
Social and Environmental Impacts of Overconsumption

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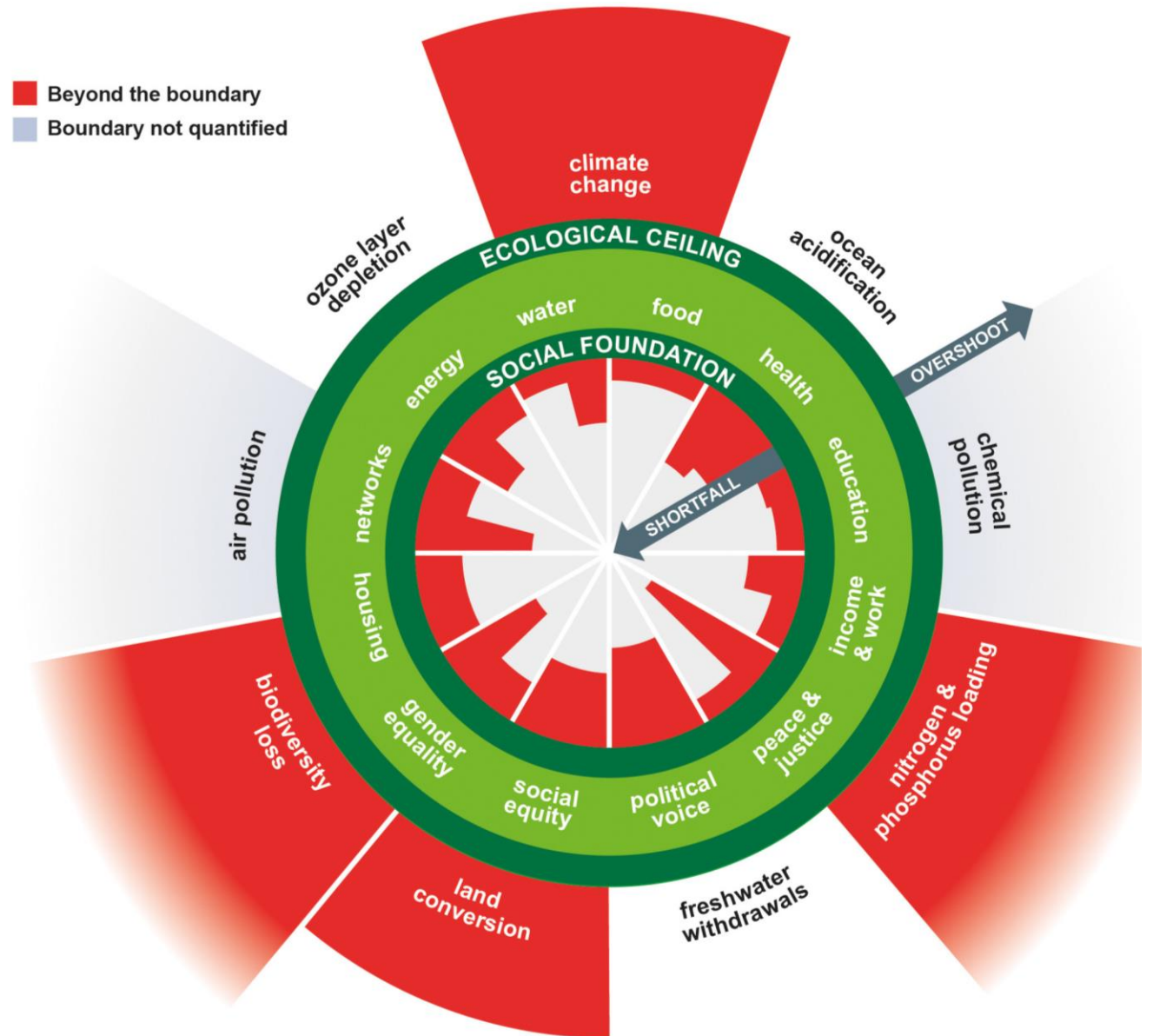


