



Sharing lessons from the Beyond-GDP world

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Degrowth Conference
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new economics foundation

- **London-based**
- **Politically independent** think tank
- NEF's **mission** is to kick-start the move to a **new economy** that promotes:
 - **Social justice**
 - **Well-being**
 - **Environmental sustainability**
- **NEF and degrowth:**
 - NEF doesn't explicitly promote a degrowth agenda...



Sharing lessons from our research



1. What are the **barriers** to the use of **Beyond-GDP indicators** in **policy-making**?
2. What **opportunities** are there to **increase their use**?



Why are the findings interesting for advocates of degrowth?

Lessons learned that the degrowth community may also benefit from

Lesson 1:
Indicators
can be used
in several
ways

Lesson 2:
Using
indicators:
the recipe
for success

Lesson 3:
Overcoming
barriers to
the use of
alternative
indicators

What is Beyond-GDP?



Measuring progress differently



Stiglitz



Sen



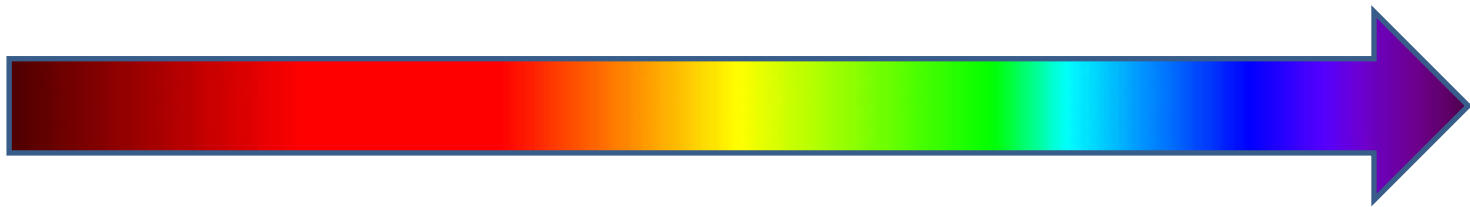
About the Beyond-GDP agenda



Not everyone working in the **Beyond-GDP world** thinks of Beyond-GDP in the **same way**...

A **spectrum** of positions exist regarding **economic growth**:

Less
radical



More
radical

GDP has **technical shortcomings**, which can be overcome by using additional indicators

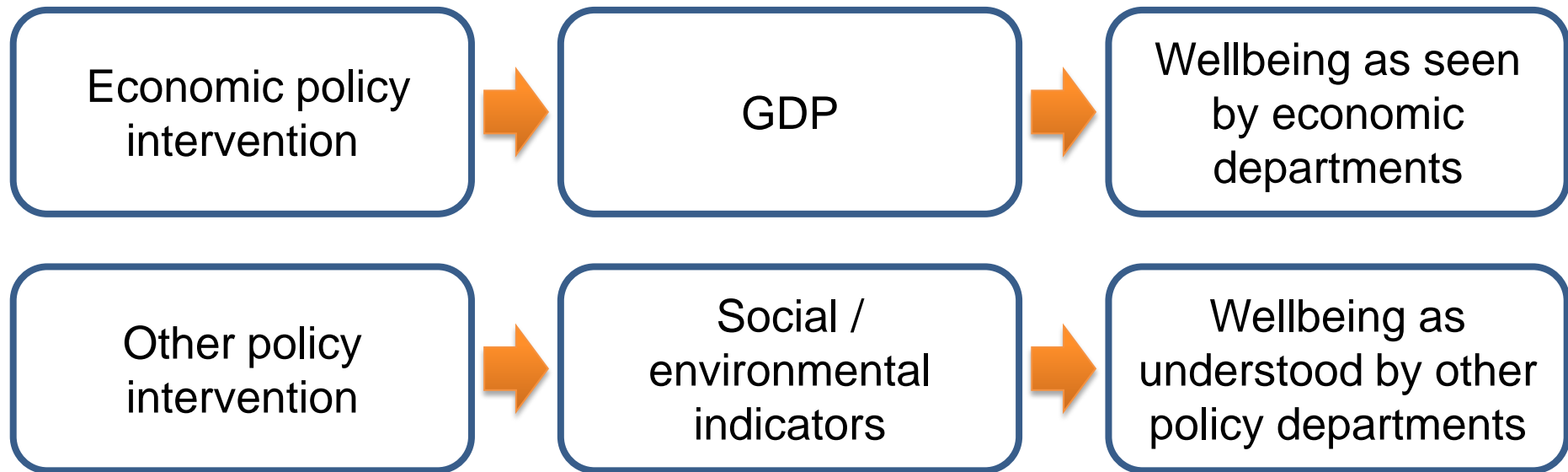
Growth is good, but we need to **target other things** too - 'sustainable growth'

