

SPES Feedback for 2025 Strategic Foresight Report

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Authors

Mario Biggeri – Scientific coordinator of the SPES project, University of Florence

Filippo Cuccaro – Researcher of the SPES project, University of Florence

Andrea Ferrannini – Researcher of the SPES project, University of Florence

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Disclaimer

This brief note for the SPES project has been prepared by the University of Florence as part of WP11 “Impact and stakeholder mobilizations for the transition”. It aims to provide useful arguments for the 2025 Strategic Foresight Report based on SPES arguments and findings.

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Abstract

The foundation of modern economies relies on the consumption of finite resources, especially fossil fuels, to fuel growth, which ultimately leads to environmental degradation, resource depletion, and inequalities in wealth distribution. The concept of endless economic growth on a planet with limited resources is inherently unsustainable - the paradox of infinite growth within a finite world. The necessary transition to a new economic model needs to ensure that prosperity is shared more equitably among all people. This brief note (prepared by the SPES project – Sustainability Performances, Evidence and Scenarios to inform the Strategic Foresight Report) wants to highlight the main long-term EU challenges' and propose solutions with the intent of enhancing the economic system resilience, meanwhile promoting Sustainable Human Development to expand sustainable and inclusive wellbeing for all. Considering the most recent relevant literature, we attempt to unify the thoughts towards a shared consensus that can finally lead to the ultimate beyond-GDP transition. This requires conscious governance and collective action by all societal actors, where solutions must be built around sustainability and resilience, and definitively not by wealth or power.

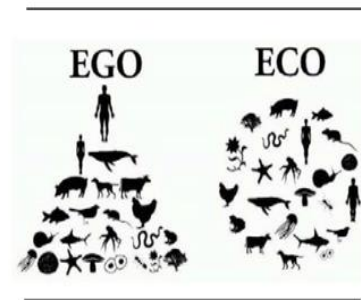
Introduction on GDP versus Wellbeing debate

The dominant economic framework of Western societies suffers of its original sin: it is based on finite resources – petrol and derivatives above all of them, together with the other natural elements, that are also not inexhaustible – in order to deliver an infinite growth of the global economy. This is a paradox that can only lead to the resource's exhaustion. On top of this, "growth" is only seen and measured in monetary terms, and it is far from being redistributed fairly among the populations, albeit are all people together that create it. And this is a dynamic that caused the inequalitarian world that we all live in.

As recently beautifully described by David C. Korten: *"conventional economics serves us well only if our purpose is to exploit people and Earth to make money for the already rich. I call it ego-nomics. To secure the wellbeing of all of Earth's people, we will need a new economics that guides us on a path to an Ecological Civilization in which caring for life takes priority over exploiting life to grow money for the already richest among us. I call it eco-nomics."*¹

Ego-nomics is intended as: Maximizing personal financial return using life as a means. Eco-nomics is instead: Maximizing the well-being of life using money as a means.

*"Earth is our common home and the source of our existence and wellbeing. Money has no meaning or utility beyond the human mind. Indeed, most modern money is nothing but invisible electronic traces stored on computer memory chips."*¹



Many aspects of wellbeing are already embedded in European and global monitoring frameworks, starting primarily from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations. While progress has been made, efforts to balance social needs and planetary boundaries are lagging behind. The Sustainable Human Development (SHD) paradigm, introduced by the UNDP in 1990, provides an integrated development vision. It emphasizes a vision of wellbeing that fosters human security, respects ecological limits, and redefines the economy by focusing on people's capabilities to live long/healthy and creative lives and respect planetary boundaries. It can be a timely vision of a good life for all that does not cause harm and increase Human Security (UNDP, 2022b).²

There is an ongoing debate regarding the need for measuring and centre the political discussion on wellbeing instead of GDP. Nevertheless, GDP is still used as a valid indicator of economic growth and is the main objective of economic policies. This is also because a large, heterogeneous and somehow confusing /inconsistent group of alternative indicators leads policy makers to rely on GDP as the most convenient measure of development, despite its drawbacks and ambiguities. Currently there are several research projects financed by the EU and UN that aim to unify the consensus towards a specific framework that could be mutually used to measure wellbeing and direct policy-

¹ David C. Korten (2024). Eco-nomics for an Ecological Civilization. From Competing to Maximize personal Financial Returns to Cooperating to Secure the Wellbeing of Life. (page ii)

² Biggeri, M., Ferrannini, A., Gábos, A., Grande, C. S., Lelkes, O., Palencia-Esteban, A., Rougier, E. (2025). Towards a consensus on measuring transition performances within a Sustainable Human Development paradigm.

making. In particular, the ambition of the SPES project is contributing to shape a new sustainability model for the future of our societies inspired by a Sustainable Human Development vision. Only in this way the pursuit of shared prosperity and human flourishing would be able to reconcile productivity enhancement with inclusiveness and environmental protection, while strengthening democracy and ensuring human security for all.³

Wellbeing is the overall standard of living and quality of life of individuals and households within an economy; is not merely considering monetary values but correctly highlights the social aspect of human life. It considers various dimensions, such as, income, wealth, employment opportunities, access to basic goods and services, social support and cohesion, and overall satisfaction with life; and, most importantly, the distribution among the population of all these items. The scope of the economy needs to be the wellbeing of people, in observance and respectfully of the natural environment that host us. With David C. Korten words: *"Securing the wellbeing of humans and Earth is the economy's only legitimate purpose. Instead, our current economy is destroying Earth's capacity to sustain life and driving inequality and violence to grow the financial assets of the already richest among us."*⁴

Scope and main challenges

Reaching a definitive agreement on wellbeing definition, understanding and measurement of performances, is a necessity to guide and align the policy-making processes around the globe. As mentioned, GDP, the dominant index in public disclosure meant to measure economic activity, is not sufficient. Politicians must be provided with the information and expertise required to recognize the importance of data and analysis in the creation of public policy by academics and National Statistical Offices. Data and methods must be openly acknowledged and made accessible to all societal stakeholders. Given the increasing global push to the beyond-GDP debate, it is essential to prioritize the alignment among different proposals by developing a clear and coherent framework and theory of change. Narratives, policy priorities and technical capacities must align before an appropriate SHD measurement framework can be adopted at global and European levels and used effectively in policymaking processes.