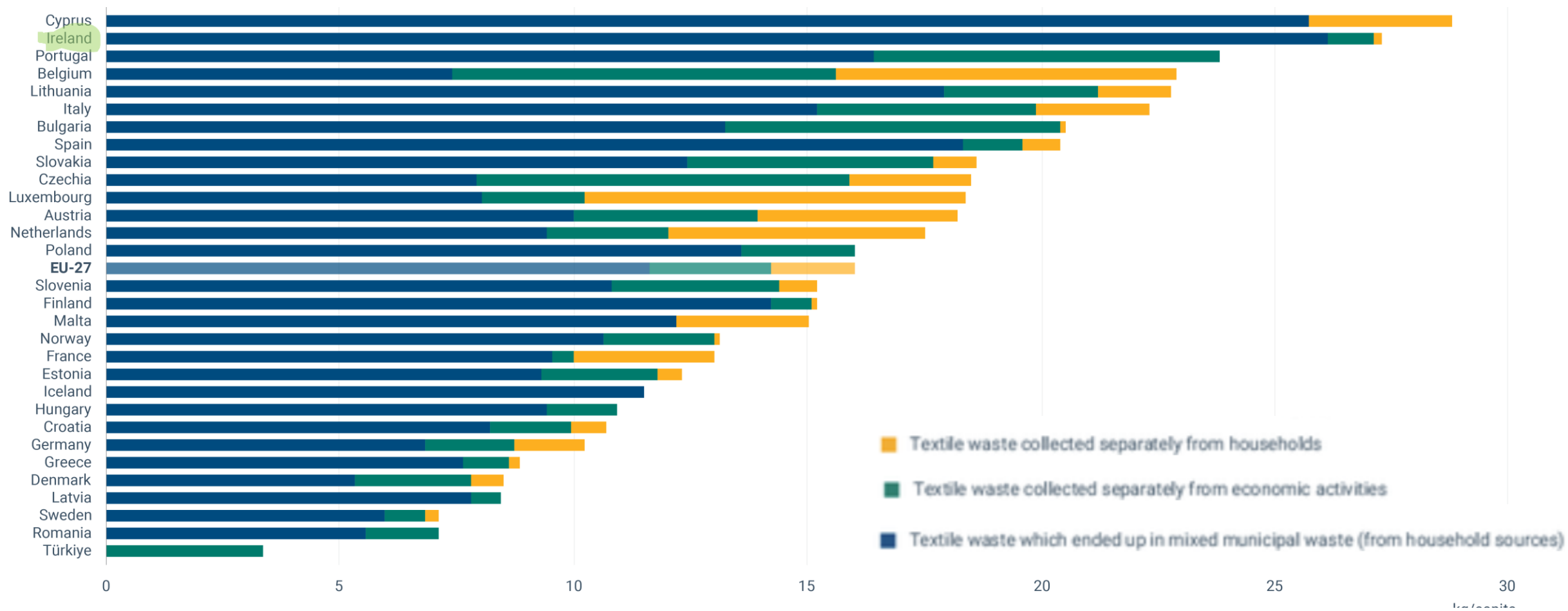
Overconsumption

1. What is it?
2. What are the social and environmental impacts?
3. Why do we do it?
4. How can we do things differently?

What is Overconsumption?

- Doughnut: Safe and just space for humanity situated between the upper limit of permissible use and the lower limit of necessary use of environmental resources (Raworth 2018)
- Overshoot Day
 - Globally, July 24th 2025
 - Ireland, April 29th 2025





Generation of textile waste in 2020 (in kg per capita)

(Source: European Environment Agency)

Ecological Effects

- Depleting finite natural resources
- Increasing greenhouse gas emissions and climate change
- Generating vast amounts of waste and pollution
- Destroying habitats, leading to biodiversity loss and species extinction, and creating water scarcity and soil contamination
- Global waste projected to rise by 70 per cent by 2050 (World Bank 2018)



Social Consequences: The Netherlands Fallacy





Social Consequences

- High from spending often replaced by feelings of guilt and anxiety (Nefat et al., 2018), particularly among those with depression, loneliness and other low mood (Banschick, 2014).
- Addressing overconsumption can help to enhance identity and happiness, and a sense of autonomy (Helm et al, 2019, Rodriguez, 2018; Uggla, 2019)
- Minimalism is linked to emotional well-being while alleviating depression (Kang et al, 2021)



“We are persuaded to spend money we don’t have on things we don’t need to create impressions that won’t last on people we don’t care about.” (Jackson & Gough 2017)

Why?



