growth is considered

the ultimate goal for our society

an elixir to heal all possible ills

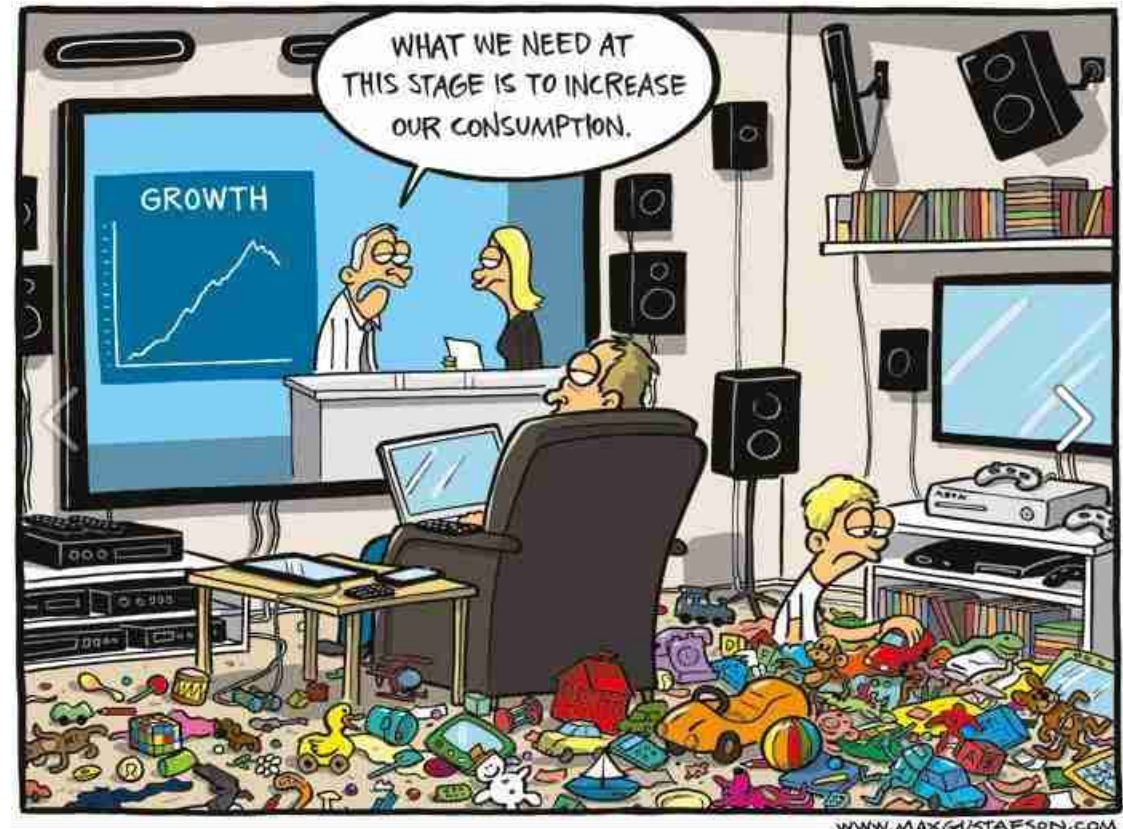
(Büchs and Koch 2017; Bailey 2015)

1. Welfare depends on growth for ...

- More Jobs, increasing living standard
- Redistribution, Reducing inequality
- Wellbeing, social security, tackling poverty

... and fosters growth

Contradictions of growth:

