



emissions: the new GDP?

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One of the main points of the degrowth movement is that GDP is not an adequate indicator of wealth and progress of society. Why? Because society is more complex and GDP alone is not able to capture many crucial aspects (i.e. environmental issues).

Why was GDP adopted in the first place?

- 1 When GDP was introduced in the 1930's there was high economic uncertainty (crises, inflation) and an overall indicator of economic activity was needed,
- 2 GDP can represent a synthesis for a large number of different products, aggregated according to their price,
- 3 People can easily understand it, it is a good communication tool.

What is the problem with GDP now?

GDP has turned from a means (an indicator) to an end itself (indefinite growth), which has been proven to be both impossible (due to material constraints) and unacceptable (due to inequality and environmental unsustainability).

We have finally discovered that **THERE IS MORE IN LIFE THAN MONEY.**

So GDP has grown old and will most likely soon retire.



But history repeats itself... a new version of GDP is taking over: CO2 emissions

Why? Because the **CO2 emission indicator has got the same features as GDP:**

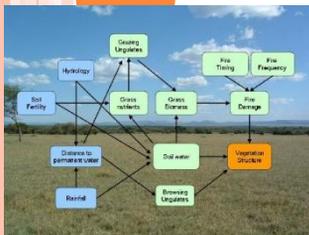
- 1 There is a strong uncertainty about climate: we need a single indicator to measure the impact of human activities,
- 2 CO2 emissions can represent a synthesis of a large number of gas emissions, which are aggregated according to their green house potential,
- 3 People can easily understand it, it is a good communication tool.

What are the problems with CO2 emissions?

Most people are enthusiastic now, because thanks to the use of a single indicator (CO2) and a single goal (reducing emissions) everyone is more involved in environmental issues than before.

War on emissions has been declared. Indefinite growth is not our end anymore. Now we follow Zero emissions. Sooner or later we will realise that **Zero emissions is a utopia**, and will start thinking about how to decolonise our imagination from it.

Zero emissions will prove to have the same limitations as indefinite GDP growth, impossible (animal metabolism is based on burning carbon composites) and unacceptable (certain societies will always produce more CO2 emissions than others). CO2 emissions cannot take into account many local issues (smog, earth and water pollution), and the sustainable use of resources (fisheries, biodiversity, etc.). At some point, we will realise that using just CO2 emissions as a measure of impact is too simplistic and ultimately misleading.



What should we do?

The degrowth movement should use its wisdom about the rise and fall of indefinite GDP growth to **avoid blindly falling in the zero CO2 emission paradigm.**

After an initial enthusiasm about an increased concern with the environment, the degrowth movement should become critical on the use of CO2 emissions as the only environmental indicator, reminding people that, just like GDP, **THERE IS MORE IN THE ENVIRONMENT THAN CO2.**



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