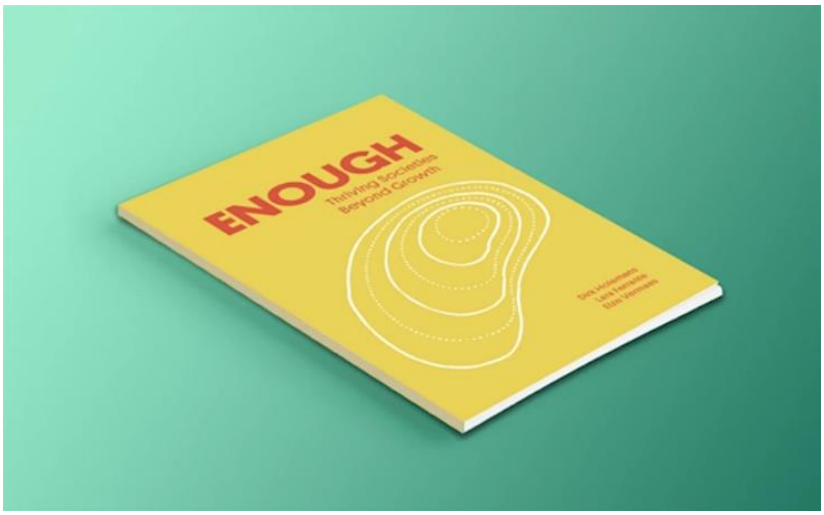
GREEN EUROPEAN FOUNDATION

R E P O R T

Green European Foundation, with the support of Green Foundation Ireland, invite you to a book launch and round table discussion

ENOUGH:
Thriving Societies Beyond Growth



Guest Speaker:

Dirk Holemans *(Co-Author)*

Monday 9 December 2024 – 19:00 to 21:00

Venue:

Room 2/018, Peter Froggatt Centre, QUB, Belfast, BT7 1PB

With thanks to the European Parliament for financial provision to Green European Foundation.

ENOUGH:
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BACKGROUND

In early 2024 **Green European Foundation** released ***ENOUGH: Thriving Societies Beyond Growth.*** This publication sought to spotlight many of the ideas that the foundation has been exploring on post-growth and a just green and social deal, presenting them in an accessible and inspiring booklet. They have been taking it on a tour to spark conversations across the continent on how Europe can reconcile social and ecological justice in a wellbeing project for all.

ABOUT THE BOOK

This book, by Dirk Holemans, Elze Vermaas and Lara Ferrante, is a compelling narrative about a world with less inequality and fewer private jets, burn-outs and landfill sites, about a healthy planet with more quality of life, time for each other and sustainable products. In other words, about a good life for everyone within planetary boundaries.

"*Enough* is a brilliant combination of imaginative vision, conceptual clarity and concrete proposals. A necessary handbook for an ecological civilisation." – Roman Krznaric

Who is afraid of degrowth? The term alone scares the living daylights out of mainstream opinion makers and many economists in Europe. Growth is the lubricant of capitalism. As long as the economy is growing, all is well, we are told. But what do we mean by growth? Should everything just keep growing endlessly? The ecological crisis shows that infinite growth on a finite planet is impossible. At the same time, the current economic system does not guarantee a secure livelihood for all while social inequality is on the increase. A sufficiency economy offers an alternative. It provides for everybody's basic needs while tackling greed and overconsumption.

The EU can be a frontrunner in the ecological transition. The Green Deal was a great step forward but, with its core principle of competition in a single market, it remains locked within a growth-addicted economy and fails to address social inequality. We must imagine an alternative European economy, one rooted in a different paradigm, before we can actually build it.

Discover how societies can thrive when they no longer depend on economic growth.

This essay gives you the keys to one of the most important debates of our time.

ABOUT OUR EVENT

Our round table discussion was chaired by **Dr Amanda Slevin**. Amanda is a Director of the **Centre for Sustainability, Equality and Climate Action (SECA)** at Queen's University Belfast, which she co-founded with **Professor John Barry** in 2019. SECA encourages collaborative links across Schools, Faculties and Directorates in Queen's University Belfast to investigate the interconnections between socio-economic (in)equality and the interlinked climate and ecological crisis as determined by natural and social sciences. There are three pillars to the Centre across which the challenge of the planetary emergency is investigated from an interdisciplinary and engaged perspective.