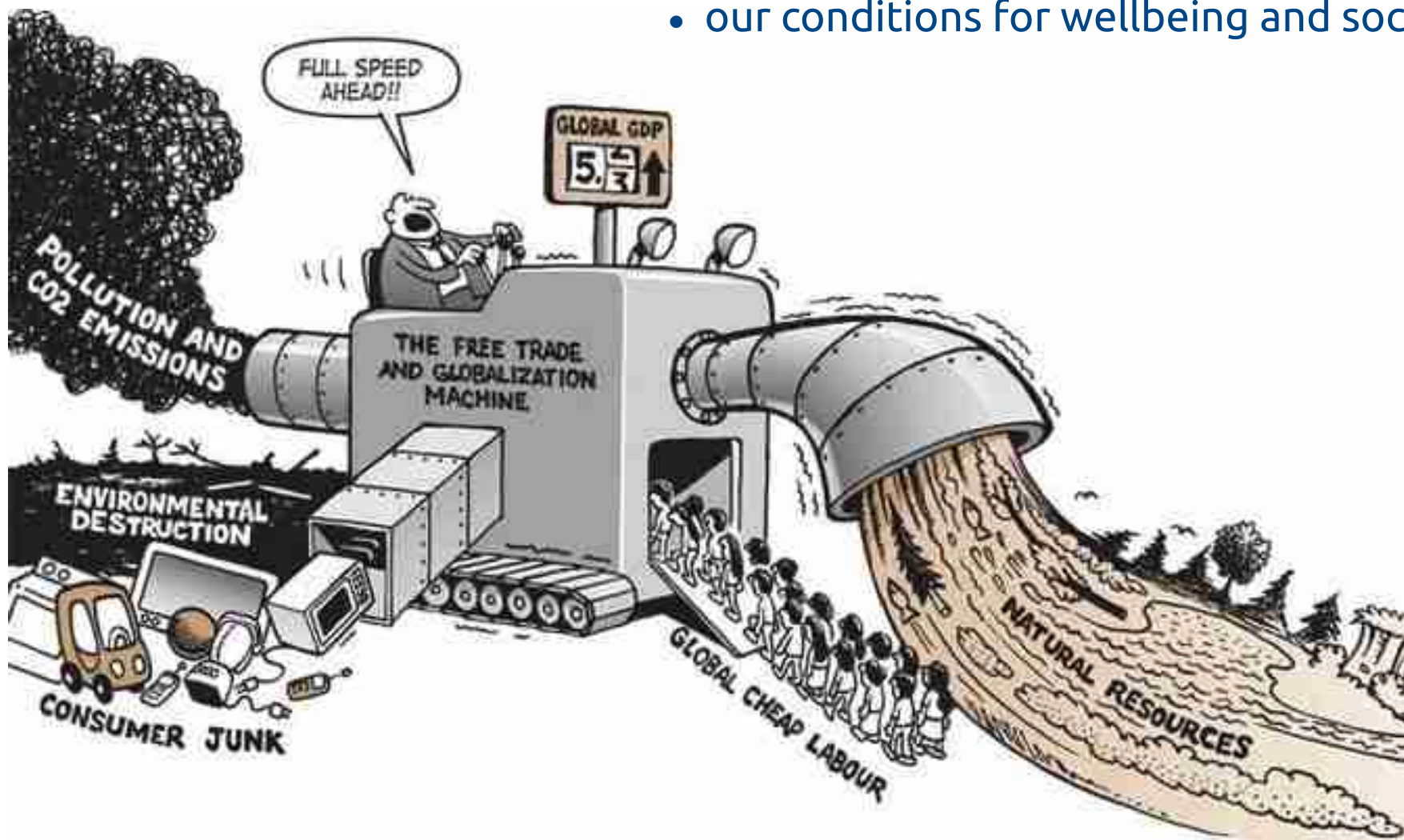


2. But to date economic growth has:

- Declining effects on well-being and happiness
- Declining capability in reducing inequality and creating jobs

3. Moreover, growth is destroying

- our natural environment
- our conditions for wellbeing and social security



Worker
=
money pump

“Why should we pay for all?”

The environmental paradox of welfare state:

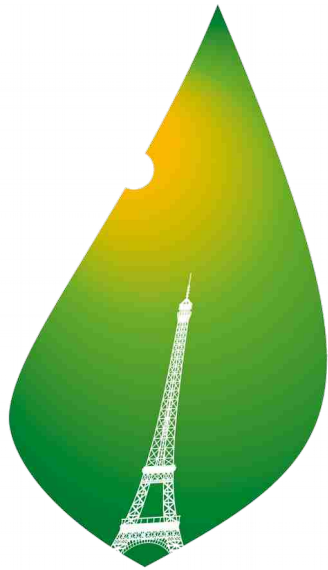


- **Global climate change** is threatening welfare and wellbeing in the *long run*
 - **Mitigation policies** may negatively affect welfare and wellbeing in the *short run*
 - **Reducing social spending** to make the welfare more sustainable may weaken its capacity to support people in the *transition* process
 - **Increasing social spending** can help people in the *short run* and negatively affect the environment - and people - in the *long run*
- **Distribution of risks could prove highly unequal, in many ways.**

4. Paris 2015: getting out of the paradox?



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COP21 • CMP11

PARIS 2015

UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE



Main strategy:

Mitigation by decoupling growth from the damages it causes, namely **green growth** or ecological modernization.

