

How nice goals work together in a system

Iván Gyulai

The Ecological Institute for Sustainable Development

gyulai@ecolinst.hu

Goals at the cost of nature

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goals at the cost of nature

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Poverty comes out from the existing institutions, such as money, profit, competitiveness and insufficient access to resources.

Sufficient access to resources results enhanced pressure on natural resources.

Goals at the cost of nature

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

It is impossible to offer more and better food at an always growing world population, changing natural environment, depleting resources

Goals at the cost of nature

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all

We produce energy for using energy

There are two issues:

- Energy produced from which sources
- Energy used for what purposes

We have exceeded the resilience of the biosphere, and consume half of the production of the world metabolic system, halving the natural ecosystems. We use energy to maintain an always growing structure, making war etc.

Goals at the cost of nature

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Full employment rate means additional production and calls for enhanced consumption, and results in increasing resource demand.

Goals at the cost of nature

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Innovation results in less employment because of labour efficiency

Infrastructure and industrialisation build on more resource use, and require ecosystems

Goals at the cost of nature

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

Equality means poor countries getting richer

Are rich countries getting poorer?

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 11 requires natural resources

Goals that might work for nature

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Goals might work for nature

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all

Education can work for a better society, but the current education contributes to the existing problem

Less knowledge much wisdom is needed

Goals might work for nature

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Adaptation contributes to enhanced resource use

Some of the technical solutions shift environmental burdens, such as using biomass

Goals might work for nature

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

These are almost the same:
sustainable use of
resources

Goals might work for nature

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Yes, if the concept is meant to stay within the limits of the carrying capacity

But if yes, then we need a significant reduction of primary material use

A resource use cap required for this

How nice goals work in a system

Why not work

to improve the state of the environment, eradicate poverty, and enhance economic growth in one regime?

What do you need for economic growth?

Gaining competitive advantages in the sale
of products and services

Why do you need competitive advantages?

To maximise profit

What you need to do to gain competitive
advantages in the sale of products and
services (to maximise profit)?

A competitive price

How to achieve a competitive price?

- Enhance labour efficiency: less employment, better and more products for less wages
- Tax exemption and tax allowance
- Natural resources at a low price
- A modest expenditure for social well-being
- Shift negative external costs (environmental and social burdens to the society)

What comes out from the system?

- Investors invest into countries where resources (natural and labour) are cheap
- Taxes are low
- Environmental standards are modest
- State gives helping hands
- Social burdens: exploitation, low wages
- Environmental burdens: utilisation of natural resources, pollution
- Global movement of goods
- Global shift of social and environmental problems
- Paralysed working opportunities in the non-competitive countries

So, why not work?

- We want sustainable growth but the high environmental standards are obstacles for a competitive economy
- We want inclusive growth but the labour efficiency needed for a competitive economy results in less employment
- We want to achieve higher efficiency, but it contributes to a growing structure with a growing environmental pressure
- We want smart, sustainable and inclusive growth but we have less community income from the „competitive” economy, less source for education, environment and social inclusion
- We want knowledge society, but we neglect the wisdom and the ethics to use knowledge

The needs of SD

Sustainable economic growth:

Absolute decoupling of GDP
growth and environmental
burdens

Social equity: we want poor
well off, but we did not want
rich to moderate their
demands

None of the goals answer the underlying cause

- Wrong pattern of values: well-being overrides other values
- Existing institutions and structures strengthen the wrong structure of values
- Wrong perception towards development/quality of life
- Solutions based on a bad perception: economic growth is the aim, people/nature are resources
- A wrong macroeconomic model, there is no growth without growing consumption
- Unlimited resource use

Goals wanted!

- Change values: moral, ethics, confidence, mutual understanding, love, health, friendship are values as well.
- Make world less technical, more spiritual!
- Change existing institutions to make values changed!
- Change the perception towards development/quality of life!
- Change the existing macroeconomic model
- Set resource cap to limit natural resource use