

# Polis

## Presentation

Polis is an international network for environmental education whose aim is to promote training, research and information relating to Environmental Education.

It was set up in 1996 and holds NGO non-profit status. The objectives of the organisation's activities are to promote research, training and action in environmental education, thus, it sets up international networks and partnerships. It produces and publishes educational materials. Polis' activities are carried out by volunteers from different professional fields and a network of environmental education professionals who collaborate on specific projects.

Between 1996 and 2001 Polis created and coordinated an international network of educators from over 60 countries across all continents (teachers of different levels within formal education, communications professionals and students of educational science).

This work allowed for the publication of the magazine « Dialogues on Environmental Education » for 7 years. The magazine was distributed in over 60 countries in English and French, presenting articles, opinions, research and experience of environmental education from around the globe, as well as publication of text books on education and the environment, aimed at educators.

## Activities

Polis has taken part in numerous research and training projects on environmental education and training with support from the European Union (e.g. the "SEAM" project, albeit on

education and training for the sustainable management of the marine environment in the Mediterranean and Black Sea). In addition, the organisation has taken part in and organised environmental education projects supported by the Green Ministries for Education and the Environment.

Between 2005 and 2010, Polis took part in the « Charter of Human Responsibilities », an international initiative to debate and raise awareness of the notion of responsibility, instituted and supported by the Charles Léopold Mayer Fondation, (a Swiss-registered foundation) in collaboration with a network of NGOs from 16 countries across all continents.

Polis coordinated activities aimed at young people as well as a wider audience to promote the Charter in southern Europe, organising awareness-raising events centred on our responsibilities towards the environment.

In this context, in 2007-2008 Polis organised a series of mobile art exhibitions in Greece and France on the theme: “environment: common good – common responsibility” linked to events including theatre performances, children’s workshops, and a climate change conference.

Between 2008 and 2010 Polis organised and coordinated a project to create educational tools for children, in collaboration with artists and educators in Greece, Georgia and Algeria, and illustrated by children and young people from different countries. This project led to the publication of two bilingual books, which were presented to the audiences involved in the range of public events (art exhibition, theatre performances).

Between 2009 and 2010, Polis was involved in preparing the international young people’s conference on the environment, “Let’s take care of the planet”, an initiative by the Brazilian Education and Environment ministries, which brought

together in Brasilia over 500 young people from 50 countries. Following this event, in 2011-2012, Polis took part in preparing the European young people's conference "Let's take care of the planet", held in Brussels and supported by the European Union.

Since 2010 Polis has coordinated thematic network for Environmental Education as part of the international "Forum for Ethics and Responsibilities" project, which aims to introduce the concept of Responsibilities into the international debate. Related to this, Polis collaborated with a network of environmental educators across 10 countries in order to initiate debate on the objectives, methods and challenges of environmental education and of sustainable development, ahead of the United Nations Conference on the environment, "Rio+20" in June, 2012. This work was followed by research into environmental education and sustainable development: identification and propagation of exemplary educational experiences across the world.

Communication : Liaison newsletter «Dialogue on Environmental Education », website : <http://www.polis-inee.org/>

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## **Conference on Post-Growth at the European Parliament, September 2018 – Challenges and Prospects**

## **Questioning the dogma of growth, which has become incompatible with the human and ecological wellbeing**

The historic conference held in the European Parliament in Brussels on 'post-growth' revealed the clash around the crucial question: is it possible to decouple CO2 emissions from economic growth rates and to continue indefinitely the march towards a 'Green Growth'?

A historic conference was held on 18 and 19 September at the European Parliament in Brussels, on "post-growth", bringing together scientists, politicians and decision-makers. The event was organized by members of Parliament from five different political parties, together with trade unions and NGOs, and aimed to explore the possibility of a "post-growth economy" in Europe. The conference was preceded by a seminar on 'degrowth' organized by the Université Libre de Bruxelles, which brought together scientists from all over Europe involved in research around degrowth. We have followed these four days of debate representing Polis association.

What has impressed us is the journey of this notion, marginal so far, which has succeeded in penetrating the hard core of institutional and decision-making circles, until becoming an object to be debated at the level of the European Parliament. The opening of the conference by Mrs Vestager, European Commissioner for Competition, is significant of the importance that European institutions are beginning to give to this notion.

At the same time, the debate clearly showed that the concept of degrowth is no longer a concept marking an ideological stance, but an operational concept. In this regard, several researchers have presented research carried out all over Europe and up to the United States (within the MIT), with

concrete proposals on the implementation of degrowth initiatives at the economic level.

To give some examples, the presentations included studies on governance and post-growth policy making, case studies on Transition Movements (in Sweden, the Netherlands and elsewhere), developments in the area of municipal sufficiency policies, initiatives on circular economy and zero waste policies, initiatives in urban and transport planning, research for alternatives to GDP and for Corporate and Social Responsibility instruments and reporting standards, research on ecological footprint leading to proposals for a Sustainable Consumption, as well as proposals for cooperation, collective action in view of the establishment of an open horizontal organisation of the degrowth movement.

On the occasion of the conference an appeal to the European institutions was launched, signed by 200 university scientists, and published in the media of 16 European countries [in English, in 'the Guardian']:  
<<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/sep/16/the-eu-needs-a-stability-and-wellbeing-pact-not-more-growth>>]: “For the past seven decades, GDP growth has stood as the primary economic objective of European nations. But as our economies have grown, so has our negative impact on the environment. We are now exceeding the [safe operating space](#) for humanity on this planet, and there is no sign that economic activity is being [decoupled](#) from resource use or pollution at anything like the scale required. Today, solving social problems within European nations does not require more growth. It requires a fairer distribution of the income and wealth that we already have.”

We felt during and after the conference that two languages were being spoken and that two opposing views were competing. The representatives of the European Commission were talking about Green Growth and were convinced that a decoupling of CO2 emissions and economic growth rates is possible. On the other

hand, the Degrowth movement (basically, represented by people and institutions gathered around the call of the Université Libre de Bruxelles) was arguing for the opposite. It quickly became clear that concrete measures and details of a post-growth society cannot be clarified if the fundamental question of decoupling is not resolved.

To find out more, consult the work of the group 'Research and Degrowth', an academic association dedicated to research, training, and awareness on degrowth: <<https://degrowth.org/>>

Yolanda Ziaka