

Intergenerational Justice Initiative

Laying the Foundations for Long-Term Wellbeing

As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it.
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry)

The Intergenerational Justice Initiative (IJI) advocates the use of current structural reforms for comprehensive, long-term oriented solutions. Normatively, it defines Intergenerational Justice as a global state of equilibrium in which present and future generations share comparable standards of quality of life and individual development opportunities, based upon intact ecosystems that provide the resources for human wellbeing.

Article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty defines the “wellbeing of its people” as one of the EU’s three aims. Surely, this has to also include future Europeans. In this sense, the IJI poses following questions: *Which changes are necessary so that future generations can enjoy the same rights of citizenship that we benefited from, such as social support structures, healthcare, education, a culture of peace, and an intact environment? How can we ensure that current lawmaking becomes future just, guaranteeing the wellbeing of all people, including the ones born after us?*

Since the start of the sustainability agenda, it has become increasingly evident that most of the major environmental, social, and economic trends heavily impact the preconditions for wellbeing in the future. The majority of European citizens have understood this: **71% agreed that reforms which benefit future generations should be pursued even if it means sacrifices for the present generation** (Eurobarometer, Sept 2010). Some countries have understood this and created systemic future research Commissions (Finland, Netherlands) or even a **Commissioner or Ombudsperson for Future Generations** (Hungary, Israel).

The EU has a chance to join these pioneers and develop its global leadership position in sustainability concerns, especially in the run up to the Rio+20 Earth Summit in 2012.

The Intergenerational Justice Initiative has come into existence because individuals felt that something very important is missing from the current debates. We seek to promote and reinforce responsibility towards future generations through awareness raising, policy discussions and engagement with institutional reform proposals. Ideas, support and proposals for engagement are always welcome. For further information please contact:

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Background: Context, Challenges and Vision for Action

All over the world climate change, the destruction of the environment, the financial crisis and the widening gap between rich and poor are spreading insecurity and fear. We are the first generations whose decisions will determine for better or for worse the future of human life on this planet. Our thinking and policy-making is currently inadequate for a responsible management of these challenges, and the status quo that has caused many of these developments needs rethinking. Our current political and economic structures are marked by:

- a structural short-termism due to the very nature of our political cycles (4-5 years) and an increasing disillusionment with the promises of influence through voting
- lack of policy integration and coherence through (competing) single-issue governance bodies with often non-aligned targets
- market structures that often benefit already privileged players, ignore needs without purchasing power, and discriminates against long term returns
- a culture of (conspicuous) consumption in which continuously maximizing material wealth underpins our definition of “progress” and our judgments of policy results

Intergenerational Justice on the other hand focuses on the fundamental needs and rights of all humans living on this planet. Naturally, this approach has to include justice between generations. Young and future Europeans will live with the consequences of our decisions and value orientations today, but currently have no voice to engage.

In order to translate these ethical ideas into concrete policy-making, we need to engage new knowledge about ecosystems and human relationships, in particular with regard to well-being and “progress”. At the moment we are consume more and more resources and produce more and more goods without clear indication how much they increase well-being in comparatively rich societies. More concretely, we have to rework some fundamental economic and legal concepts, so that policies drive intergenerational fairness and long-term wellbeing.

The shared concern of the Initiative is to promote “Intergenerational Justice” as a guiding principle for policy making. It highlights how many single interests and issues converge in the long-term: without natural resources there will be no wealth production, without education for innovation there will be no technological progress, without tackling unemployment there will be no sound public budgets, without a decent distribution of wealth there will be inequity in participation and social tension, without a flourishing real economy there will be more and more speculative financial bubbles.

The overall picture behind the Intergenerational Justice vision is one of *re-balancing*: aligning our economic and political structures with the reality of our planet and human relationships. Policy-making therefore needs to be about fairness and solidarity and about searching for the common ground rather than juxtaposing differences. It also means replacing short-term gains with long-term security and perceiving the special circumstances of all groups and generations of our societies as interlinked.

In short, we advocate for an update of our policy-making to reflect recent knowledge about developments of ecosystems and wellbeing and to systematically integrate long-term justice considerations. Do our decisions take into account the needs and contributions of all generations? Do they protect the environment that we depend on? Do they treat people as citizens within families and communities rather than merely as individual consumers? Do our decisions strengthen the bonds between generations, or break them?

There is enough wealth on this planet to provide wellbeing for everyone, also in the long-term – if we set the rules of cooperation adequately. Safeguarding future living conditions will directly benefit the generations of today: many people already feel the closing in on opportunities and only justice today will lay the foundation for lives in dignity tomorrow. Without such a re-think we risk to continue a frantic rush of fighting symptoms of society's mismanagement today with tomorrow's credit from our children and grandchildren.

Objectives and Activities

The objective of the Intergenerational Justice Initiative is to raise awareness for the issue, to discuss new solutions addressing it, and to share experiences and best practices from different countries. This endeavour cuts across disciplines, including educative measures on future justice and the principle of intergenerational equity in public discourse, education, scientific methodologies, impact assessments and political debates, as well as discussing possible institutional changes to foster long-term orientation. We foresee the following activities:

- **Public awareness:** An online platform to discuss policy-making from the perspective of implementing Intergenerational Justice.
- **Institutional reform discussion:** Dialogue with local, national and EU institutions on the establishment of authorities and other institutional bodies with the mandate to protect the rights of future generations and to design adequate intergenerational analyses.
- **Project/Programme action:** Define concrete research projects to increase intergenerational justice and organise events to discuss their possible paths of implementation.

If you are interested in contributing to or participating in these activities, or would like to propose new ideas, please contact Maja Göpel, Thomas Fischer, or Conny Reuter.