

Economic Growth – Sustainable and (Un)Limited? by David Tischer

In the course of the 11th Planete+ Doc Film Festival the movie “Last Call” by Enrico Cerasuolo was screened, a wholehearted documentary that shows the dedicated work of a group of young researchers who came to a tremendous fame after publishing a book in 1972 that changed the worlds view on the relation of economy and ecology and boosted the emergence of a worldwide green movement: *The Limits to growth*.

After the screening of the movie “Last Call” , the Heinrich-Böll Foundation invited for a panel debate entitled “*Economic Growth – Sustainable and (Un)Limited?*” to discuss todays challenges laying ahead of green policies and the relation of economic growth and sustainability in the context of our society. Two debates were held : the first one had been organized in Wrocław on 14th of May, the second one took place in Warsaw, on 15th of May.

The Wroclaw debate was moderated by **Edwin Bendyk, journalist of “Polityka”** . Four Panelist agreed to take part in the discussion : **Prof. Wawrzyniec Konarski**, Vice-President of the Polish Association for the Club of Rome and Professor at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, **Prof. Lars Ryden** from the Uppsala Centre for Sustainable Development in Sweden, founder and long-term director of the Baltic University Programme, **Katarzyna Słodczyk** from the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice and the director of the movie himself, **Enrico Cerasuolo**.

The Warsaw debate has been a bit different as **Mirella Panek-Owsiańska**, President of the Responsible Business Forum in Warsaw agreed to take part in the discussion and gave a broad overview as far as business responsibility as far as the climate chance is concerned.

The first question in the debate reached the director of the movie Mr. Cerasuolo and concerned his motives for making the movie. The answer was straightforward. : it is because the subject of the report “*The Limits to Growth*” is still very important , even after 40 years after its first publication in 1972. It was seen then, by the authors and many other people at their time, as the “Last Call” to change the way our economy works, to prevail the damages of unsustainable growth and it was crucial for the society has to ask the question , if there can still be hope in recovering our planet. As pictured by the director, the now grown-old authors of this remarkable book have different answers to that

question: while Dennis Meadows still has hopes if not for the sustainability, but resilience at least, Jorgen Randers challenges the power of democracies to cope with the problem.

Living in Sweden, Prof. Ryden had a positive view on the challenges of climate change, as his country is a good example that coping climate change - if inaugurated early and with enough level of political will – proves that green and sustainable economy is possible. He however emphasized that there is still a lot to do and that the importance of an advanced awareness of the problems in the society is very important.

Prof. Konarski agreed with Prof. Ryden, but in the case of the Polish society, he claimed that there is still a long way to go. In his eyes, there are not enough local initiatives that fight for green aims and people don't put enough pressure on their politicians to force them to make a rapid change. He emphasized that without this pressure from society, the destructive forces on environment are arising from many parts of the economy and are not easy to fight with.

Mrs. Panek- Owsiańska shared her insights about strategies of global and local companies. In her everyday work, she encountered a lot of consciousness to green problems and policies and many companies seem to realize that a sustainable environment is not costly, but the opposite will be. Through the responsibility reports that many companies start to release, it is easier for the consumer to change his behavior and support green policies. The cooperation between society, economy and politics is the only answer to the question how to change our world to be sustainable.

Katarzyna Słodczyk, who took part only in the Wrocław debate, focused on the relationship between local, civic initiatives and the settled politics. In her view, there is not enough communication between those two actors, which makes it difficult for small initiatives from the public to reach higher onto policy making levels. With an easier realization of bottom-up ideas, the activity of citizens could be effectively boosted and also would it be easier for the normal citizen to realize the actual impact of his actions and create more consciousness about everyday actions.

The panelists had also the opportunity to answer the questions from the public, which were very diverse. The discussion was very vivid in Wrocław where the audience proposed their own ideas for a more sustainable world, such as stopping to cut trees for Christmas, or the questioning the growth of developing countries. In the latter case, our

panelists agreed, that a sustainable world cannot be managed without now developing countries such as China or India, but that the western countries can use their advance to be role models for a more sustainable growth. But there was also critic from the audience, stating that the debate was too one sided and questioning today's role of the Club Of Rome. The debate in Warszawa has been shaped rather differently as it mostly concentrated on how the future might look like: Less meat consume, more energy efficiency and a lower fertility rate in a aging society are the challenges we will have to meet.

All in all the reflection of the debate seems to be positive : each of us can start the change with its own habits. It is difficult to change them, but once the decision is made, it is getting easier to stick with a new way of living and by doing so inaugurate a sustainable development not only in personal life, but also in local and global economy. Due to the movie "Last Call" we are all more aware that there are certain limits to growth and in order to let future generations live and profit from the world's resources, we need to rethink our model of living. The director of the "Last Call" said he hopes his film would contribute to the change of thinking of many people and will provoke them to take care of our planet for the sake of future generations.