



THE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT INITIATIVE: DRIVING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH ACADEMIC INNOVATION

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ABSTRACT

Humanity inhabits a single planet and yet our use of ecological resources far outstrips the planet's ability to regenerate them. This project aims to improve our understanding of human use and depletion of ecological systems and also to drive policy-making towards stronger forms of sustainability, particularly at the level of national governments but across every sector of society. To be more specific, how can we: Serve an expanding population harbouring legitimate material aspirations (SDGs), while; Phasing out fossil fuels within decades (Paris), and protecting the integrity of the planet's ecosystems (Aichi targets)? For these goals to be met within a realistic timeframe, we need to rethink the ways in which we conduct and share research; we need to be much more conscious of and engaged with the end-users of that scholarly effort. The Ecological Footprint Initiative (EFI) is at the junction of the social and physical sciences, where fields like ecological economics have emerged to upset conventional disciplinary norms that have proven themselves inadequate for the transformative change that is required if we are to head off catastrophic effects of climate change, deforestation and species loss. We also need to build on emerging forms of pedagogy that allow students at the graduate level as well as postdoctoral scholars to learn the skills of research that can drive change. These goals need universities and scholars to engage in new and purposeful relationships: with NGOs and progressive state agencies, building new forms of collective capacity and change. This paper will set out the goals of the EFI and explore opportunities for international collaboration.

Keywords: Environmental indicators; sustainability; academic innovation