



## Second Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen Awards

*8<sup>th</sup> February 2014*

**Winner: Prof. Inge Ropke**

**(Unconventional Thinking Category)**

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### Award Acceptance Speech

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Dear Dr. Pachauri, Dear Participants,

I am greatly honoured to receive this award. There are many reasons, but I will emphasise three, before adding a brief comment on Georgescu-Roegen's relevance today.

Firstly, I am honoured to receive an award in the name of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen. Georgescu-Roegen is a great inspiration, a role-model and beacon for all ecological economists today. When he provided the foundation of modern ecological economics, he gave a really new formulation of economics, based on a biophysical understanding of the economy. For this effort he would have deserved the Nobel Prize in economics. But the attempts to ensure this came too late – and the time was not ripe in the early 1990s. Therefore, it is great that TERI has instituted an award in his name.

This brings me to the second reason to be honoured: it is a great honour to receive an award from TERI, which has such a fine reputation. This helps me more than you may be aware of. One and a half years ago I was appointed the first professor of ecological economics in Denmark. Of course, we have professors of environmental economics, but this is the first position in ecological economics. The field is still marginal. The award provides considerable legitimacy to the field and my work, and my university has been proud to announce it.

Thirdly, it is a great personal pleasure for me to gain recognition from an award jury including my personal and academic heroes. TERI has succeeded in gathering an impressive group of

people – who should have had the award themselves. It is a great advantage to me that you put all these people on the committee.

Finally, a remark on Georgescu-Roegen's relevance today. The award rewards unconventional thinking. Georgescu-Roegen was known for promoting ideas that could be very inconvenient and at odds with mainstream economics. For instance, he was involved in considerable controversy on economic growth, emphasising the biophysical limits.

More than ever, there is a need to be inconvenient and to emphasise that these limits call for sharing. Poor people need growth and increased consumption, but rich people do not.

Sometimes it is argued that technological change ensures decoupling so the rich can carry on. But this is highly misleading, as for instance consumption-based emission accounts demonstrate. Technology should not be used to legitimize increased consumption for the rich, but to solve problems for the poor.

The great challenge is that present social and economic systems generate large inequalities. Furthermore, due to global interconnections, improved living standards for the poor seem to depend on increased consumption also in the rich countries. This is absurd. Systems have to be changed.

These system changes depend on inconvenient ideas. This is why Georgescu-Roegen is so relevant today.

Thank you for instituting the award and for giving it to me.

Thank you.

