

Interpreting the Green Economy: Emerging Discourses and their Considerations for Southern Africa

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A Conceptual Map: Green Economy

- Incrementalist, Reformist, Transformative
- Stylised, over-simplified
- Broad acceptance of the underlying premise of green economy – that the economy can – and should be – harnessed in the realisation of sustainability goals.
- Illustrative rather than comprehensive

Incrementalist Discourse

- Broad acceptance of prevailing macro-economic paradigm
- Not a challenge to capitalist system or interpretations of growth, but use its mechanisms mitigate environmental impacts (bring environmental externalities within the purview of the existing paradigm)
- Greater use of market-based tools to internalise environmental externalities
 - e.g. environmental taxes proposed to reduce greenhouse gases
- GDP - measure progress
- GDP – difficult to measure quality of life – therefore growth mainly measured in physical terms- increased production and consumption – not necessarily social goals more broadly

Reformist Discourse

- Extends the incrementalist view – more ambitious agenda for green economy. Economic growth non-negotiable
- With right planning and actions, environmental conservation can *stimulate* stronger economic growth than the status quo.
- Green Investment. Environmental protection is not only compatible with growth – but it can be a driver of growth
- Green economic activities can assist in addressing intractable social issues
- Recognises the inadequacy of simply using GDP as measure of growth – social and environmental costs of economic activity. Additional indicators of growth
- Decouple economic growth from use of natural resources – relative (reduction of impact per unit of GDP)

Transformative Discourse

- Views of civil society and other observers, rather than policy makers and international organisations
- Not dismissing 'green economy' in entirety, key criticisms
- Strong critique of growth paradigm inherent in current capitalist economic system - particularly its role in creating environmental degradation and social inequity
- "Social logic of consumerism" – value outside market (family, creativity, care of others) (Jackson)
- "A green economy must be a 'steady state' economy, or one that grows in terms of the benefits it delivers (over and above any costs) but not in terms of its physical size" (Daly)
- "De-growth", "sufficiency", wealth in moderation (Daly, Jackson)

Transformative Discourse

- Green economy that is not based on continued growth in the traditional sense of the word
- Stable economies operating within the Earth's ecological limits (Daly, Jackson)
- Sometimes 'de-growth' to reach a steady state
- Decreased material consumption – move beyond solely profit motive
- “Social logic of consumerism” – value outside market (family, creativity, care of others) (Jackson)
- Sufficiency – wealth in moderation