



Helen Kopnina

Sustainable business
program

Water solutions: What is wrong with sustainable development in relation to water and what can be done better?

Critical evaluation of sustainable development goals (SDGs) in theory and educational practice

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THE GLOBAL GOALS

For Sustainable Development



“

WHAT ARE the SDGs ABOUT?

Inclusive economic growth

Inclusion

Resilience

Reduction of mortality

Raising living standards

Adaptation to climate change

”



Don't just sit there clapping



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Exercise: what do the SDGs mean for Chinese paddlefish?



What's wrong with inclusive economic growth?

- Practical: Is economic growth possible without increase in the consumption of natural resources and poverty and conflict? Can the poor be lifted out of poverty without increasing resource consumption, radically decreasing consumption in the “developed” world, and reducing human population globally?
- Ethical: BILLIONS of members of other species are not “included” in the benefits of economic growth other than being “sustainably used” as “natural resources” or “ecosystem services”

What's wrong with resilience?

- Even if societies can be resilient to climate change due to technological development (health, food production), can the planet (biodiversity, etc.) be as resilient?
- Are SDGs sufficient for resilience by the time our children grow up?

Growing healthy & wealthy population AND environmental integrity all at once?

**Can you have your cake
and eat it too?**



Limitations sustainable development and SDGs

- The values acknowledged to nature are instrumental in character: 'natural resources' or 'ecosystem services' increase material prosperity
- ESD/SDGs prioritizes the social and economic dimensions of sustainability, as if People and Profit are not dependent on Planet
- Western dominant paradigm, industrial, corporate, growth-oriented, no indigenous/non-Western perspectives or alternative economic perspectives (degrowth, steady state economy...)
- <https://scientistswarning.forestry.oregonstate.edu/>

**THINK.
OFFER A REAL ALTERNATIVE TO ECONOMIC GROWTH**



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Difficult questions

- Ethical: Since the future generations are not born yet and non-human species cannot speak for themselves, how can intergenerational justice and biospheric egalitarianism be addressed in democratic systems?
- Practical: Can poverty reduction be decoupled from economic growth and increase in consumption of natural resources?
- If the alternative path to economic development cannot be found, how can rising the standard of the living in developing countries avoid negative impacts on the global ecosystem?

Easy solutions: just don't do it

Creating monocultures, using electricity, pesticides, fertilisers and labour



Just leave the grass alone – increase biodiversity (flowers, insects, birds)





Just don't eat fish (and/or meat)?

- Cowspiracy
- Seaspiracy
- Octopus teacher
- How many human vegans does the world need?

Alternative economies

- Circular economy and Cradle to Cradle (note: while aspiration is absolute decoupling of natural resource consumption from economy, in practice only partial decoupling is possible)
- Sharing or collaborative economy (note: doesn't work with all products, e.g. food)
- Consumer choice editing (unloved by neoliberals but effective)
- Degrowth (Dan O'Neill
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIG33QtLRyA&t=12s>)
- Steady state economy (Herman Daly) did not oppose all GDP growth, but stated it should not be due to population growth or growth in consumption of resources. If it comes from being smarter in how we do things, more creative – transition to services from materials



Solutions: environmental education

The Belgrade charter aimed ‘to develop a world population that is aware of, and concerned about, the environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations and commitment to work individually and collectively toward solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones’ (UNESCO, UNEP 1976).

Education for sustainability

- Circular economy <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/resources/learn/higher-education-resources> *
- Cradle to Cradle <https://www.c2ccertified.org/education>
- Ecocentric education: https://www.mdpi.com/journal/education/special_issues/Ecocentric_Education
- **Teaching SDGs in The Netherlands: a critical approach**
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13504622.2017.1303819>
- **The victims of unsustainability: a challenge to SDGs**
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13504509.2015.1111269>
- **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD): The turn away from 'environment' in environmental education?**
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13504622.2012.658028>
- **Neoliberalism and justice in education for sustainable development: a call for inclusive pluralism**
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2016.1149550>

*watch out for green-washing (circular economy and C2C can still promise 100% absolute decoupling of natural resource consumption from the economy which might be impossible)

Additional sustainable development goals (aspirations)?

- Voluntary reduction in human population (family planning, especially in cases when human/women's rights are violated and there is no freedom of choice)
- Equitable division of resources between species long term
- Education for ecojustice and ecodeмокracy
- Long term sustainable future for all planetary citizens
- Education for planetary citizenship

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