Since joining QUB in March 2018, Amanda has held several academic positions and in July 2024, she commenced the newly established role of Lecturer in Climate Policy, Politics and Sustainability. She convenes the postgraduate module Foundations for Sustainable Development and teaches on undergraduate and postgraduate modules across QUB.

In her opening remarks, Amanda praised the book, stating that it was an important contribution to our understanding of climate breakdown and the positive solutions that avert climate catastrophe. She then asked Dirk Holemans to outline the main concerns of the book

Dirk Holemans, who is also the Honorary President of Green European Foundation, began by referring to ***The Great Derangement*** by Amitav Ghosh, who asserted the ecological crisis was foremost one of our imaginations and how we also find it hard to imagine a much better society. We need to imagine a better society. He and his co-authors wrote this book in Dutch originally, while trying to find an appropriate English title around the notion of 'growing in another direction'. The core message of the book was about enabling everyone having just enough, so they settled on this title. Dirk emphasised that we need to remodel all systems and make them 'provisioning' systems, while striving to maintain a balanced ecological welfare system. He also recalled the very successful *'Beyond Growth'* conference he helped organise in 2023 with the assistance of cross-party support in the European Union which helped spark this work.

Our next speaker was **John Barry**, Professor of Green Political Economy at Queen's University Belfast, co-chair of the **Belfast Climate Commission**, and a Board member of Green Foundation Ireland. He described himself as a recovering politician, having served as Green Party representative and councillor in Northern Ireland for many years.

John's areas of academic research include post-growth and heterodox political economy; the politics, policy and political economy of climate breakdown and climate resilience; socio-technical analyses of low carbon just energy and sustainability transitions; and the overlap between conflict transformation and these sustainability and energy transitions. His last book was ***The Politics of Actually Existing Unsustainability: Human Flourishing in a Climate-Changed, Carbon-Constrained World*** (2012, Oxford University Press).

John warmly congratulated the authors of this book. As a green political economist, he has been researching, teaching and writing about the necessity for a post-growth, post-capitalist social and economic order since 1990, when he completed a Masters dissertation at University College Dublin entitled *'Limits to Growth'.* While he is now an 'overnight' success after almost 35 years, this book summarises many of the key scientific, ethical, social justice principles and evidence that he and others (in academia, activism, electoral politics and culture, though not so much in the media) have been promoting for decades.

John thought that the book is an excellent primer on the arguments and evidence for an urgent and long-overdue imperative for the minority world, the global north to recognise that we are all 'grow'd up', we do not need any more growth, but more redistribution of wealth, income, resources and opportunities, and to move from a view of the good life based on accumulation either of capital or commodities to having enough for a dignified and fulfilling life, while moving to a focus on well-being and quality of life, especially relationships (human and nonhuman) and meaningful free time.

He agreed with almost everything in the book – not least the importance of presenting a positive, attractive and a vision of a sustainable future that is as much about desire for a better future and way of life as it is about fear for the present.

This book, its ideas and explicit endorsement of the need for us to be both imaginative and radical, is an important contribution to the ideas and thinking needed in that struggle.

John ended by thanking the authors, on behalf of his children and all children who will need much courage, determination and resilience in the crucial decades of revolutionary transformation ahead.

There were then many questions and contributions from the floor.

Reference was made to the terrible environmental situation of Lough Neagh.

Another contributor asked why it is that academic institutions are not providing the analysis required to deal with the situation. John responded that the orthodox economics department had become in fact, a management department with very little questioning of the economic system. As a result of this, they were producing 'technically competent barbarians'.

The question was asked who was the most well-known capitalist in Ireland? The answer was Michael O'Leary, who reserved his greatest venom for the Greens and not for so-called left-wing parties like People Before Profit. Why is that? Because the Greens actually are a bigger threat as far as he is concerned.

*You can **download 'ENOUGH: Thriving Societies Beyond Growth' here**.*

*You can **view photos of our event here**.*