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New indicators of wealth in European governance

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THE EUROPEAN UNION TAKES UP THE DEBATE ON THE NEW INDICATORS OF WEALTH

Since the early 2000s, the debate on the new indicators of wealth has gradually been institutionalised. The European Union is part of this process: EU policies, whether sectoral or general, now use a large number of environmental and social indicators. In 2007, the European Commission launched an initiative known as "Beyond GDP", with a view to developing new indicators of wealth aimed at improving European governance, not only for policies implemented by the European Union, but also for those of the member states.

HARMONISATION OF ACCOUNTING AND ALIGNMENT OF INDICATORS

One of the main achievements of this initiative is that it launched a process of harmonising national environmental accounts between member states. However, it failed to prompt any discussions on the alignment of the indicators used by the different EU strategies, or on the articulation of indicators developed at the national, EU and international levels. Absolute harmonisation between the different levels is unrealistic, or even counter-productive, as it would mask the differences between the policy perspectives underlying the ambitions of each country in terms of sustainable development. However, the European Union would benefit from launching discussions on the articulation of its indicators with those chosen by the member states, in order to guarantee a certain degree of comparison between countries.

NEW INDICATORS WITH NO REAL POLITICAL OR SYMBOLIC IMPORTANCE

Despite the ambitions of the "Beyond GDP" initiative, the European Union has failed to develop a new indicator of wealth capable of complementing GDP. This goal was clearly dependent on the capacity—currently lacking—to develop a common EU approach to "what really matters" in terms of sustainable development. Moreover, the cognitive framework of the European institutions remains focused on economic and financial indicators, as shown by the budget and fiscal coordination mechanisms implemented further to the 2008 financial crisis. The European Union's conversion to the new indicators of wealth is therefore far from complete, but is certainly underway.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gross domestic product (GDP) has fallen out of favour. This key indicator of national accounting, a barometer of progress in Western societies since the post-World War II period, is under increasing pressure. Three problems lead to criticism of GDP. First, GDP growth since the 1980s has been accompanied by growing inequalities, demonstrating the limitations of growth in production and consumption in terms of social well-being. This lag between growth and well-being is not only seen at the collective level, but also at the individual level, as shown by the disconnect between GDP and the subjective measurement of life satisfaction. Finally, by only accounting for monetary economic activities, GDP ignores the environmental degradation caused by these activities. This questioning of the role of GDP as an indicator of progress and, more broadly, of the hegemony of economic and financial indicators has intensified as indicators have become increasingly important in steering public action and state governance: the 1980s saw the emergence of New Public Management methods based on the principle of steering public action according to performance.

Although the issue of "alternative" or "complementary" indicators to GDP was raised as early as the 1970s, initiatives aimed at developing such indicators have gradually been institutionalised since the 2000s, whether at the level of the regional authorities,[1] at country level (the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission in France,[2] but also in other countries [Chancel, Thiry and Demailly, 2014]) or at the international level (the OECD Better Life initiative)[3]. The European Union is an integral part of this process: many social and environmental indicators have been developed in the context of the implementation of sectoral policies, but also of general strategic policies, such as the Europe 2020 strategy[4] or the Strategy for sustainable development. In 2007, the European Commission[5] also organised an international conference entitled "Beyond GDP: Measuring progress, true wealth, and the well-being of nations". Bringing together 650 representatives of 50 countries, this conference was intended be a key stage in European and international discussions on the new indicators of wealth (European Commission *et al.*, 2007). In his opening speech, the President of the Commission called for "the sort of breakthrough that we saw in the 1930s", when GDP became prevalent in national accounting, and for the creation of indicators capable of adapting or complementing GDP, in order to address the social and environmental challenges of the early 21st century. This conference marked the beginning of what was to become the EU "Beyond GDP" initiative, which was formalised two years later in a European Commission communication (Commission of the European Communities, 2009). This communication, a kind of "roadmap" for the initiative, identifies the actions that can be taken in the short and medium term in order to "develop more inclusive indicators that provide a more reliable knowledge base for better public debate and policy-making" (Commission of the European

