# Societal Challenges Along the Rural-urban Continuum

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## Abstract

Up to now, global, European and German sustainability policy has radically failed. With regard to climate policy, worldwide emissions have increased since 1990 by 40 %. Even in the industrialised countries they are relatively stable only because of the collapse of Eastern European industry, the financial crisis and the shift in production capacities into transition economies. Yet, these emissions still remain on a high level: at present, the average American emits 20 tons, a German about 10 tons (if calculation tricks are removed), and an average Chinese person emits 5 metric tons of carbon dioxide per year. Climate scientists demand a global reduction by about minus 80 % up to the year 2050, and possibly 95 % in the western countries. So far, scenario-based climate projections have been too optimistic. Climate change occurs faster than anticipated. Thus, radical measures are needed to avoid resource-related wars and millions of dead – plus gigantic economic losses that would exceed the costs of an effective climate policy by a factor of 5 to 10. Radical measures are often economically profitable – even on a short time-scale – as they trigger technological innovations, *e.g.*, with energy efficiency and renewable energies. And yes, policy approaches can be named in how the European Union could effectively avert sustainability-related challenges such as climate change. At the same time, the EU could take other countries along on this necessary journey and attempt – for the first time – a true position of leadership in the international sustainability challenge along the rural-urban continuum. But instruments and principles of justice might be slightly different from what is usually debated in the mainstream discussions.

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