On this premise, the **main challenges to long-term** global and therefore also **EU resilience consist in:**

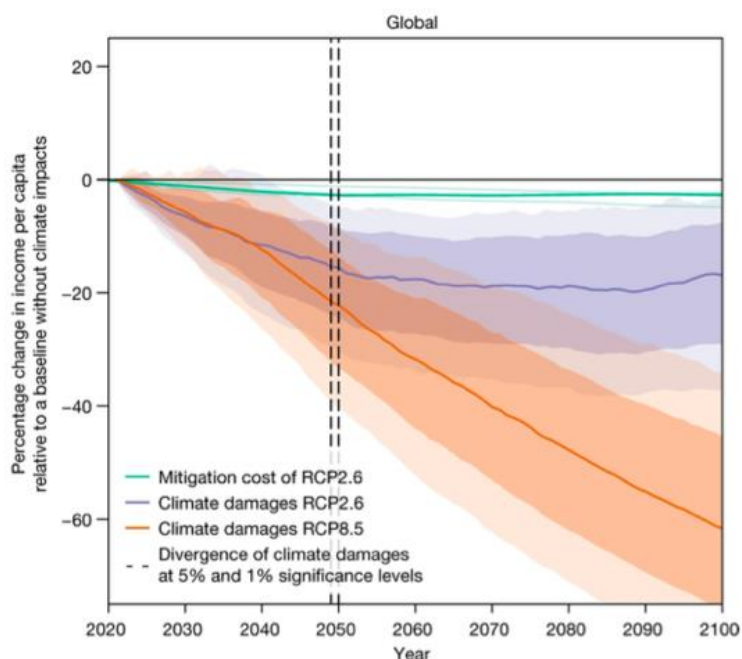
- Ensure human security via cohesion (Protection, Empowerment, and Solidarity);
- Addressing climate change and complete the transition to carbon neutrality;
- Ensure the redistribution of resources, as well as the wealth created with and from them;
- Guarantee social services to all (education, health, housing, and mobility),

When acting on these thematic is important to always consider the **inequalities**, in distribution and access, among and within the populations, and use policies instruments to mitigate them as much

³ Biggeri, M., Ferrannini, A., Lodi, L., Cammeo, J., Francescutto, A. (2023). The "winds of change": the SPES framework on Sustainable Human Development.

⁴ David C. Korten (2024). Eco-nomics for an Ecological Civilization. (page 9)

as possible. The sustainability transition is a mandatory field, as became clear and comprehensible also thanks to the work conducted by Kate Raworth (2017) and further developed by the Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL), that highlighted the nine boundaries that define the area, the doughnut, within which humanity can live justly and safely. The doughnut's ecological ceiling indicators measure the limits to Earth's regenerative systems. The indicators used to measure and monitor are mostly non-financial and all refer to human-nature interaction and coexistence. It has been estimated that in 2023 we have crossed six out of the nine planetary boundaries⁵. And, as they pointed out, during the conference "Making our economies fit for the people and the planet", held in Brussels in march 2025, *"At the moment no country lives within planetary boundaries!"*. Also, the most recent work of the Green European Foundation (GEF), offer indisputable evidence that the climate change cannot be ignored any longer. Looking at the percentage change in net income for two different scenarios of climate change (red and purple lines) compared to mitigation cost (green line), it is clear that without taking the path of mitigation, an enormous global income loss is guaranteed. *"It is indeed definitely cheaper to save the world than to destroy it."*⁶



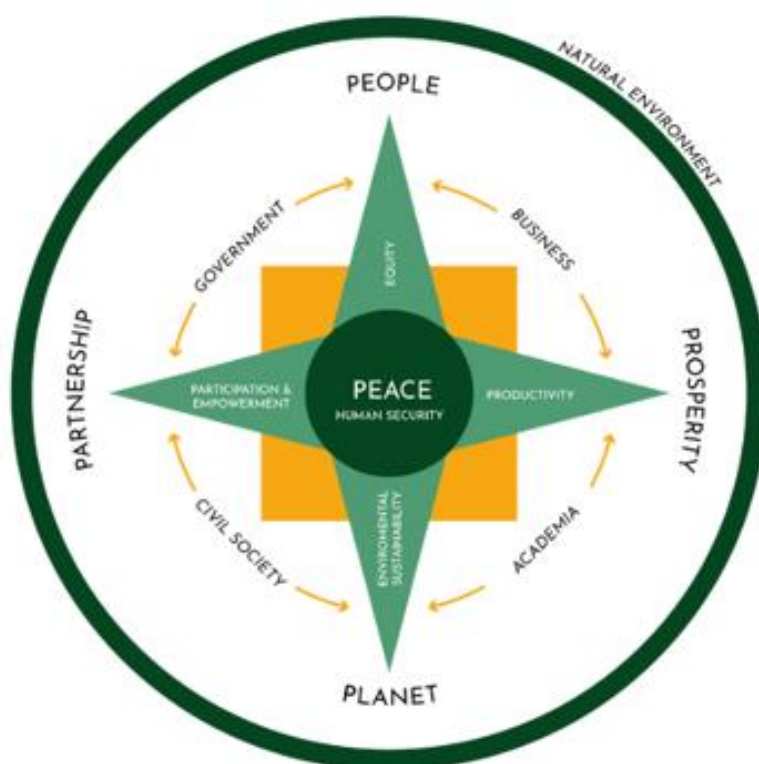
Source: Kotz, Levermann, and Wenz¹⁴ (Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License).

