



Group Assembly Process (GAP) - Stirring Paper

Pop the Carbon Bubble! Tactics for degrowing the economy and mitigating the climate crisis

by Kevin Buckland

In the global movement for climate justice, the question isn't what needs to be done; the question is when do we start. One analysis traces the global climate crisis back to its root: the fossil fuel industry and a financial system that rewards short term pursuit of profit above all else. To aptly tackle this crisis, we need to focus on the *source* of the problem - rather than its symptoms. In this context, a global campaign to divest from the fossil fuel industry is emerging - providing a tangible and scaleable first step towards degrowing the global economy that is dangerously inflating an economic bubble with this rogue industry's hot air.

As we learn from permaculture - *the problem is the solution*. We are faced with a desire to restructure our global economy at the same time that we have a dire *need* to. The global divestment campaign can be seen as the first step in a groundswell that can start to dismantle the structural foundations not only of the climate crisis, but also of ideological neoliberalism by transitioning vast quantities of money away from centralized profit-driven corporations and towards locally and democratically controlled decentralized energy production.

It is in this context we must remember that our current economy is, in essence, a collective fantasy: a barometer of our hopes and fears of the future - currently artificially inflated by the irrational "hope" of ever growing fossil-fuel access and consumption. It is in this context that the earth's fossil fuel reserves loom like a timebomb. [Forbes magazine](#), hardly a radical voice, recently outlined 20 trillion dollars of the fossil fuel industry's value as part of this "Carbon Bubble". Thus, with *any* serious global agreement on climate the entire Carbon Bubble would become stranded assets, and could provoke wide-ranging uncertainty in the future of these investments, sending ripples throughout the global economy with unknown consequences: potentially even provoking a financial crash of unprecedented scale. In the same Forbes article, Joshua Humpreys of the Tellus Institute warns, "Long-dated bonds of fossil fuel companies, some with maturities extending decades into the future, could readily become toxic financial assets as the credit quality of their issuers deteriorate in reaction to belated market responses to the harsh reality of stranded asset risk and systemic climate risk."

So what do you do when you *know* there is a timebomb lurking just ahead of you? If you can't diffuse it, you start take away anything combustible that surrounds it. This is the

logic behind the global fossil fuel divestment campaign, that is already moving millions of euros away from this dangerous industry, and its starting an inertia that might well end with a (relatively) controlled demolition of the Carbon Bubble.

Across Europe, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, organizers are pressuring public institutions such as universities, municipalities and cities to divest public funds from any fossil fuel projects or bank with known ties to the fossil fuel industry.

According to [a recent study](#) published by the University of Oxford based Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment, "The fossil free divestment campaign is growing faster than any previous divestment campaign and stands to cause significant damage to coal, oil and gas companies."

With over 500 separate campaigns worldwide, actively challenging the economic support of fossil fuel extraction and combustion, and organising across a broad base of communities, such health professionals and theologians, to students and art activists, the campaign is creating new momentum in climate organising and helping create the space for economic and social transition away from fossil fuels.

The [New York Times](#) said the campaign could "force climate change back on to the nation's political agenda." "We are seeing for the first time a global economic direct-action movement focused on creating market momentum away from both economic and ecological disaster.

The divestment campaign is one of the few situations in which simple education, communication and debate are economic direct actions: the more people know about, talk about, and worry about, the Carbon Bubble - the more deflated it becomes as savvy investors and morally accountable institutions start to shift their investments away from this liability. In this regard, one of our most potent weapons are creative interventions that repeatedly bring the economic uncertainty of the fossil fuel industry into the forefront of our collective consciousness. This working group will look at innovative and creative interventions into dominant economic narratives.

Thus, this working group seeks to not only discuss the impending reality of the carbon bubble but also to develop plans for collaboration on how to collectively and creatively engage in the Global Divestment Campaign. We seek tangible outcomes that will create a space for ongoing collaboration into the future, spreading ideas of degrowing our shared economy by starting with its most noxious elements. Lets do this, together. Now!