Growth is much **less important** to progress than conventionally assumed, but **not actively bad**

Continued growth will be detrimental – **degrowth is needed**

About the Beyond-GDP agenda

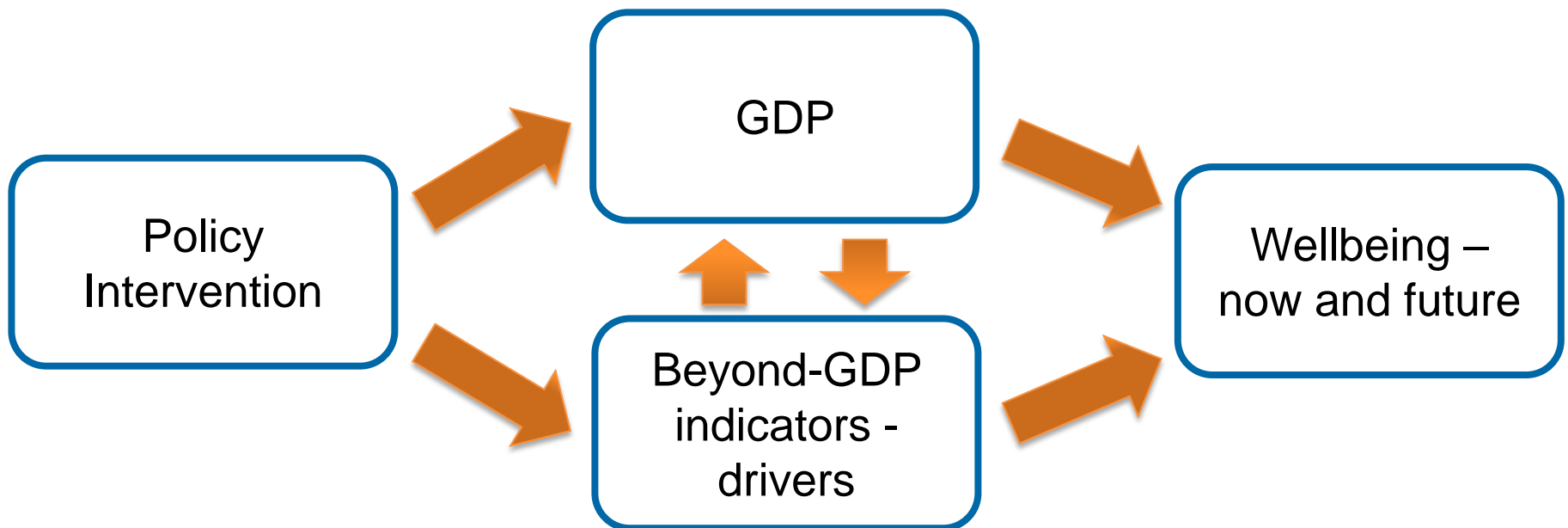
In the less radical view of Beyond-GDP, social and environmental goals are considered **in parallel** with economic goals