⁵ <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>

⁶ Emma Bergeling (IEEP), Antoine Oger (IEEP) and Taube Van Melkebeke (GEF), (2025). A European Wellbeing Economy Avenues for Political Action. (page 51)

The SPES theoretical framework

With the intention of preparing the EU to be as much resilient as possible in 2040, we need to change the paradigm and the basics on which the Western economy is used to work.



Source: Biggeri et al. (2023)

The SPES project⁷ provides a new integrated framework that is both theoretically-grounded and policy-oriented and able to reconcile potential contradictions between economic, social, and environmental spheres. The SPES framework integrates the sustainable development and human development paradigms. This shift reflects the understanding that sustainable and inclusive well-being (SIW) depends on a multitude of factors such as health, education, and natural resources. The SPES framework links the 2030 Agenda with the Sustainable Human Development (SHD) paradigm and the integral ecology perspective, in order to identify the pillars, driving actors, and triggering factors for sustainability transitions. This framework offers a clear integrated vision for sustainability transition processes, by placing economic growth and human flourishing within social and environmental boundaries while embracing both material and immaterial dimensions of sustainable well-being. In short, the novel SPES framework is composed of three building blocks:

1. We refer to the 5 Ps of the 2030 Agenda – People, Prosperity, Planet, Partnership, and Peace – as the main critical areas of action, thus advocating for sustainable development as the overarching policy framework at the global level. Due to their fundamental role in setting global, national, and

⁷ SPES project Policy Brief 1 and 2, <https://www.sustainabilityperformances.eu/publications-deliverables/>

local development agendas and strategies, these 5 Ps must be taken at the forefront of any interpretative framework concerning sustainability transitions. Nevertheless, despite the integrated and indivisible nature of the 2030 Agenda, Peace is viewed as the cornerstone, with a much broader meaning than simply the absence of conflicts: rather, it refers to the harmonious coexistence between humans and the ecosystem. In other words, it is both a means and an end since “there can be no sustainable development without peace, and no peace without sustainable development” (UN, 2015, p. 2) **2.** We identify the corresponding objectives – productivity, equity, environmental sustainability, participation & empowerment, human security – each on equal terms, to fully embrace a Sustainable Human Development vision. We re-interpret the original pillars of the human development paradigm according to current societal challenges, while also introducing a new fifth pillar to consider the role of social relations, stability, and peace: the notion of human security. This emphasizes that many current human insecurity threats are the by-product of the human choices made in the pursuit of unsustainable and unbalanced growth. **3.** We rely on the Quintuple Helix model to show how different societal actors – government, business, academia, civil society, natural environment – interact and drive the sustainability transition. We identify the spheres of actors and their interactions driving the sustainability transition towards SHD. This model provides the necessary transformative dynamics by considering the continuous interplay of the roles by all societal actors in their different domains shaping the integrated pursuit of the 5 pillars in all 5 critical areas of action.

Jointly, these building blocks successfully combine the global policy framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with the theoretical insights of the SHD paradigm, making our original contribution both theoretically-grounded and policy- oriented. Similarly, they allow the SPES framework to be dynamic and centered on collective action shaped by a clear perspective for the common good and a novel interpretation of normative objectives and societal factors steering transition processes.

In line with the SPES framework, the overarching goal of all European policies should be to foster a fundamental transformation of socio-economic systems to fulfil societal needs while respecting planetary boundaries. The transformative elements identified are “Inner transformation towards unity” and “Reflexivity and social learning towards transformative resilience”.⁸ In order to trigger sustainability transition processes towards SHD and all its pillars, other criteria rather than profit-seeking and economic growth on which to base collective choices should be set. These are among others: environmental safeguard; humanity (i.e., respect for every person); responsibility (i.e., as opposed to a strictly individualistic logics); moderation; prudence (i.e., prevent and control present and future risks); diversity (i.e., recognition of the other as a way to respond to the variety of situations); and citizenship (i.e., everyone is a full member of the community in which they live). We argue that individual, collective and policy choices should be driven by the concept of “unity”, which is central in an integral ecology perspective and explains the value in all human lives: unity with the world, unity with each other, and unity within ourselves (Wenar, 2020). However, a change of criteria is needed but not sufficient. Once the “desired direction” is identified, it is important to consider that, it is not a fixed path, and that unforeseen events may shock the system which therefore need to be re-active and able to prevent and mitigate negative impacts of for instance wars, pandemics and of course climate change. The new system requires transformative resilience, ensuring its ability to continuously adapt to fit into new sustainable development paths, avoiding collapse.

⁸ Biggeri, M., Ferrannini, A., Lodi, L., Cammeo, J., Francescutto, A. (2023). The “winds of change”: the SPES framework on Sustainable Human Development.

The SPES project makes the following policy recommendations:

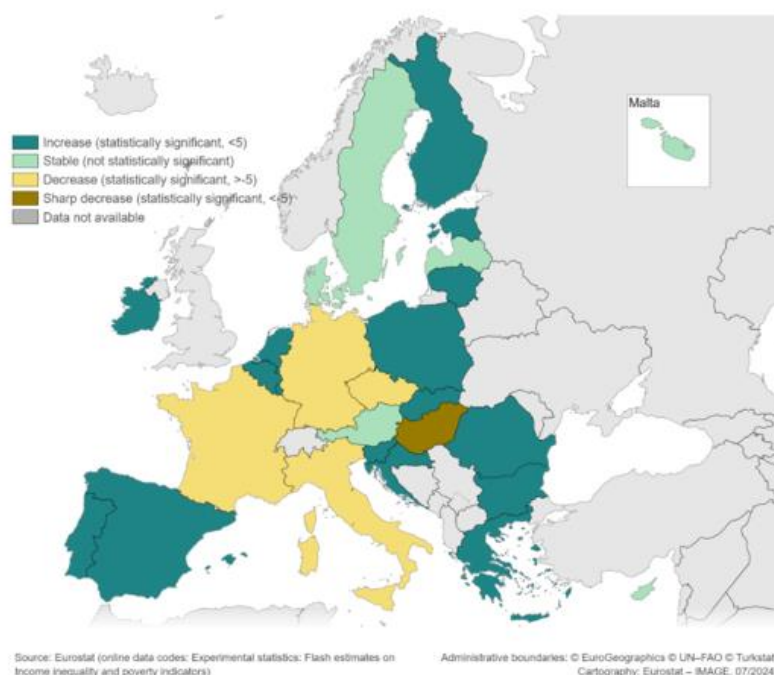
1. Ensuring appropriate governance mechanisms as an accelerator for sustainability transitions
2. Steering capital investments towards Sustainable Human Development
3. Pushing to definitively go beyond GDP in our measurement systems
4. Making Research & Innovation policy fully transformative towards Sustainable Human Development
5. Promoting critical, creative, and caring citizenship
6. Harnessing science-policy interface to fight misinformation
7. Strengthening a global collaboration to go beyond GDP
8. Refining simpler composite indicators for better policy insights
9. Placing geo-statistics at the intersection of economic, social and environmental domains
10. Enhancing National Statistical Offices to produce evidence on Sustainable Human Development
11. Translating research and science in the public discourse to facilitate civic engagement

The redistribution of resources, profits and services is a necessity; primarily because it is the only way to obtain an increase of the individual wellbeing which is the natural leverage for intervene on the global wellbeing; secondly because is the most efficient way for making the sustainability transition, that is worthy to remember, it is an essential condition for human life on hearth. Redistribute income it might be the first viable option and perhaps the easiest and most direct, although its public support is often controversial; but it is definitively not the only way, and probably the most efficient neither. Indeed, keeping the multidimensionality of wellbeing in mind, the provision (investments) in social services is a more efficient and effective redistribution of wealth among the whole population. Moreover, if and when the provision of social services is environmentally sustainable (for inputs and outputs), the redistribution of the economy's wealth for the benefit of the individual wellbeing is helping the ecological transition needed to keep the humanity alive.

In 2017, Keith Payne, in his book, "The broken ladder", explained how inequalities affect the way we think, live and die. In other words, he explored the psychological impact of income inequality. He provides a few perspectives from which is easy to see the links between our individual situation, which is always relative to the situation of others, and our behaviors and choices. First of all, it is important to recognize that when we want to assess our own situation in terms of wellbeing, we compare ourself to others. Wellbeing is therefore a subjective perception of relative status. The author points out that income inequalities correlate positively with index for health and social problems (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009); and negatively with life expectancy (UN Report 2004)⁹. Three indicators that are surely related to wellbeing. He also discusses some interesting dynamics that lead relatively poorer people to behave and consume according to unsustainable trajectories, that cause premature deaths and environment pollution. (*"Poor logic, Live fast die young, Nothing to lose"*).

⁹ Keith Payne (2017). The broken ladder.

Median income in real terms: year-on-year % change, 2023 vs 2022



Inequalities do also favour political polarization, and consequently the policies that will be implemented in a given context. An experiment reported in the book, shows that when people think to be relatively rich are less in favor of redistributive policies, while those that think to be relatively poor are more supportive for such a kind of policies. Also, it is important to have in mind that inequalities are exacerbated by racial discrimination, which is itself one of the causes of inequalities. Inequalities have also an indirect effect on human capabilities, as mentioned into the SFR 2023¹⁰, students with low socio-economic status are six time more likely to underachieve in school. From EUROSTAT¹¹ we see that income inequalities among EU member states are increasing, which shed light to the importance of considering also the differences between countries besides to the inequalities within them.

Imagine 2040

The Club of Rome in the book: “Earth for All”¹², published in 2022, forecasted two alternative possible scenarios for the development of the global economy. This work takes into consideration the entire world of course but is nevertheless relevant for this discussion given that EU is part of it. What differentiates between the two stories are the global efforts to address the actual economic

¹⁰ Strategic Foresight Report (2023)

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Flash_estimates_of_income_inequalities

¹² Sandrine Dixon-Deciève, Owen Gaffney, Jayati Ghosh, Johan, Rockström, Per Espen Stoknes, Jørgen Randers, (2022). Earth for All - A Survival Guide for Humanity.

system's failure. In the first case "Too little too late", the global reaction is not just too slow and tardy but also insufficient. However, the second scenario imagined "The giant leap", represents a viable way forward to save hearth and consequently our modern society. We feel that we are somewhere in between the two hypothetical scenarios described but we might be too optimistic and the true is that we are very far from implementing the needed giant leap. Along with forecasting efforts, the contribute of the Club of Rome underlines fundamental actions that are necessary for making the giant leap. Conscious that the impacts of crossing climate and ecological tipping points are likely to last centuries to millennia. They identify five "extraordinary turnarounds" that can be summarized and achieved by addressing vertical and horizontal Inequalities - in income, education, gender, energy access, and people diets.

The five tools proposed, by the club of Rome, to obtain the turnarounds are:

1. Creation of Citizens Funds to distribute the wealth of the global commons fairly to all citizens
2. Government intervention (subsidies, incentives, and regulations) to accelerate the process
3. Transformation of the international financial system to facilitate rapid poverty alleviation in most of the world¹³
4. De-risking investments in low-income countries and cancel debt
5. Investment in efficient, regenerative food and renewable energy systems

To the list above we need to add "human security and peace", that are not easy to reach without investments in terms of empowerment, trust and solidarity, i.e. the transformative elements in the SPES framework.

With David C. Korten words¹⁴: *"The challenge of our time is to recover our true humanity as we learn to live in beloved communities of mutual caring and service to the natural and human commons. Relevant action includes: Replacing GDP with valid indicators of beneficial economic performance. Embracing biology and ecology as the disciplines most foundational to our efforts to restore and manage the regeneration of the living Earth."* He agrees with the SPES transformative framework, and the highlighted need for an inner transformation towards unity process, albeit phrased differently: *"We will achieve this transformation to an Ecological Civilization only through a people-powered meta-movement in which the world's people come together in a unifying commitment to creating a world that works for all life."*

Korten expressing his idea of what a healthy and sustainable, in all meanings, business should look like, fundamentally describe the basic characteristics of the Social Economy: *"A properly functioning business is a community institution that facilitates the local exchange of goods and services. A modest profit is essential to survival, but profit should never be the main purpose of any business."*¹⁵

For any Government, promoting social economies offer the perfect path to foster sustainable and inclusive wellbeing. Social economies (SE) are all economic activities conducted by enterprises, primarily cooperatives, associations and mutual benefit societies, whose ethics convey the following

¹³ On this regard, Korten also makes a few interesting proposals that deserve further research/attention. (i) A small financial transactions tax on the purchase and sale of financial instruments such as stocks, bonds, foreign currencies, futures contracts, derivatives, and cryptocurrencies will eliminate most speculative trades without hindering mutually beneficial investment. (ii) Prioritize and incentivize Community Banking - global system of community banks owned by the communities they serve.

¹⁴ David C. Korten, (2024). *Eco-nomics for an Ecological Civilization*. (page ii)

¹⁵ David C. Korten, (2024). *Eco-nomics for an Ecological Civilization*. (page 19)

principles: 1. placing service to its members or to the community ahead of profit; 2. autonomous management; 3. a democratic decision-making process; 4. the primacy of people and work over capital in the distribution of revenues. Generate companies that focus on providing a social benefit rather than on maximizing profit for the owners, and that are owned by investors who seek social benefits such as poverty reduction, health care for the poor, social justice, global sustainability, and so on, seeking psychological, emotional, and spiritual satisfaction rather than financial reward. Any profit made by a Social Business (SB) stay within the company for further expansion or to make work conditions better for the workers, while investors get back only the funds they invested and cannot claim any dividends. Policy makers could, for example, leverage the power of new technologies to increase access to services and facilitate citizens' participation in the public sphere, favor the democratization of production processes by promoting a shared ownership of the companies and their benefits, find more sustainable solutions to human activities, and raise the productivity of local resources. SE&SB organizations can have a primary role in increasing access to education. SE&SB organizations can effectively complement the traditional welfare systems by supplying the tailored services, which cannot be provided by the larger and standardized public providers. Since the focus of their activity is not on profit maximization, efficiency and effectiveness are achieved mainly by considering the social impact they produce. It is important that policy makers create a system that does not create monopolistic or oligopolistic advantages for SE&SB, promotes a competition based on social value and not on lower prices and gives to SE&SB the legal instruments to co-create services with public authorities.¹⁶

Resilient society and fairness between generations

The EU will be as much resilient in 2040, as much it succeeds in:

- Transitioning to renewable energy “dependency” towards energy clean, accessible and participated (renewable energy communities)
- Relying only on sustainable production of goods and services that are not harmful for the environment (sustainable production & consumption - SDG 12)
- Promoting social inclusion and cohesion among territories and people
- Designing industrial policies towards sustainable competitiveness and sustainable production & consumption
- Fostering social economies
- Implementing redistributive policies to mitigate inequalities in income and access to services
- Ensuring:
 - universal quality education and training to increase creative critical and caring thinking
 - universal smart public transport system
 - universal health system and housing schemes for the most vulnerable people

¹⁶ Yunus,M.;Biggeri,M.; Testi, E. (2021) Social Economy and Social Business Supporting Policies for Sustainable Human Development in a Post-COVID-19 World. (page 2,7,8)

- Organizing migration flows and international cooperation to foster SIW
- Obtaining durable peace via human security (Protection, Empowerment, and Solidarity)
- Safeguarding the principles of the EU Pillar of Social rights in the labor market
- Investing in transformative R&I
- Mitigating the digital divide
- Re-thinking the global finance and fiscal restructuring (to make the transition to SIW possible)
- Developing a policy for mass-media and transparent information to go beyond GDP

Policies that will intervene on these areas will also help to ensure a resilient society and fairness between generations; and it is worthy to remember that the EU is already moving and several aspects with policies, new laws, and plans, for which it will be important to strengthen existing targets. These are: on emissions reductions and climate neutrality (European Green Deal), biodiversity (Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Nature Restoration Law) on energy efficiency (Energy Efficiency Directive), on renewable energy (Renewable Energy Directive), on pollution (Zero Pollution Action Plan), on employment, skills and poverty reduction (European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan), on social and territorial cohesion (EU Cohesion Policy).

