

# The Steady State Economy Conference

Working Towards an Alternative to Economic Growth

Policy Proposal

## Workshop 6: Engaging Politicians and the Media

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**Question:** With the increase in environmental problems caused by economic growth, and its failure to increase well-being, why is there so little discussion of alternatives in the media, and how can this be changed?

### Background

#### *The Main Challenges*

- The largely unquestioned assumption that Growth is a) essential for prosperity and b) a proxy for progress is built into academic training in economics, politics and business. Degree courses do not reliably cover sustainable development and environmental issues, let alone models of a no-growth economy.
- Politics for several generations has been a competition in promising Growth and ever-rising living standards. Democracy in the West is now tightly coupled to discourses of Growth and rising prosperity based on it.
- Mass media enterprises and their owners and senior managers are committed to the ideology of Growth.
- Questioning Growth is a fast track to professional marginalisation in politics and media.
- The alternative to the Growth Economy is assumed to be regression to scarcity, deprivation and primitive technology. (Consider Tim Jackson's work on limits to growth and this work's early reception by civil servants.)
- Steady-state / steady-flow economics is marginal in the academy and beyond the pale in the Treasury and City.
- Media coverage of the economy assumes the desirability of Growth.
- Steady-state/flow economics is theoretically and practically undeveloped, for all its plausibility and cogency of diagnosis of unsustainability for the prevailing model. There is no good theory of transition from where we are to a civilised and satisfying steady-flow economy that would provide livelihoods, security and well-being for all.

### Proposal

- Seek agreement among leading business schools and economics departments in universities on compulsory coverage in degrees of sustainability economics and ecological arguments about limits to growth and their critics.

- Much more rigorous modelling and elaboration of a steady-state/flow model of the modern economy and how it could be developed in practice. In particular there is a need to focus on how employment, welfare and economic security can be sustained in this model.
- Much more work (complementing projects in progress in DEFRA and Natural England among others) on ecological limits and how these can be reflected and respected in policy, especially in land use planning.
- Experiments in steady-state/flow enterprise and planning at local government level. There are plenty of local authorities where there is a strong assumption that particular areas are 'full' in respect of demands for more development of greenfield land etc, more roads, airport extensions etc.
- Take opportunities from public debates on economic crisis and spending cuts to highlight inherent instability of the Growth model and the potential in alternative models to provide sustainable well-being.
- Forums for exploration with policymakers, politicians and researchers of the implications of limits to conventional growth that are already recognised in policy or becoming widely discussed (eg green belt; rejection of predict and provide in road policy; rejection of Heathrow expansion; designated protected areas and buildings; overall UK population and migration levels; carbon budgets and targets). Constraints on, if not actual retreat from, the Growth ideology are now implicit in these policies and debates. These forums could include the National School for Government, training courses for new MPs and local councillors, etc.
- Annual local governance festival / debate forums in all local authority areas: a 'House of the Local Commons' or 'House of the Future'. Showcase for debates, exhibitions and forums on local sustainable development in which ideas about steady-state/flow economies can be raised, familiarised and 'normalised'. This would bring together policymakers, media, campaigners, NGOs promoting sustainable living (eg Global Action Plan, WWF), community initiatives and voices for steady-state/flow principles and practice (eg Transition Town projects, sustainability programmes of faith communities, etc).
- Latter two ideas could stand a chance of bringing discussion and debate about steady-state economy into mainstream forums for decision-makers.

## Information Resources

Rob Hopkins, *The Transition Handbook*, Green Books, 2008

Tim Jackson, *Prosperity without Growth*, Earthscan, 2009

Roger Levett and Ian Christie, *Towards the Ecopolis*, Comedia, 1999

Roger Levett et al, *A Better Choice of Choice*, Fabian Society, 2002

Global Action Plan: [www.globalactionplan.org.uk](http://www.globalactionplan.org.uk)

WWF programme Community Learning and Action for Sustainable Living (CLASL):  
[wwf.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/working\\_with\\_local\\_authorities/engaging\\_communities/](http://wwf.org.uk/what_we_do/working_with_local_authorities/engaging_communities/)