Drivers of Overconsumption

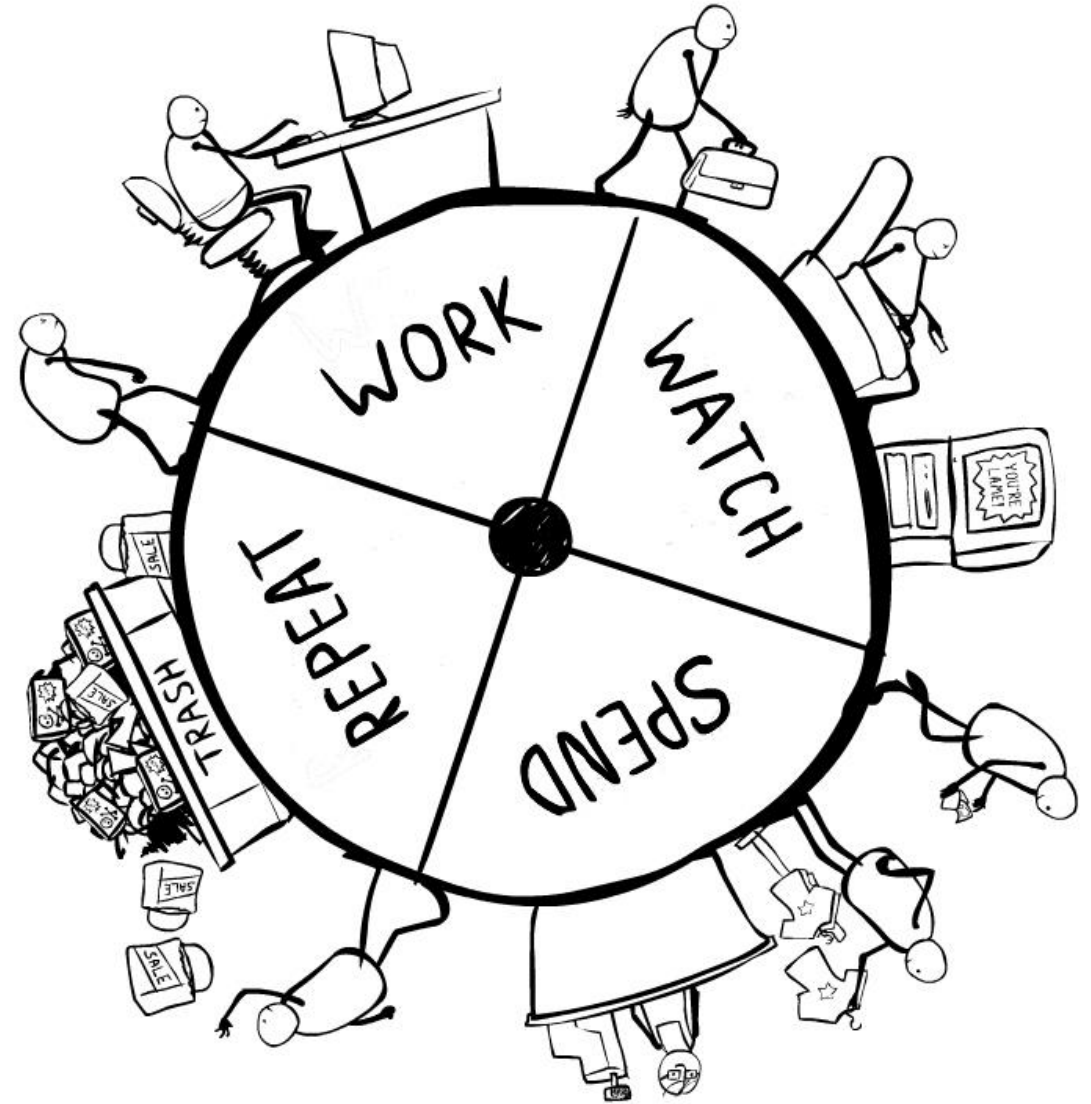
- Attempts to signal our comparative degree of social power inherent in human societies.
- Intensified in the modern context:
 - Economic Factors, e.g. Access to credit, global and national income inequality, discount pricing
 - Social Factors, e.g. Time poverty, absence of social connections, social media Influence and fashion cycles
 - Global advertising and marketing spend 400 bn in 2010 to 1trillion by 2024 (Navarro, 2025)
 - Power of Industry e.g. lobbying
 - Weak Regulatory Intervention e.g. Planned obsolescence

Drivers of Overconsumption

Governments plan for and stimulate economic growth

Linear growth-oriented economy predicated on:

- Treadmill of Production: Growing consumption needed to sustain economic growth
- Treadmill of Consumption: Desire creation as marketers attempt to sell products in an increasingly saturated market



Can we just get more efficient?



If global GDP grows by 3% per year during 2015-2030, this requires decoupling of GDP from global resource use at 6.88% per year.



Require efficiency improvements at a rate three to six times faster than has ever been achieved in history



No evidence that absolute decoupling of GDP from material footprint is feasible on a global scale in the context of continued economic growth

Source: Hickel 2021

Wellbeing Economy

- Political Leadership: stronger industry regulations, wealth taxes
- Policy Intervention: Extended Producer Responsibility
- Industry partnerships
- Cultural Change: social tipping Points (25-30%)
- Community Initiatives: sharing initiatives, BFC
- Technology and Innovation
- Well-being Economy: Time, community and **circularity**



Image Source: Wellbeing Economy Alliance