

# Ecology of Happiness

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## **Abstract:**

Empirical evidence suggests that achieving sustainability requires reducing economic growth, not just greening it. This conclusion often leads to ecological pessimism based on two beliefs. The first is that there is a human tendency to unlimited expansion; the second is that lack of consensus makes limiting growth politically unfeasible. We challenge both beliefs. The decline of fertility and per-capita income growth provide reasons to expect decreasing human pressure on ecosystems. Moreover, the lack of a clear alternative to growth as a means to increasing well-being creates the widespread perception of a trade-off between sustainability and current well-being. This restricts the consensus to the policy of limits to growth. We argue that ecologism could overcome its political impotence if it adopted a policy agenda pursuing sustainability through the expansion of well-being. Indeed, the crisis of social capital experienced by much of the world's population is at the origin of the current unsustainable growth of the world economy. Declining social capital leads the economies to excessive growth, because people seek economic affluence to compensate for the emotional distress and collective disempowerment caused by poor social capital. We then suggest policies that, by promoting social capital, would expand well-being, and shift the economy to a more sustainable path. Such set of proposals is more politically viable than the current ecologist agenda, and reconcile sustainability and well-being.