Dear colleagues,

according to general economic knowledge, the economic growth, which has kept up for more than two centuries now, is a factor touching on self-supporting processes, which are based on two main tenets:

- The first one is technological progress - a technological progress that will allow the unlimited growth of human productivity and of course also solve all past and actual repercussions of the environmental pressure produced by our productive system.

- The second one is economic growth - an economic growth that is inextricably linked to the concept of the material well-being of our social, civil and cultural development of societies

As we know, this last equation linking economic growth and public happiness has today being repealed - not by moralists or anti-capitalist activists – but by the most distinguished liberal economists and Nobel laureates.

But we should also take a much closer look at the concept of technology as the driving force of growth and progress.

The advocates of “natural capitalism” claim that if technological progress could provide solutions for the mitigation of the environmental pressure produced by our mass production and consumption system as well as provide enough energy by exploiting all forms of renewable resources, then we will have achieved heaven on earth.

We would finally live in a world in tune with all imaginable consumerist lifestyles and a world in which we no longer need to question neither our value systems, nor our economic system, our model of wellbeing and the quantity of material “things” that we “need to need” for our pursuit of happiness.

Let us imagine for just a second that this vision can come true after we will have fixed our actual global economic crisis, before climate change becomes irreversible, before we run out of drinkable water and fossil resources, before we will get hit by the backlash of more than 50% of the world population living on less than 1 or 2 US $ a day, before we will have irrevocably lost our natural capital.

Let us envision a world of tomorrow in which an endless availability of energy, an unlimited access to resources, and the development of all adaptation and mitigation and “cradle-to-cradle” technologies has become true.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think that even if this were to happen, we would still end up “hitting the wall” simply because the infinite growth of material “things” would keep diverting us from the essence of our human endeavour, which is not only about the invention and re-invention of the prosaic aspect of our human needs, but also about human creativity, its poēsis, its poetry, its capability to create new meanings, to construct new meanings of life.

The fact is that the dominance of the materialistic and prosaic aspect of the “need to need” in our consumption economies is impinging our space and time.
Our space and our time are also limited and non-renewable resources.

The issue of the construction of a new balanced relationship between individuals, societies and the planet certainly implies new technological and economic challenges. But we cannot forget the ethical and aesthetical concern of this issue, meaning the most ancient existential concern of mankind.

Technological innovations can radically mitigate the repercussion of the production of that unreasonable amount of stuff that humans all over the globe think they would need to achieve our western notion of well-being.

But all that, though necessary, is not sufficient. Because not only the ecology of our planet but also the ecology of our minds need to be restored to a healthy state.

Art and culture play a central role for such a deep transformation. Because art and culture can in fact constantly create new realities, by integrating some and excluding others.

And by doing so, the „invisible hand“ of culture and art can lead human cooperation and interaction towards sustainable lifestyles and a new understanding of prosperity.

That means a culture and all form of artistic expressions that is able to convert the paradigm of the quantity of material goods ‚we need to need‘ into the paradigm of their quality and their sense making.

Let me conclude with a poetry of one of the most important Italian poet, Alda Merini, who just died at the beginning of this month. The title is I do not need money.

I do not need money
I do need sentiments
Sentiments made of words
Words chosen by wisdom

I do need those flowers that we call thoughts
Those roses made of presences

I do need dreams that live inside the trees
Songs that make even statues dance
Stars that whisper into lovers’ ears

I do need poetry
That kind of spell that burns away the heaviness of words

I do need those words
That can awake emotions
And give us the gift of new colours

Alda Merini, Milan, the 30th of June, 2007

Thank-you.