Example of green growth approach

GREEN GROWTH, A CIRCULAR ECONOMY STORY

The 'take, make, use, throw away' approach to scarce resources is a thing of the past. It's **time to close the loop** and invest in the circular economy and green growth!



THIS IS WHAT WE KNOW

- growing demand for goods
- global competition is intensifying
- unsustainable use of resources
- climate change is happening
- energy supplies are dwindling



THIS IS WHAT THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY DOES...

- saves and values scarce resources
- cuts greenhouse gas emissions and environmental impacts
- breaks down silo thinking and promotes cross-policy action
- makes the economy more competitive, sustainable, fair
- creates new business opportunities, jobs and growth

THIS IS THE OUTCOME...

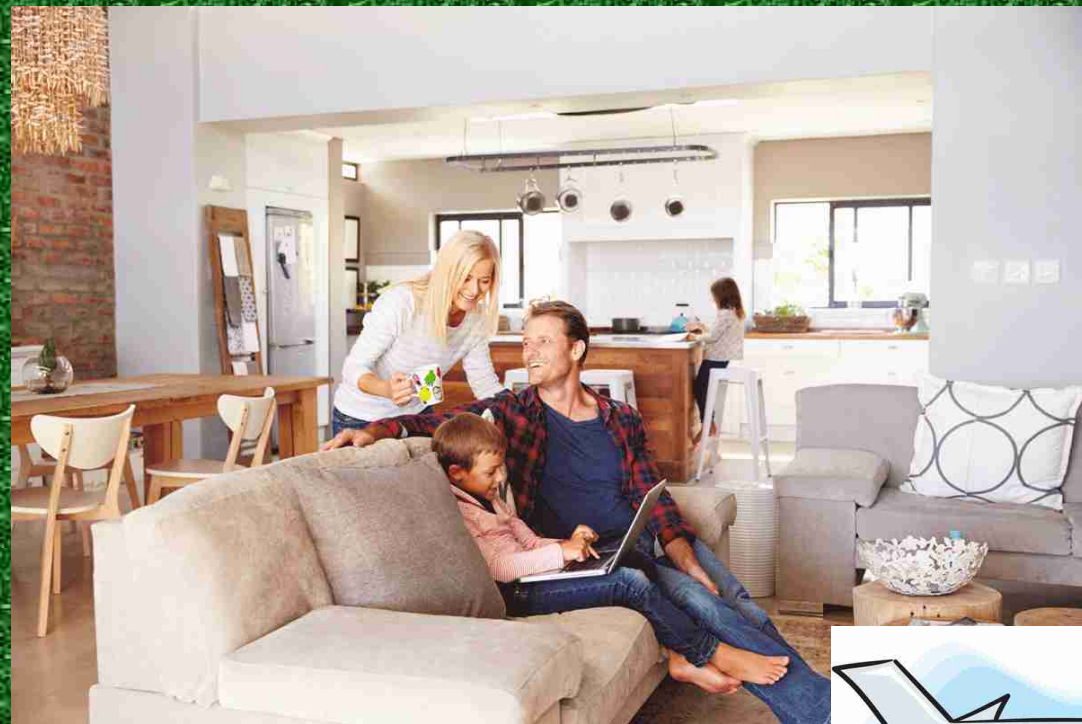
The circular economy package brings the pieces together – production, consumption, secondary raw materials, waste management, innovation & investment – to cover the whole product lifecycle.

It means Europe is now the best place to grow a sustainable green business.

Paris 2015: getting out of the paradox?



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So, business as usual,
just greener.

But what if ... ?

Greener what, how and how much?



Main risks:

- We are cheating, just **greenwashing** the status quo
- Even if it is real, the strategy is **not that effective** ... as it is happening
- Provides “the **false comfort** that action is being taken” (Khan and Clark 2016)

If it doesn't work, are we ready for stronger mitigation strategies?

- **Radical** emission cuts in a fairly short time (IPCC 2018)?
- Difficult to predict consequence on our **economies**?
- However important **effects on the environment**?



Or ... are there
alternatives?

5. Alternative strategies: (a) Wait and see?



Late August 2018: New York Times journalists visit Punta Santiago, near where Hurricane Maria made landfall.

2017: Hurricane Maria the worst storm to hit Puerto Rico in +80 years, felled trees, smashed buildings and tore roofs from homes



They documented the damage that remains from the storm in more than 150 homes.

