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## Beyond "Beyond GDP" indicators



In 2007, various organisations launched the "Beyond GDP" campaign, which aimed to assess complex issues such as social welfare, sustainability and economic development using more indicators, and which resulted in an overwhelming production of sustainability indicators. The authors of this research suggest the need to adopt a reflective attitude towards the policy decisions determining the choice of discipline, models and indicators used in order to improve the quality of scientific information used in decision making processes.

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The paper presents a critical analysis of the Beyond GDP initiative launched by the Club of Rome, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the OECD and the WWF in 2007. The goal of this initiative was to go beyond the use of GDP in the assessment of complex issues such as social welfare, sustainability and economic development. We apply the analytical tools of complexity theory, evolutionary biology and theoretical ecology to the assessment of the usefulness and limitations of indicators such as GDP in terms of dimension, scale of analysis and related narrative.

The paper analyses the results of the Beyond GDP conference, which consist of an overwhelming production of sustainability indicators. We argue that the indicators created measure more of the same and do not respond to the goal of providing new information. The new flow of information that has ensued does not introduce new narratives or new perspectives

that may help improve social, economic and development policies – it merely adds more data to existing perspectives and lead to the formulation of the same policies.

We suggest that reflexivity is needed in order to improve the quality of the scientific information used for governance, in relation to the normative decisions that determine the choice of discipline, models and indicators to be used. In other words, scientific information reflects the choice of scientific method to be used, which in turn is chosen according to the problem framing and envisaged solutions. Reflexivity makes it possible to explicitly take into account the normative aspects that determine pre-analytical choices and to broaden the assessment to the problem framing, the proposed solutions and the very scientific information that is used.

In the case of GDP, the analysis leads to the following questions: Is the economic narrative useful? In relation to what? Whose point of view is being considered? Who is being left out of the debate?

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### References

Kovacic, Zora; Giampietro, Mario. [Beyond “beyond GDP indicators:” The need for reflexivity in science for governance](#). *Ecological Complexity*. 2015, vol. 21, p. 53-61. doi: 10.1016/j.ecocom.2014.11.007.

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