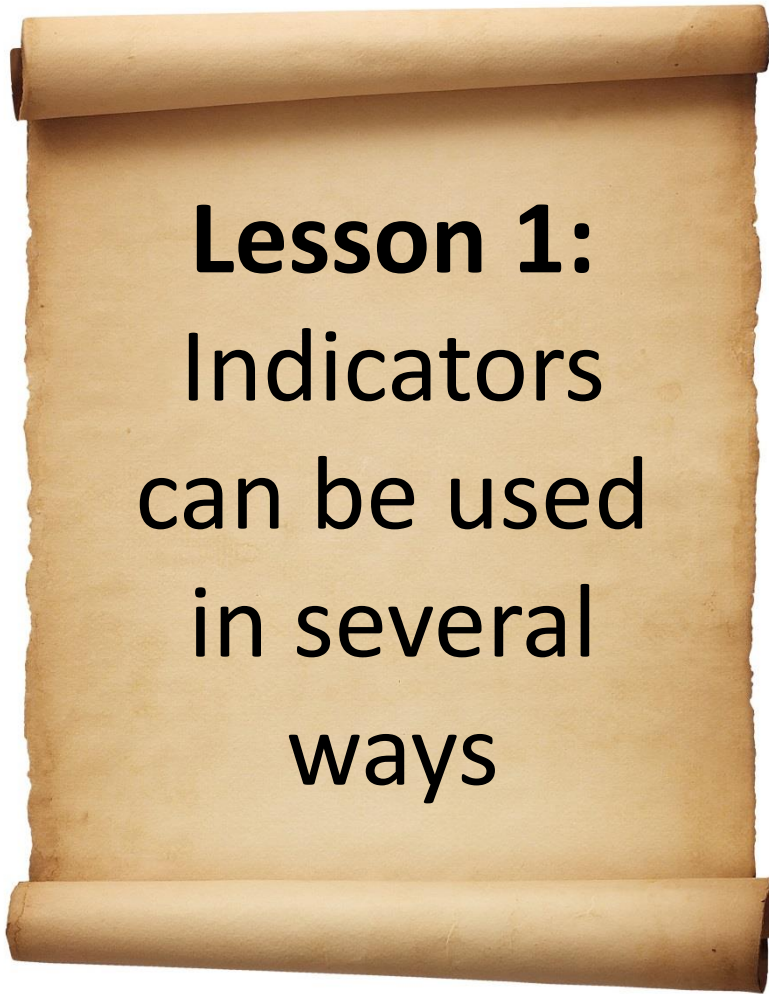


Problematic because **economic** goals tend to be **prioritised** over other goals

About the Beyond-GDP agenda

Our view of Beyond-GDP is that social and environmental goals need to be **integrated** with economic goals





Lesson 1:
Indicators
can be used
in several
ways

Key academic texts:
Boulanger, P. M. (2007)
Carol Weiss (1979)

Lesson 1: Indicators can be used in several ways

Instrumental use

- **Objective information tools**
- Used to **improve policy-making**
- Used **consciously** and **directly**
- E.g. a business might use sales figures to decide which products to stock more of

This **isn't the only way** that indicators can be used...



Lesson 1: Indicators can be used in several ways

...very often, indicators are used in **more subtle** ways



Lesson 1: Indicators can be used in several ways

Conceptual use

- **Less about** using indicators to directly **measure** and **analyse**
- More about **raising awareness** about an issue
- Encouraging people to **think in a certain way**
- E.g. Ecological footprint may got people thinking about fair shares of natural resource use
- GDP has very strong **conceptual power**, seen in the pervasive emphasis on increasing economic growth in policy



Lesson 1: Indicators can be used in several ways

Political use

- Using an indicator to **justify** or **support** a **decision** (which may already have been made)
- E.g. using subjective well-being indicators to justify environmental policies
- E.g. using subjective well-being indicators to push an agenda



**Friends of
the Earth**

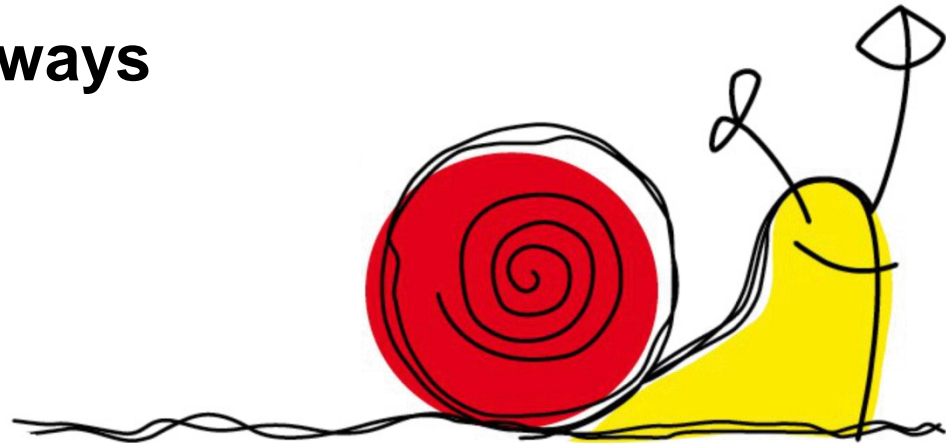


unicef

Lesson 1: Indicators can be used in several ways

What does this means for the degrowth agenda?