“People here have waited months for repairs with little relief. A year later, in house after house, it looks like the hurricane just hit.”

The New York Times, Sept. 22, 2018

(a) Wait and see: should not be an option (Fitzpatrick 2011)

Alternative strategies: (b) Adaptation?



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August 2017: Hurricane Harvey made landfall along the **Texas Gulf Coast**. Days of torrential rains to Houston and surrounding areas (its average yearly rainfall in just a matter of days) and the resulting flooding devastated the city. Lives lost. Tens of thousands of homes damaged or destroyed. Estimate 1 million vehicles destroyed. **Second only to Hurricane Katrina** as the U.S.'s costliest hurricane on record.

National Geographic, Sept. 26, 2018

A Year After Hurricane Harvey, Houston's Poorest Neighborhoods Are Slowest to Recover. Texas has made progress recuperating from Hurricane Harvey, but **low-income and minority residents have had a much harder time.**

The New York Times, Sept. 3, 2018

(b) Adaptation: just more risks and inequality ?

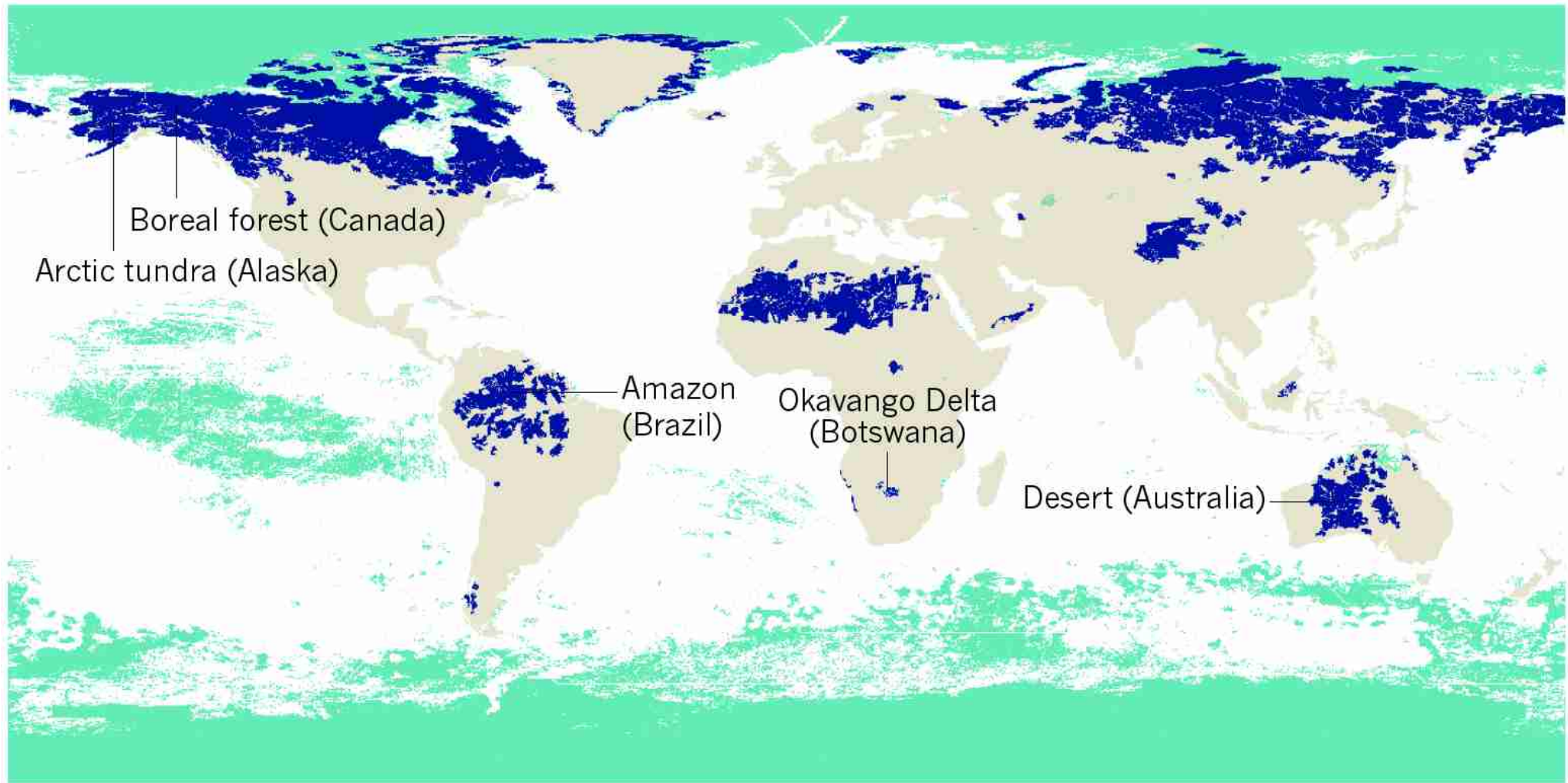
Alternative strategies: (c) Conservation



