

Challenges, roles and limits (?) of an economic science that wants to help realizing sustainability

Introduction

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Challenges, roles and limits of an economic science

- Neoclassical (environmental) economics (NE) as an “ideology”; an attractive rhetoric and formalization of common sense notions
- **Paradox**

NE as a “far-off-reality” approach” (J. Spangenberg)

NE closed to reality :

- it is shaping reality (see the so-called debt crisis in EU, IMF, TEEB)
- it is the reflection of collective representations produced by dominant social structures (structural functionalism perspective of **L. Bratt**) :

CBA and monetary valuation as an analytical form of the fetishism of the commodity and money and as an ideological support of the growing commodification of nature.

The possibility of seeing the value of all things, people and social relations in terms of money *is specific to capitalist conditions.*

Challenges, roles and limits of an economic science

- **Two broad areas of research and actions:**

1. The *social-historical dimensions* of economy-environment interactions

both *material/formal mediations* : property rights (private, common goods), labour, money, institutions and capitalist accumulation in general (**F. Otto Wolf**) energy, social metabolism (**B. Özkaynak**) etc.

and *conceptual mediations*: values (**E. Kras, M. Dereniowska**), ideological orientations (**P. Söderbaum**), symbols, etc.

“We need an economics that deals with : more inclusive forms of ethics [...], various non-monetary dimensions [see also **S. Schmelev and J. Brown**] [...], power issues and institutional arrangements” (**P. Söderbaum**)

What are the structural/social roots of the global ecological crisis? How environmental governance (and/or should) emerge? How environmental governance is transforming (and/or should transform) socio-economic dynamics?

Challenges, roles and limits of an economic science

2. The crossroad between social equity issues (solidarity) and environmental concerns (responsibility)

Reducing work-time in order to reconcile employment and environment ? (see Lawn from ecological economics, Jespersen from post-Keynesian economics, Harribey and others from classical Marxism, etc.)

Trade and the environment (supporting the worldwide justice movement fighting the ecological debt, **B. Özkaynak**)

Economic growth and well-being (reducing-welfare growth hypothesis, **P. Söderbaum**, **B. Özkaynak**)

Sustainable de-growth (Martinez-Alier, Kallis from ecological economics, others from France)

Poverty and the environment (multi-criteria assessments, **S. Schmelev**; lack of participation and communication, **M. Dereniowska**; vulnerability and social policy, **J. Delheim**)

Challenges, roles and limits of an economic science

- **Two roles of an (pluralist) economic science:**

1. Concepts and methods for “a new trans-disciplinary bundle of sustainability sciences...” (F. Otto Wolf)

“We need to bring in other social sciences and competing paradigms in economics as part of a pluralistic approach.” (P. Söderbaum)

“economics for sustainability can only be developed as scientific and political cooperation with the protagonists of other scientific disciplines” (J. Delheim)

2. “...functioning as a cognitive support for a complex societal policy for sustainability” (F. Otto Wolf)

“no simple explanation to offer, but deal with the world and its complexity” (J. Spangenberg) and with “radical uncertainty” (J. Reardon)

Challenges, roles and limits of an economic science

- **Two (potential) limits of an economic science:**

1. Economics for sustainability “has to change a social-political relation of force” (J. Delheim)

“economics plays a key role in attempts to get closer to a sustainable society” (P. Söderbaum)

“different economics as part of the power struggle used by different social groups” (A. Douai)

2. Pluralism and the role of neoclassical economics

“the ‘pluralism about pluralism’ problem” and good judgment (M. Dereniowska)

“we need to find some deeply felt COMMONLY held factors (values, or ideological orientation) that we agree on and that can form a common, solid base, or deep foundation on which to seat pluralism” (E. Kras)

“an overall economics perspective where, for example, neoclassical economics becomes a sub-category” (P. Söderbaum)

“if economics is to move forward, neoclassical economics must become pluralist. It is not enough for us to develop alternatives, neoclassical economics itself must change.” (J. Reardon)
