The COVID-19 pandemic has been confronting for us all. But at the same time, we can also see that perhaps there is also a golden rim to it. This is a unique moment of opportunity for ‘transition to eco-prosperity’.

In 2015, the United Nations put forward 17 sustainable development goals to be achieved by 2030. Yet, how we could achieve them is not clear and thus controversial. What the pandemic has taught us, is that things can be done differently. In a very short time, governments have taken decisions because healthcare and saving lives became the priority. Economic considerations have receded into the background. Yet, at the same time, measures have been introduced to limit financial damage in the short term.

Isn’t it noteworthy that many successful countries are led by women? In Europe, Iceland (Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir), Denmark (Mette Frederiksen), Norway (Erna Solberg) and Germany (Angela Merkel) performed well such as New Zealand (Jacinda Ardern), Taiwan (Tsai Ing-wen), or regions as Tokyo in Japan (Governor Koike Yuriko), or Kerala in India (K.K. Shailaja). We do not claim to always agree entirely with their respective overall policies. However, they certainly have been better at building trust, leadership style, care and empathy. They have used a wider range of criteria, based on well-founded data, and not predominantly economic ones.

Perhaps this approach of female leaders is inspirational? The opportunity to adjust the course of our society towards a more sustainable and thereby better balance is much more a reality now. Many people have found out that commuting for hours to work is not always necessary, and that the day should not always be split into separate blocks of work and family life. Despite sometimes strained relationships, family relations have reached a special new appreciation. We also need to rethink how we travel, especially by air. Governmental support in the sector of air transport became more climate change oriented. Also the increase of welfare support for people who are experiencing financial hardship in these troubled times has become obvious.

In the recent past, it has often been argued that there was a contradiction, or trade-off between achieving a more sustainable society and the “personal” gross national product. It might seem that we have to give-up prosperity in order to live more sustainably. However, what we suggest is that this is not an either/or argument, but rather, that it reflects that prosperity and sustainability can be combined in the guise of eco-prosperity. If governments, the business community, researchers together with the wider civil society come together and collaborate, we can achieve it.
Some lines of thought:

1. **Deal carefully with natural means of production.** Companies must go further in the careful use of raw materials, air, water and all other means of production. In fact, we must appreciate that they belong to society and remain available to our society after their use, in the same or even improved condition. The circular economy also creates greater opportunities for new activities in shorter production chains.

2. **Responsible globalization.** In the last 30 years we have all benefited from globalization. But these benefits have been unequally distributed. Some of us benefited more, whereas others may have suffered mostly drawbacks. Certainly the global ecosystem has been severely damaged by it. We do not advocate for reversing globalization, but rather introduction of global rules for better distribution of benefits, reduction of ecological damage and respect for cultural diversity.

3. **Greater attention to care, welfare and health.** Eco-prosperity assumes decent livelihoods and a decent basic income with satisfactory minimal basic care for everyone, without walls between well-being and health care in policymaking. Affordable and secure access to information should be a basic right. Recognition of diversity is essential, such as assessed respect for human rights.

4. **Sustainable investments that promote eco-prosperity.** Large investment funds such as Blackrock in the United States or Temasek in Singapore have already adapted themselves in a more eco-prosperous way. Accordingly, all our financial institutions should go the same way and give priority to sustainable investment.

5. **Meaningful work.** In this crisis, a new term arose: ‘essential jobs’. We have rediscovered how valuable care providers, GP doctors, nurses, garbage collectors and local shops are for society and the economy. More in general we need to take better care of our employees by involving them in decisions about their work (shared leadership), give them better salaries and better training. We have also missed the artists and their creative inspiration to challenge our thinking.

6. **Sustainable mobility.** We learned to work from home, cycling and walking and to think more carefully whether travel is essential. Let us keep that changed mindset and thus avoid the potential ecological damage from haphazard displacements.
7. **Sustainable use of space.** The purely economic logic in our housing model is ecologically and socially unsustainable. In densely populated city areas without much public space and insufficient comfort, the lockdown has had a major negative impact on the well-being of many residents, especially young people and children. The right to have affordable housing can be realized in a much more people- and society-oriented way with more qualitative space and better water and air management.

Will the transition occur without incident? No. But now we have to invest in an awareness that an ecological approach and welfare for everybody can go ‘hand in hand’. This is what crises are good for: sharpening our awareness for new possibilities and for the ability to make firm adjustments. Don’t let this opportunity pass. Then this crisis will not go to waste...