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REMAINING WILDERNESS: ■ Terrestrial ■ Marine

Source: Nature, 1 November 2018



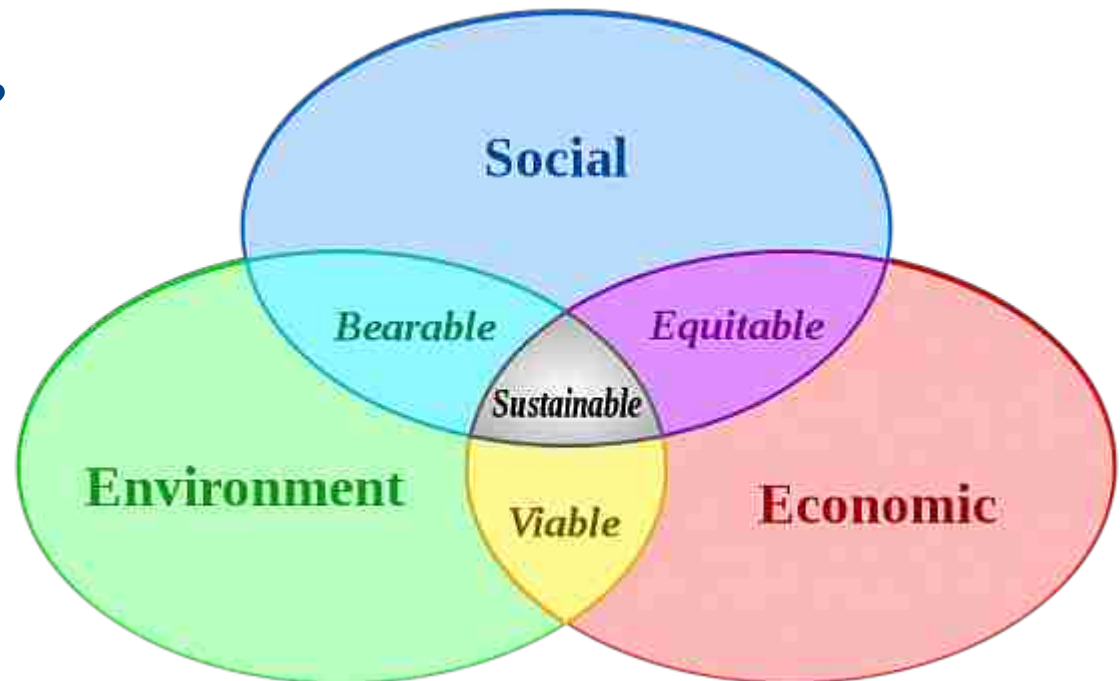
(c) Conservation: globally unbalanced and difficult task

How different must a sustainable society be?

How we move towards a society that works differently ?

Differently how ?

Who has to change, how and when ?



Dealing with the welfare sustainability paradox



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1. De-Growth?

- Basic needs and Consumption?
- Which employment and income?
- Which investments/production?
- How the transition?



2. Organization?

How change and innovation can create a fuller voice for ecological interests?



3. A Sustainable Welfare?

“towards the satisfaction of human needs within ecological limits, from the intergenerational and global perspective” (Koch and Mont 2016)

- Post-growth lifestyle? Just the universal basic needs? More equal?
- Less work-insurance based, less productivistic more investments on reproduction?
- Top-down and bottom-up? More efficient, less bureaucratic and more collective-based?
- Global and intergenerational?



7. Conclusion: we are running out of time?



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“I wish it need not have happened in my time”

“So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. **All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us**”

*J.R.R. Tolkien
The Fellowship of the Ring*



**Political decisions are essential.
The private ones are probably just as important.**

Lørdagsuniversitetet i Arendal, 5 Januar 2019

Thank you for your attention !



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