- Indicators are **useful tools** for objectively monitoring a situation, and **appealing** to those with a positivist mindset...
...but this isn't their only useful application!
- Indicators can also be used to:
 - **Raise awareness**
 - Promote **thinking in new ways**
 - **Shift debates**
 - **Legitimise** calls for action



Lesson 2:
Using
indicators:
The recipe
for success



Lesson 2: Using indicators: The recipe for success

The findings in this section are based on...

- **Interviews** with 18 indicator producers and promoters
- **Media analysis** of public and expert media
- **Questionnaire** responses from 41 indicator producers and promoters



Lesson 2: Using indicators: The recipe for success

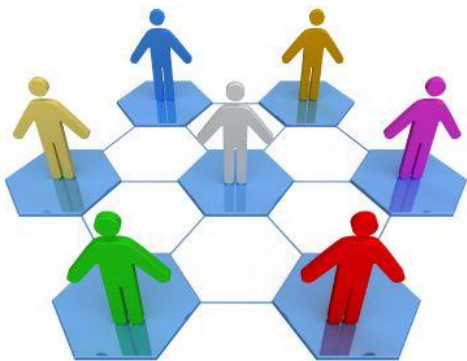
Q. What counts as **'success'** when using indicators?

A. Bringing about **societal change** by **influencing**:

Opinion formers



Policy



Organisations

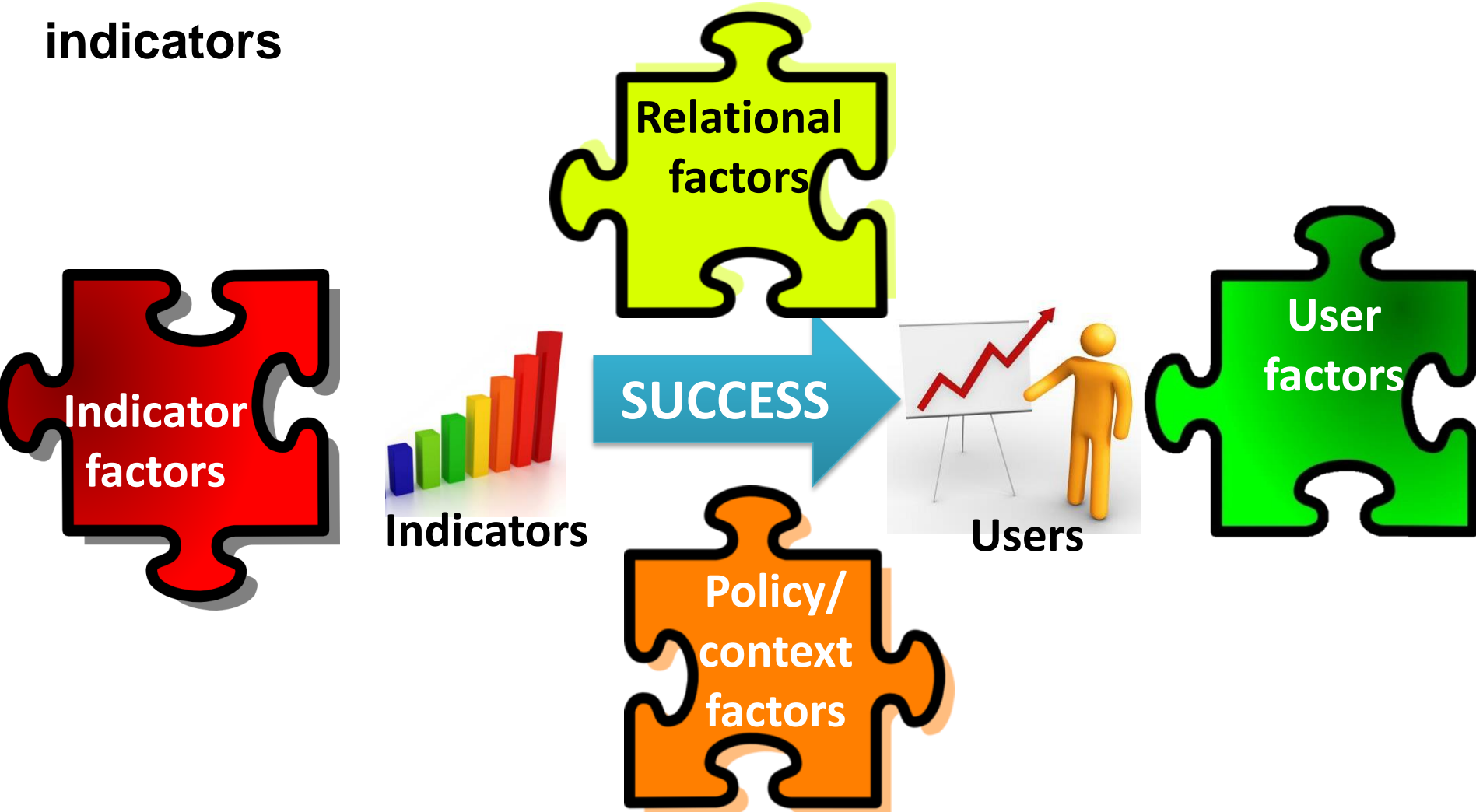


The public

The rest of
the **Beyond-
GDP**
movement

Lesson 2: Using indicators: The recipe for success

Four clusters of **factors** contribute to the **successful use of indicators**



Lesson 2: Using indicators: The recipe for success



1. Saliency

- **simple, attractive concept** (public)
- something that **can be influenced** by policy (policy makers)
- **tangible outcomes** (policy makers)

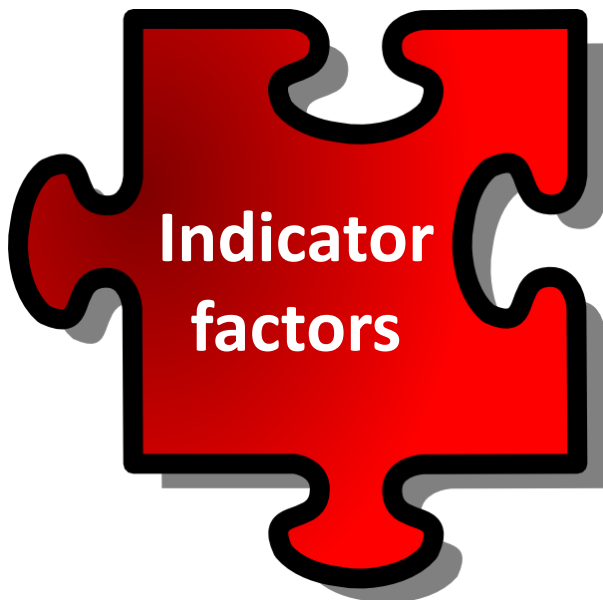
2. Credibility

- perceived **reliability** of data
- caution around **composite** indicators

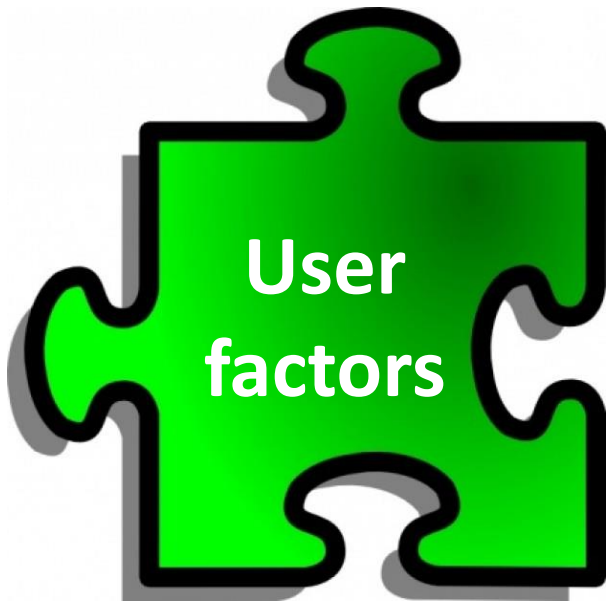


3. Legitimacy

- **neutrality** of the indicator's production
- public consultations vs. vested interests



Lesson 2: Using indicators: The recipe for success



Not much you can do to change your users

Good news: People with economics backgrounds tend to be **more interested** in using indicators

But: They tend to favour indicators which **use economic language and techniques.**



externality

market failure

opportunity
cost

Lesson 2: Using indicators: The recipe for success



Harder to deal with - but it is useful to **be aware of:**

Opportunities

- Indicators that connect with **political agendas**
- Indicators that capture the **public's interest** can create public pressure




Obstacles

- **Ideologies:** e.g. SWB “not the govt’s job” - scientific validity may help overcome
- **Resistance** from those who feel indicators could cause their decision-making to be bypassed

Lesson 2: Using indicators: The recipe for success

Look out for these qualities to maximise impact:

- Consultations to understand **users' needs**
- Developers had **direct contact with audiences** - personal contacts can be made 
- **Local initiatives** can be very impactful at the local level – flexibility, responsiveness
- **Partnerships of developers** reach **wider networks**, draw on greater **skills** bases & encourage more **neutrality**



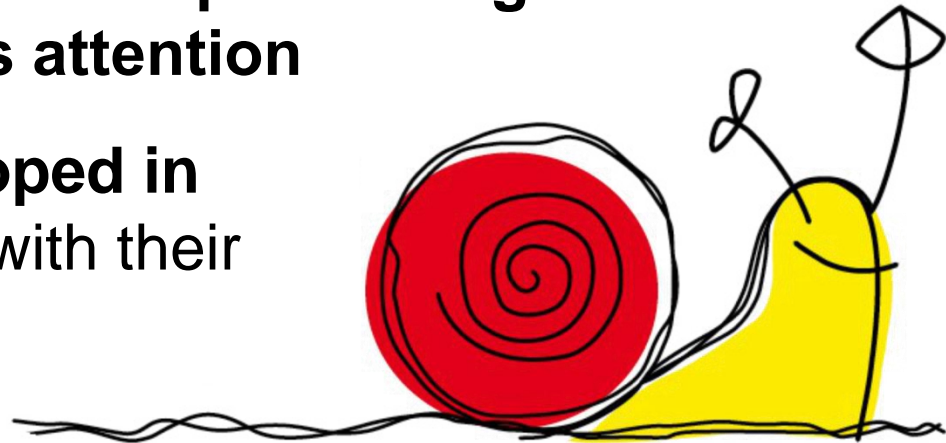
**Relational
factors**

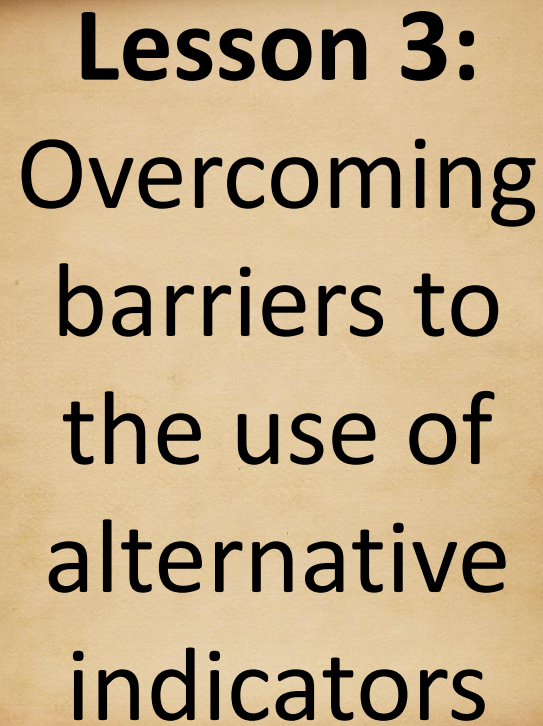
Lesson 2: Using indicators: The recipe for success

What does this mean for degrowthists using indicators?

