



*DOCTORAL INPhINIT FELLOWSHIPS PROGRAMME – INCOMING FRAME  
INFORMATION CALL 2020*

**PhD POSITION OFFER FORM**

**Position**

1. Project Title/ Job Position title: Why has sustainable development failed to ensure a good life for all within planetary boundaries?
2. Area of Knowledge:
  - LIFE SCIENCES
3. Group of disciplines: **Animal, Plant, Environmental Biology, Physiology, Ecology and Conservation**

LIFE SCIENCES

Medicine, Public Health, Sport Sciences, Nutrition, Clinical Psychology, Health Management

**Animal, Plant, Environmental Biology, Physiology, Ecology and Conservation**

Human Biology, Microbiology, Molecular Biology, Genetics, Cellular Biology, Genomics and Proteomics, Biochemistry

Agriculture, Veterinary Science, Animal Production, Forestry

Biotechnology, Bioinformatics, Pharmacy, Food Technology

PHYSICAL SCIENCES, MATHEMATICS AND ENGINEERING

Theoretical and Applied Mathematics, Computer Sciences

Physics

Geology, Earth Sciences, Environmental and Atmosphere Sciences, Mines, Geological Engineering, Oceanography, Hydrology



Civil and Construction Engineering, Energy, Nuclear Energy and Renewable Energy Engineering
Chemistry and Chemical Engineering
Telecommunications, Electronics, Robotics, Biomedical Engineering, Automation Engineering, ICT
Industrial Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Metallurgy, Materials, Nanotechnology, Aeronautical, Naval and Aerospace Engineering

4. Research project/ Research Group description (max. 2.000 characters)

A recent article in Nature Sustainability found that “No country currently meets the basic needs of its citizens at a globally sustainable level of resource use. If all people are to lead a good life within planetary boundaries, then radical changes to physical and social provisioning systems are required” (O’Neill et al, 2018). This means that sustainable development, after three decades of implementation, has failed to deliver what it promised. Why did this happen? This is what this project aims to investigate.

It starts with the hypothesis that economic growth is environmentally unsustainable. Only relative dematerialization has happened, but not absolute one. Therefore, an increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) leads to increase in material and energy use, and therefore to environmental unsustainability.

In 1987 the UN World Commission on Development and the Environment presented the report “Our common future” (better known as the Brundtland report), coining the concept sustainable development, then launched at the Rio summit on Environment and Development in 1992 -Principle 12 of the Declaration. Subsequent global events relating to sustainable development involved an overall reframing of both the diagnosis and prognosis in relation to the ecological crisis. Economic growth was freed of the stigma and reframed as a necessary step towards the solution of environmental problems. This watering down of the initial debates of 1970s influenced by the *Limits to Growth* report constitutes the core of the ‘green economy’, a kind of Green Keynesianism with new millennium proposals such as a Green New Deal, and the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The recently proposed Sustainable Development Goals are characterized by a series of weaknesses. This include: 1) Absence of an analysis of the historical and structural roots of unsustainability, poverty, and inequities and 2) Inability to recognize the biophysical limits to economic growth (SDG 8).

5. Job position description (max. 2.000 characters)



This project attempts to lay out a critique of sustainable development and investigate alternatives to United Nations' 2030 Agenda. The proposed PhD thesis will contribute to the search for the sustainability of life by addressing two fundamental questions: 1) What is a life worth living? and 2) How can conditions that allow it to happen be met? Sustainable development is still a powerful narrative. Yet its discursive and social centrality has been displaced, so that the range of social experiences that are considered valid and credible alternatives to what exist is enlarged.

This PhD project will contribute with 1) a critique of sustainable development, based on an assessment of its failure to address the ecological crisis; and 2) an exploration of alternatives to sustainable development.

A range of different and complementary notions or worldviews have emerged in various regions of the world (what has been called the Pluriverse), that seek to envision and achieve more fundamental transformations than that proposed by sustainable development approaches. Transformative alternatives to sustainable development would:

- 1) Attempt to transform the structural roots of a problem, along political, economic, social, cultural, and ecological axes;
- 2) Question the core assumptions of the development discourse (e.g., growth, material progress, instrumental rationality, the centrality of markets and economy, universality, modernity and its binaries);
- 3) Encompass a radically different set of ethics and values to those underpinning the current system.

This project will investigate the alternatives to sustainable development that intend to re-politicise the debate on the socio-ecological transformation, exploring the critique with the current world representations (i.e. sustainable development) and the searching for alternative ones

## **Group Leader**

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4. Research project/ Research Group website (Url): <http://envjustice.org/>
5. Website description: EnvJustice research project, funded by the European Research Council.

## **Additional website (optional, max. 5 websites)**

1. Url:
2. Website description: