

Subject: "Ecological Economics is economics as if the environment mattered. Why is Ecological Economics needed?"

According to Herman E. Daly, ecological economics is mainly about three issues: allocation of resources, distribution of income, and scale of the economy relative to the ecosystem—especially the third. A good allocation of resources is efficient (Pareto optimal); a good distribution of income or wealth is just (a limited range of acceptable inequality); a good scale does not generate “bads” faster than goods, and is also ecologically sustainable (it could last a long time, although nothing is forever). In this sense, we are going to try to see why and how ecological economics seems to be the only solution for a bearable future. Through the exploration of environmental problems, such as use and allocation of non renewable resources, and climate change, we will try to point out at which point a complete reconsideration (which seems to be already in motion) of the present economic system is needed and how ecological economics can be part of the answer.

The life and the economy are based on the existence of natural resources. An unbalanced environment cannot, in the medium term, assure the quality of life. The economic utility of the environmental protection is calculated in terms of improvement of the quality of life and reduction of the costs caused by its degradation.

The blind economic growth presses on the whole environment. It encourages the concreting of the landscapes, the pollution and the overexploitation of our streams and product large quantity of wastes. Companies define their strategies as a general rule according to the tendencies of the international financial markets. Their reflection is for very short term. As a consequence, the protective measures of the environment are darkened by the measures of maximization of the profits. The impulses given to the ecological reorientation of the economy are thus obliged to take into account financial markets and world commercial policies.

The modern economies are based on the production and the consumption of tangible assets. In this respect, they work extremely well. But we can observe that traditional economy has more and more difficulty to get lives that have a sense, to assure the social justice and to protect the environment for the future generations. So, what is the solution?

Following the example of the ecological and social concerns, which are remodeled to face the realities of the current world, the economy must be revisited if the humanity wants to build a durable and bearable future.

Why, without making the distinction between the populations of the developed said countries and the others, the growth (GDP / Wealth national) cannot last globally? To answer this question, it is enough to notice that, in the "richest" countries, the economic growth connected to the bulimic consumption make that the carrying capacity of our planet is already widely reached.

In other words, if all the inhabitants of the world consumed so much that we do, the physical limits of our planet would be widely exceeded (We would need 5 planets!). The non-renewable material resources run out, notably energy resources, it is inevitable. We may speak about recycling and about valuation of the waste, there are limits, there will be always losses in the processes.

We may advance that the technical progress will allow to produce so many possessions and services by consuming fewer raw materials and energy and to find substitutes in the disappeared materials, they wont spring from nothing, they will also consume some material and some energy. It is thus only a myth in order to delay the indispensable evolution.

It seems obvious that it will be necessary to recycle and to value the waste, not while producing it almost any more, than the biggest efficiency will have to be acceptable in the production, that will be needed maybe substitutes, that it will be necessary to modify our ways of consumption and our practices of production, that all the not renewable resources must be used parsimoniously. It will make it not less indispensable to question immediately our economic model of growth and thus our way of life.

Towards this exit, the globalization of the economic field, which obeys only a single logic that of the capital, independent of the political and social choices, is an obstacle that seems insurmountable in the implementation of relevant alternatives.

Another problem that use and allocation of resources we face is those of climatic change. In this view, some countries act as if the technology will be the miracle solution (we can think about the first world economic power, the US, which didn't engage in the Kyoto Protocol).

But the technological projections will not be enough to put an end to the climatic changes. It is with our way of life to adapt, while consuming less but especially differently. A reduction in gases for purpose of greenhouse is probably not the solution with the climatic changes. It is truly a new economic model that we will have to set up. According to the International Energy Agency, the CO₂ emissions will increase by 60% from here 2030. From the increasing importance than it grants to the world trade goods - and thus of transport - current globalization

contributes to the constant increase in the CO₂ emissions. Until now, the economic growth went hand in hand with the growth of these emissions. An increase of 60 % means that the reheating would rise well above the fateful bar of the 2 degrees. It is thus necessary to carry out important changes. The research of the economic growth as aim in itself must be seriously questioned, and initially within the rich countries. To attenuate the risk of a dangerous anthropic disturbance (i.e. due to the man) of the climate, the CO₂ emissions should decrease by 60 % from here 2050. What means, for the countries of North, a reduction of 90 % !

To carry out these reductions requires a real turning towards more durability at the level political, economic, technological and individual. The economists of the environment stress that we will have to deal with two challenges: Eco-efficiency and Eco-sufficiency. The first concept returns to the installation of a great width revolution in terms of industrial ecology, renewable energies, durable technologies, etc. Scientific knowledge is available for that. They should now be put into practice. But technologies are not enough. And that is why there is a necessity to face the aspect of eco-sufficiency, which sends back us to our individual way of life. To reach a reduction of 90 % of the emissions, we will have to learn how to consume less, and especially differently. That relates to our food (less to consume meat), our mobility (to take public transport, to develop a culture of the bicycle), our way of traveling (to avoid the travel by plane) or of housing ourselves (eco-construction). In our country, the ecological print of the middle class and higher is antidemocratic: their mode of consumption cannot certainly become the standard generalized for the whole of the world population. It will thus be a question of making comprehensible that a way of life in a less hurry and materialist way can offer a quality of higher life.

The ecological economy recognizes the biophysics limit of the growth and thus pleads for a bearable economy for our planet. The economic growth should not be an aim in itself. Economic prosperity must be durable at the environmental level. In the contrary case this growth is quite simply anti-economic! There is besides an Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW). It is essential that the political authorities institute a ceiling on ecological durability on a relevant scale (like the world emissions of CO₂ or local water consumption). Concurrently to that, an equitable distribution of environmental space is necessary. It is only as a last resort that one must (possibly) call upon the mechanisms of the market to return the attribution of the most effective possible factors of production.

In order to coordinate with such a world problem, it is necessary to fight against the parceling regarding the environmental policies. We need a strong World Organization of the Environment, having as many weight at the total level than the World Trade Organization. The latter must be deeply reformed besides in order to support an ecological and social trade for the South. A trade that will also protects weakest in the rich countries.

A change in individual behavior is needed and people have to be persuaded of that. What people often forget, is that the catastrophe is already touching weakest in the world. To wait that catastrophes even more serious occur to change attitude is not ingenious. We are facing problems, which are likely to become irreversible. We must thus ensure us that we do not go too far. There remain only 10 to 15 years before the point of no return is reached. It is thus necessary to start as of now the transition towards more durability. We need a world ecological pact in which each one takes part. A world program of structural adaptation, which will puts us on the track of a sustainable, durable and equitable ecological economy.

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