When selecting indicators to work with:

- Think about the needs of your **intended audience**
- Be prepared to demonstrate **scientific robustness**
- Look for indicators that connect to **political agendas** or have **captured the public's attention**
- Try to use indicators **developed in consultation** and **contact** with their intended audience



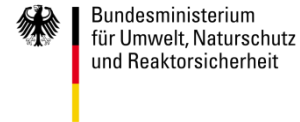
A scroll of aged, yellowish-brown paper with a slightly textured surface and irregular, torn edges. The scroll is partially unrolled, showing the text. The background is a solid blue color at the top and white below.

Lesson 3:
Overcoming
barriers to
the use of
alternative
indicators

Lesson 3: Overcoming barriers to the use of alternative indicators

The findings in this section are based on...

- Case studies on how alternative indicators are being used within seven organisations
- A 2-day workshop with experts from the field



City of Rotterdam



CHRUĐIM
oficiální stránky města



Lesson 3: Overcoming barriers to the use of alternative indicators

Identified **3 categories** of barriers:

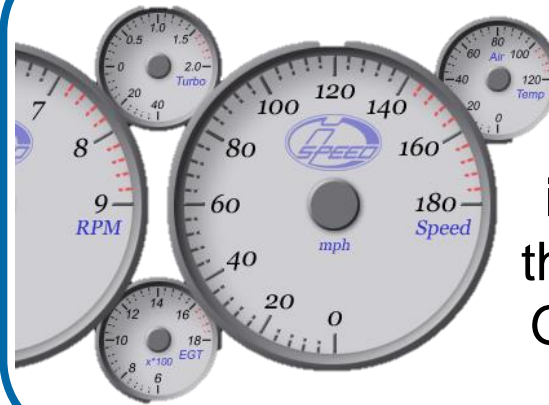
- 1. Indicator** barriers
- 2. Political** barriers
- 3. Process and structural** barriers

Lesson 3: Overcoming barriers to the use of alternative indicators

Indicator barriers



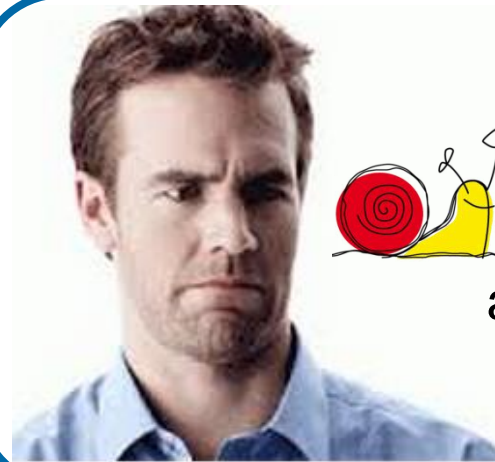
Data is unavailable, not timely, or not robust enough



No single Beyond-GDP indicator with the salience of GDP is agreed



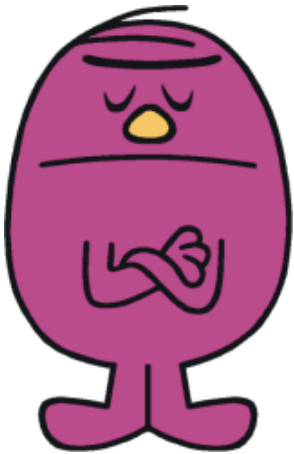
Use of many concepts (quality of life, living standards, human development, sus development) causes confusion



Perceived undesirable connotations e.g. an association with “unrealistic” proposals

Lesson 3: Overcoming barriers to the use of alternative indicators

Process and structural barriers



People are reluctant to change their habits, and are risk averse, so **resist significant change**



A more **complex approach** to policy making is needed, but we don't have well developed tools or experience



Some people have **faith in the current system**, or don't think that using alternative indicators would be an **improvement**



Failure by some producers to **connect with intended users** prevents their indicators from being **useful or visible**

Lesson 3: Overcoming barriers to the use of alternative indicators

Political barriers



The indicators being put forward have not been **agreed democratically...** unlike GDP which appeals to freedom & choice (sometimes confused with having buy-in)



Lack of a **compelling story** which engages the public... unlike GDP, which is based on the message “**as long as market failures are corrected, markets will maximise welfare**”