But another element is crucial in order to increase our possibilities of success: **education**. In this context the necessity is for a re-thinking and actualization of the education paradigm for the youth; and an intensive campaign to educate the actual policy makers, our politicians. The overarching message needs to change from considering a business successful, if it is profitable, to consider a business as a successful business, if it is socially and environmentally sustainable. Which means that needs to respect the environment and take care of people; it needs to protect both instead of protecting the profits at all costs. *"Here we come to the ultimate reason why the teaching of ego-nomics should be banned in respectable educational institutions. It legitimates - even idealizes - mental dysfunction and immoral behavior at odds with our true human nature essential to healthy societal function"*¹⁷. The main issues of the education system that need an update are¹⁸:

- The digital literacy of the teachers
- The obsolete pedagogical approaches
- The quality of the contents starting from the kinder-gardens and primary schools¹⁹
- The equality of opportunities across different status (economic, gender, social)

Also, as suggested during the conference "Making our economies fit for the people and the planet", in order to promote and encourage the process towards a resilient and fair society, we need to build capacity for and into the social society to advocate for SIW, with pressure groups, third sector organizations, citizens, and government at all levels. This is making economics more accessible to people's agency. On this respect is very interesting the work done by the DEAL, that has developed a policies course for local development (Wellbeing Economy Policy Design Course²⁰), which can be utilized in and for different context.

¹⁷ David C. Korten (2024). Eco-nomics for an Ecological Civilization. (page 6)

¹⁸ Strategic Foresight Report (2023)

¹⁹ Biggeri, Santi (2012) The Missing Dimensions of Children's Well-being and Well-becoming in Education Systems: Capabilities and Philosophy for Children

²⁰ <https://doughnuteconomics.org/tools/wellbeing-economy-policy-design-course>

Synergies and tensions

For some of the policy areas identified above progresses are already on the way, but on others tensions prevail and very little progress have been achieved. One of the most controversial topics is represented by the redistributive policies. Here below some thoughts on crucial points of debate and proposals for possible strategies:

- Redistribution:

Unfair redistribution of profits and wealth.

→ New redistribution policies to favor the poor but that guarantee that everybody is involved.

“National universal dividend” – financed by polluters and by the new forms of taxation (see below).

→ Public Investments for the provision of universal social services. In line with Olivier De Schutter, that is convinced that: *“If financed through strongly redistributive taxation schemes, universal basic services can contribute to reducing inequalities.”*²¹

→ Prioritize and incentivize Social Economies and Community Banking (see below)

- Regeneration via education of youth:

Obsolescence of contents and methods; besides of competences.

→ Re-thinking and actualization of the education paradigm for the youth.

- Individual and collective transformation of the 4 helixes actors

→ Strengthening of science-based policy toolkit²².

→ Intensive campaign to educate the actual policy makers.

- Migration flows:

Migrations flows are destabilizing EU welfare when they could and should be welcomed. EU is ageing and lack employees in health, construction and agriculture sectors²³ (SFR - 2023).

→ Regulation of migrants according to expertise and genuine humanitarian attitude.

- Durable peace: cohesion via human security:

A reflection on peace: the control over oil, often is the underlying reason that causes wars. This is because oil cannot be produced by humans and it is “controllable”, in the sense that it is stored in specific terrains and those terrains can be fenced after conquest. Renewable energy is available virtually anywhere and can be produced (after a lump investment) by virtually everybody. It cannot be controlled or fenced. It is unlikely that wars arise due to the control over solar panel or windmills.

*“The transition to renewable energy will reduce the number of conflicts. As countries become self-sufficient in energy, many incentives for conflict will diminish. The world will be more peaceful, there will be no reason to argue about energy when it is in the domains of all countries and at a low cost.”*²⁴

²¹ Olivier De Schutter (2024). Eradicating poverty beyond growth. (page 14)

²² A European Agenda To Navigate Uncertain Times (2024).

²³ Strategic Foresight Report 2023

²⁴ Ingemar Alvbom (2021). This is how wind and solar energy make the world more peaceful.

- Global finance and fiscal restructuring:

→ New forms of taxation²⁵: The EU should engage in coordinating EU efforts on taxation. This could include a tax on extreme wealth following the European Citizens' Initiative on the topic, a frequent flyer levy, an excess profit tax on fossil fuels and a financial transaction tax – (A small financial transactions tax, as proposed by Korten²⁶, on the purchase and sale of financial instruments such as stocks, bonds, foreign currencies, futures contracts, derivatives, and cryptocurrencies will eliminate most speculative trades without hindering mutually beneficial investment). To bolster national budgets and enhance sustainability goals, the EU should also encourage Member States to ensure more progressive taxation and implement environmental tax reforms, such as to apply the polluter-pays-principle, while guaranteeing that it does not negatively affect low-income groups in particular.

→ Also, the introduction of trade duties that penalize environmental unsustainable and unhealthy products could be considered; together with the tightening of taxation for weapons and military expenses. On the other hand, awards, as higher interest rate, could be guaranteed to investments in sustainable (in the SIW sense) businesses.

→ Prioritize and incentivize Community Banking also offers large potential to foster local development and ensure that any profits generated remain and are invested into the same communities increasing its resilience. → Replace private banks with a global system of community banks, owned by the community they serve.

All the proposed solutions take into consideration the problematic aspects caused by existing inequalities and attempt to mitigate their effect addressing the dynamics that increase the gaps between member of society.

The last item of the list above, that identifies the key areas of intervention, can be seen as an instrument to reach the overarching target which is a definitive shift to SIW of the policies' aspiration.

