

Contemporary Discourses on the Environment-Economy Nexus

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Context

- Competing visions about how to approach economic development under conditions of continuing environmental degradation:
 - *Green Economy*
 - *Green growth*
 - *Wellbeing*
 - *Gross National Happiness*
 - *Inclusive wealth*
 - *Harmony with nature*
 - *De-growth*
 - *Steady-state economy*
 - *Buen vivir*
- What discrete discourses underlie these rhetorical labels?

Why another study of environmental discourses?

- Already many good discourses analyses published – why do we need another?
 - Human reflexivity means we can't assume that old mapping is still relevant.
 - The proliferation of new terms suggests there might be new ways of understanding the environment-economy nexus.
 - But – possibly just 'old wine in new bottles'.
 - Broader normative reasons – identifying voices is first step towards promoting diversity in decision-making and debate.

Q Methodology

- Combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to access personal experiences, preferences, and beliefs.
- 451 documents on the environment-economy nexus collected from the 2 years bracketing Rio+20.
 - Languages: English and Spanish
 - Google searches: green economy; green growth; sustainable development; low-carbon economy; sustainable economy.
- Distilled into 48 statements.
- Participants drawn from the body of authors of 451 documents: 40 accepted.

Q Methodology

- Participants used online tool to organise statements into a matrix reflecting their personal view on the environment-economy nexus:

<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>					<i>Agree</i>	
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
36	31	32	9	30	2	6	1	10
44	33	41	43	22	3	12	37	11
	21	7	14	4	5	20	39	
		8	48	13	17	23		
		45	16	19	18	29		
		15	24	27	28	42		
			25	34	35			
			26	38	47			
				40				
				46				

- PQMethod used for correlation and factor analysis of the 40 completed Q-sorts (matrices): 3-factor solution was accepted.

Results: 3 Factors

1. Radical Transformationism	2. Cooperative Reformism	3. Statist Progressivism
<p>Sustainability and economic growth – incompatible.</p> <p>Growth creates inequalities, which is socially and environmentally undesirable.</p> <p>Redistribution of resources is necessary.</p> <p>Capitalism is not the only viable system – it is unviable.</p> <p>Cooperative and sharing-based economies are viable alternatives.</p> <p>Local/small-scale economies are needed.</p> <p>Protecting nature by pricing it is dangerous and undesirable.</p>	<p>Sustainability and economic growth – compatible.</p> <p>Don't need to abandon capitalism and growth-based economies – can decouple profit and pollution.</p> <p>Need to recognise sensible/realistic win-win opportunities.</p> <p>Collaborative governance needed: governments, business, civil society.</p> <p>Fair burden-sharing: protect the poor and disadvantaged in transition to sustainable order.</p> <p>Technology transfer from North to South.</p>	<p>Wellbeing & happiness should replace GDP.</p> <p>Continued economic growth not necessary for sustainability and wellbeing.</p> <p>State is primary agent in transition.</p> <p>Highly regulated form of capitalism is needed.</p> <p>Pricing nature not dangerous – but need to be cautious about commoditising/trading it.</p> <p>Putting a value on nature facilitates good policy-making.</p>

What's new?

- New issues are more salient in debate and policy – this is reflected in the discourses:
 - Debate about monetary valuation initiatives;
 - Wellbeing and happiness much more salient – moving from margins to mainstream
 - Burden-sharing

Normative Implications

- Recognising diversity of perspectives is first step – then need to ensure these are actively engaged.
- Institutional enclaves produce poorly-reasoned decisions.
- Decision-making needs to be inclusive of all known discourses.
- *Cooperative Reformist* message seems to get through, but others less so.