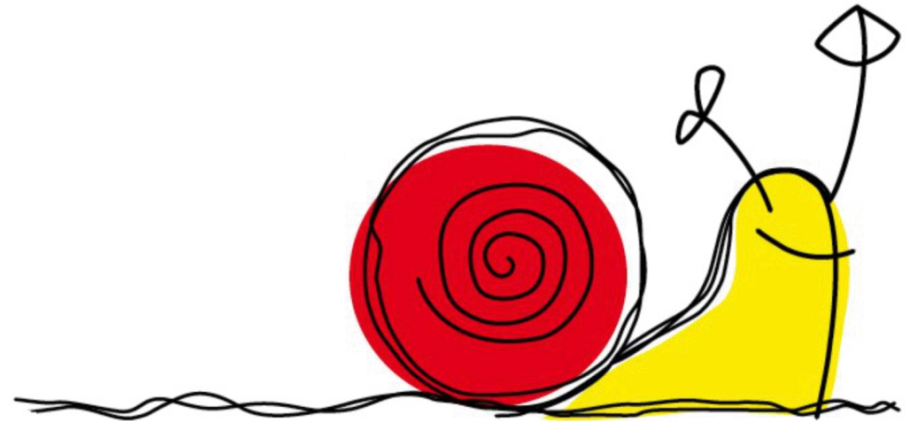


Lack of **demand** from the **public** means there is **little pressure on policy makers** to use Beyond-GDP indicators

Lesson 3: Overcoming barriers to the use of alternative indicators

Why is this interesting for degrowthists?

- The barriers that Beyond-GDP advocates face are very similar to the barriers faced by degrowthists
- We can work together to overcome the barriers...
- ...but how?

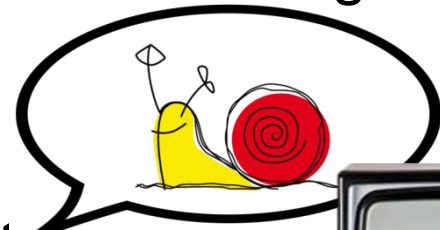


Lesson 3: Overcoming barriers to the use of alternative indicators

Key recommendation: Narrative

Develop a **positive, compelling story** about how the economy works and how we maximise human welfare without growth

- Compelling **intellectual arguments** about the economy
- Compelling **popular messages** about what government should deliver, if not growth
- **Answer questions** like ‘how do we maintain employment without growth?’
- The more people pushing a **single message**, the more powerful it will be

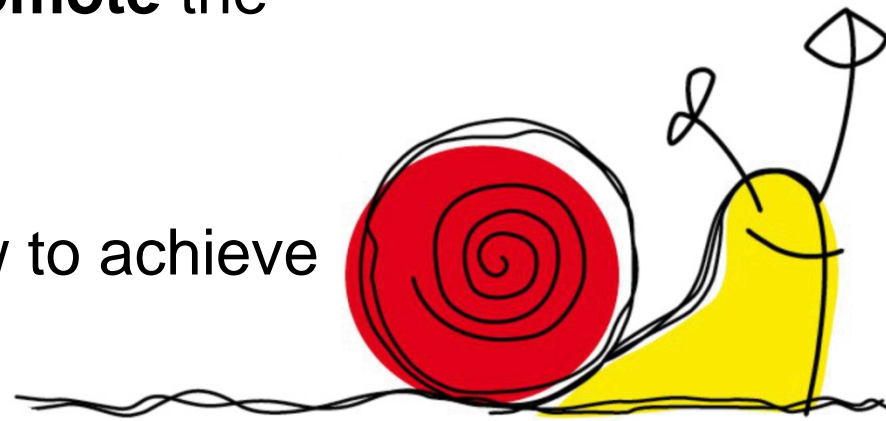


Lesson 3: Overcoming barriers to the use of alternative indicators

More recommendations

- Develop processes to **engage citizens** in indicator selection
- Continue work on **sound methodologies** and gaining **scientific consensus** over indicators
- Develop strategies for **overcoming** institutional **resistance**
- Improve processes for integrated, innovative policy making
- Be alert to **opportunities** to **promote** the use of indicators

See our report for ideas about how to achieve these: www.brainpoolproject.eu



Find out more
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[@nefwellbeing](https://twitter.com/nefwellbeing)
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