- Mass Propaganda to go beyond GDP:

In discussing this argument, the contribution²⁷ of the SPES project offers a voice to the debate and shed light on the path to follow in order to change the public perspective to permit that the SIW is effectively embrace, at least in the EU. To enhance a SHD vision, the SPES project aims to provide a political economy interpretation of the beyond-GDP movement when measuring development, societal progress and human wellbeing. This interpretation forms the theoretical foundation for developing principles and guidelines for a new measurement system, then the technical elements and choices in the design of appropriate composite indicators and dashboards, as well as the foundation for the following policy measures. At the same time, it highlights that theoretical and technical capacities are a necessary but not sufficient condition for this change of vision, goal and narrative, which is conditioned, if not dictated, by the political will and by the interactions among all societal actors. Thorbecke (2006), highlights that shifts in the development doctrine are rooted in the key interconnections between the definition and objectives of development, the assessment of development performance, and the formulation and execution of related policies, all of which are shaped by various theories and hypotheses. This equally applies to the beyond-GDP debate and movement, where four elements – concepts, models, measurement, and policies – need to be

²⁵ A European Agenda To Navigate Uncertain Times (2024).

²⁶ David C. Korten, (2024). Eco-nomics for an Ecological Civilization.

²⁷ Biggeri, M., Ferrannini, A., Gábos, A., Grande, C. S., Lelkes, O., Palencia-Esteban, A., Rougier, E. (2025). Towards a consensus on measuring transition performances within a Sustainable Human Development paradigm.

integrated to enhance a shared development vision. For this reason, there is the need to pay attention to and advance arguments and proposals with regard to four main areas of consensus:

- *Theoretical consensus*, in terms of alignment between different schools of thought that are all contributing to better measure and value what counts for the wellbeing of the people and of the planet.
- *Technical consensus*, in terms of advances and improvements in the technical design of composite indicators and dashboards.
- *Policy consensus*, in terms of effective uptake of a new measurement system by policy actors to make policy-making processes fully embedded into appropriate evidence on development, societal progress and wellbeing.
- *Public consensus*, through engagement and scrutiny of all citizens and all societal actors.

Indeed, given the increasing global push to the beyond-GDP debate and the proliferation of several prominent alternatives, these four consensuses appear essential to foster the alignment among different proposals by developing a clear, coherent and meaningful measurement system. This should involve the constellation of actors active in this process to make sure that a real shared change in the way we measure development, societal progress and human wellbeing is theoretically grounded, technically robust and feasible, and able to influence policy-making processes. All of the above together may give rise to a virtuous circle supporting the effective consolidation and institutionalization of a new development narrative.

- It is not just a technical-statistical issue but also a political obstacle

GDP itself is a political choice, and as such need to be treated and fought, in order to be substituted. Recognizing the fact that, GDP is in place thanks to a sophisticated propaganda, that “accompany” the western societies from birth, permit to set the discussion on the perspective that only propaganda can fight against propaganda, and competing with a system that make use of propaganda, without making use of propaganda yourself is a losing strategy²⁸. EU is a mass society and mass society is attentive to, and is moved by, primarily mass propaganda. If we are looking for a bottom-up push towards SIW framework, we need to involve the whole society, and the most effective way of talking to a mass society is to make use of mass propaganda. The public support needed for the change of paradigm, to be instrumental has to be, or at least to be commonly perceived, as a people’s choice. This crucial decision in supporting SIW over GDP can be induced by implementing the correct propaganda. We should not expect that this process could be brought forward only by expert - which in most of the cases already are in agreement - and politics; we need propaganda to drive the bottom-up’s request for it. This public request when present can be very useful and indeed be used by the politicians to base their consensus and consequent policies upon it. The challenge, is not just about presenting a viable alternative to GDP but ensuring that this alternative is not only understood but actively embraced by society as a whole.

- The chronology and interdependence of the 4 consensuses

We explained that the four types of consensuses need to interact and work simultaneously, but it is also true that they are developed by different groups of people, namely the different societal actors of the Quintuple Helix model - government, business, academia, civil society, natural environment - with the exception of the environment, that it is definitively in agreement. These different groups

²⁸ Jacques Ellul, (1962). Propaganda.

already naturally interact but not in a linear dependence. For instance, governments need to be elected, and the businesses need to obey laws. In building the consensus for a change of paradigm, that by definition will apply to the whole economic system, we need to take in consideration that politicians, therefore the governments, need to be legitimated (or at least feel like that through elections) by the people. This means that to finally see the governments advocating for a movement towards SIW, there is a need for the public demand, a request that comes from the people, from the bottom. In a democratic system, governments are particularly responsive to the will of the people, so the more the public can be mobilized to support a paradigm shift, the more likely governments will act. Hence, could be helpful to picture the four consensus as two sub-groups of two, where the theoretical and technical consensus are the ones that develop first, primarily but not exclusively by academia, and constitute the bulk of discussion; then the public consensus needs to legitimate and move the politicians: For governments to advocate for a shift towards SIW, there needs to be a public demand.

- *Theoretical and Technical Consensus*: Academia and other expert groups typically lead the development of the theoretical and technical consensus. These are the foundation of discussions and help to shape the knowledge base required to understand and implement SIW. It's a crucial starting point.

- *Public and Political Consensus*: After the theoretical consensus is established, the public consensus must be built. Once the people advocate for change, the political consensus will follow. Political actors (governments) are more likely to support the transition when they are responding to public pressure or when they believe that the people want this change. We are currently in a transition phase, where the theoretical and technical consensus has developed, but the public and political consensus still needs to catch up. This is a crucial moment, and the relationship between public demand and political action will be key in driving forward the shift towards SIW. The good news is that both the public and politicians have already participated to some extent in the construction of the theoretical consensus, which means they have some shared understanding of the need for change.

- *The Role of Propaganda (or Advocacy Campaigns)*: A go-beyond-GDP propaganda or advocacy campaign could indeed be a powerful tool in this transition phase. By shifting the narrative away from GDP and toward indicators that measure sustainable and inclusive wellbeing, such campaigns can increase public awareness and foster the needed support for change. Such a campaign could mobilize public opinion, push the conversation into the political sphere, and increase pressure on governments to adopt policies that prioritize SIW over traditional growth metrics. The alignment of the four consensus requires coordination, advocacy, and strategic action at multiple levels, especially in mobilizing public support and ensuring that politicians feel accountable to those demands.

Enhancing strategic foresight

The way forward is to reach consensus starting from the metrics. As the world is facing multiple and concomitant societal challenges and crises that require urgent action, the time to act and build

a crucial theoretical, technical, policy and public consensus detailed above is pressing. The way forward proposed by this brief contribution, to the SFR-2025, is to design a well-structured and participatory process of consultation to build a shared consensus. Three preliminary suggestions may arise from SPES²⁹ for this co-creation process, respectively dealing with who, how and when issues. **First**, the process should be built on a broad global alliance among the most relevant international organizations and supranational institutions, including the UN, the OECD, the European Union, and the top experts to coordinate convergence efforts of several prominent initiatives. **Second**, the process should be able to truly engage with experts from different disciplines and schools of thought (i.e., from the different “streams”) to make informed choices about the dimensions to be measured, as well as technical experts to make informed choices about indicators and their design, and policy experts to ensure the feasibility of uptake and use of a new system. **Third**, the process should start as soon as possible in 2025, as a new European Commission has just taken office, and taking advantage also of the very relevant advancements from the UN initiative “what counts”, from the OECD WISE Centre, from the JRC COIN, as well as from the ongoing work by several beyond-GDP “sister projects” funded by Horizon Europe - SPES, ToBe, WISE Horizons, WISER, and MERGE. We truly believe that all actors are ready, and all components are well set to let the different “streams” merge in a “river” that can finally ensure a coherent and meaningful approach to measuring societal progress.

To **further improve its approach to strategic foresight** to increase its impact on designing EU policies for a desirable future, the European Commission should therefore:

- Improve the collection, analysis, and use of data to anticipate emerging risks and opportunities and refine policies accordingly.
- Promote Public consultations, Surveys and Workshops. Strengthening cooperation with experts, businesses, and civil society organizations to design policies that are not only evidence-based but also inclusive.
- Gather meaningful feedback from the population regarding the targets they want the public administration to prioritize and the policies they believe should be implemented.
- Develop a forecasting model for nature degradation and social wellbeing, to better anticipate future challenges, and test policy alternatives.
- Develop more flexible, adaptable policies that can evolve in response to unforeseen events and changes in societal needs.
- Ultimate transition to “Beyond GDP”

Final remark

The foundation of modern economies relies on the consumption of finite resources, especially fossil fuels, to fuel growth, which ultimately leads to environmental degradation, resource depletion, and inequities in wealth distribution. The concept of endless economic growth on a planet with limited resources is inherently unsustainable - the paradox of infinite growth within a finite world. The

²⁹ Biggeri, M., Ferrannini, A., Gábos, A., Grande, C. S., Lelkes, O., Palencia-Esteban, A., Rougier, E. (2025). Towards a consensus on measuring transition performances within a Sustainable Human Development paradigm.

necessary transition to renewable energy needs to be supported by a redistribution of wealth and opportunities to address inequality - ensuring that prosperity is shared more equitably among all people.

Regardless of the level of wealth that an individual or a whole economy is able to reach, there is no entity that can pay a tsunami wave to change its path. This is the unbitable power of nature that affected by the endless growth paradigm, that caused the climate change, reacts to the generated pollution with its disastrous effects and consequences. Beside the catastrophe that happened in Thailand and neighboring countries in 2004, a more recent example of this have been the fire wave that destroyed, mainly but not only, the coastline of Los Angeles, bringing down many luxury properties belonging to the share of population which is also the wealthier. None of them could use their wealth to avoid the disaster neither to selfishly have only their own houses saved from the fire. These are powerful points about the futility of wealth in the face of nature's overwhelming force. Despite our advancements and the prosperity of certain segments of society, no amount of money or influence can alter or control natural events such as tsunamis, wildfires, or the broader impacts of climate change. These disasters highlight a fundamental reality: our efforts to protect ourselves from nature's wrath, while valuable and necessary, are ultimately limited by forces far beyond our control. The examples provided - like the 2004 tsunami and the recent wildfires in Los Angeles - serve as stark reminders of this. The fact that even the wealthiest individuals and communities could not shield themselves from these catastrophes underscores the interconnectedness of all humans, regardless of economic status. Nature's power doesn't discriminate, and the consequences of our collective actions, like the pollution driving climate change, affect everyone, often disproportionately. This speaks to the urgency of addressing the underlying environmental issues at a global scale. No one can "buy" their way out of the problems caused by the endless growth paradigm and its impact on the climate. In this sense, perhaps the biggest lesson is indeed the need for collective action, where solutions must be built around sustainability and resilience, and definitively not by wealth or power.

"We are not dealing with a broken system in need of repair. We are dealing with a failed system in desperate need of replacement".³⁰

³⁰ David C. Korten, (2024). Eco-nomics for an Ecological Civilization.

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