1. For some examples, see the BrainPoOL project (Bringing Alternative Indicators into Policy) www.brainpoolproject.eu/case-studies/
2. www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/fr/
3. www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/fr
4. Adopted in 2010, the Europe 2020 strategy is the European Union's 10-year growth strategy. Its aim is to address the economic crisis and to establish the conditions for "smart, sustainable and inclusive" growth (ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_fr.htm).
5. In partnership with the European Parliament, the OECD, the Club of Rome and WWF.

Communities, 2009). The Commission's goal is twofold: first, creating new indicators of wealth and, second, using these indicators to improve European governance.[6]

The new indicators of wealth have therefore emerged in EU policies. What role do they play in EU governance? What challenges do their different uses pose? This analysis is based on a literature review and 12 individual interviews conducted with the different stakeholders involved in the "Beyond GDP" initiative (European institutions, environmental NGOs, think tanks and academics working on the issue of new indicators of wealth, French and European statistical offices, and international organisations).[7]

2. WHAT PURPOSE DO INDICATORS SERVE?

We can identify three roles or uses of indicators in collective policy making.

First, the widespread use of certain indicators in the political discourse or in the media has given them a *symbolic* status: that of an allegory of progress or wealth. How many times have we heard: "Good news, French growth increased by 0.1 percentage point in the last semester"? The metonymy consisting in describing GDP growth as simply "growth" reflects this symbolic dimension acquired by GDP.[8] By imposing on society a common regulatory framework, and distinguishing what is good (anything that contributes to GDP growth) from what is not (anything that does not contribute to this growth), GDP has a performative effect, in that it defines the cognitive and action frameworks of the different stakeholders, whether political leaders, the media or citizens.

Second, indicators can be used as tools for *steering* public action. Indicators are used at all stages of public policy making, both upstream to legitimise and institutionalise a phenomenon, to monitor its evolution, and possibly to set objectives, and downstream to evaluate the results of a policy strategy. This evaluation can be carried out by *rulers* themselves, internally, or by civil society or the political opposition, in other words externally. The unemployment rate, for example, gives political importance to the issue of unemployment, leads politicians to make more or less explicit commitments to reducing this indicator, and makes it possible to evaluate the success or failure of public policies on employment. It should be noted that indicators can serve to steer public action at the level of both strategy (see for example the Europe 2020 strategy and its dashboard of indicators) and the specific implementation of sectoral measures (see in particular the use of indicators in impact studies).

Third, the symbolic power of some indicators and the importance given to indicators in the steering of political action gives them a role in the *policy debate*: indicators are mobilised in discourse by all stakeholders, including civil society, to legitimise or on the contrary delegitimise certain issues. Thus, by generating additional information about environmental and social problems (indicators of CO_2 emissions or income inequalities), the new indicators serve as "ammunition" in the European policy debate for policy makers and associations wishing to redirect budget discussions towards these other dimensions of the European Union "crisis". Alternatively, the GDP indicator can be used to legitimise or delegitimise environmental and social issues. Stakeholders seek to preserve or to give an institutional role to the indicators they prefer, and to ensure they are used as tools for steering public action, or even as indicators of an alternative approach to progress.

In short, the new indicators of wealth can have three types of usage, which are summarised in the Table 1.

Table 1. The different uses of indicators

Types of usage	Definition
Symbolic	Some indicators are the basis of a common, evolving framework, of an approach to progress that is common to the whole society.
Steering public action	Indicators are tools for developing and steering public policy, and in particular for evaluating the effectiveness of policy strategies and sectoral measures.
Policy debate	Indicators are used to legitimise or delegitimise issues, by many stakeholders who then attempt to include "their" indicators in the steering of public action and a new approach to progress.

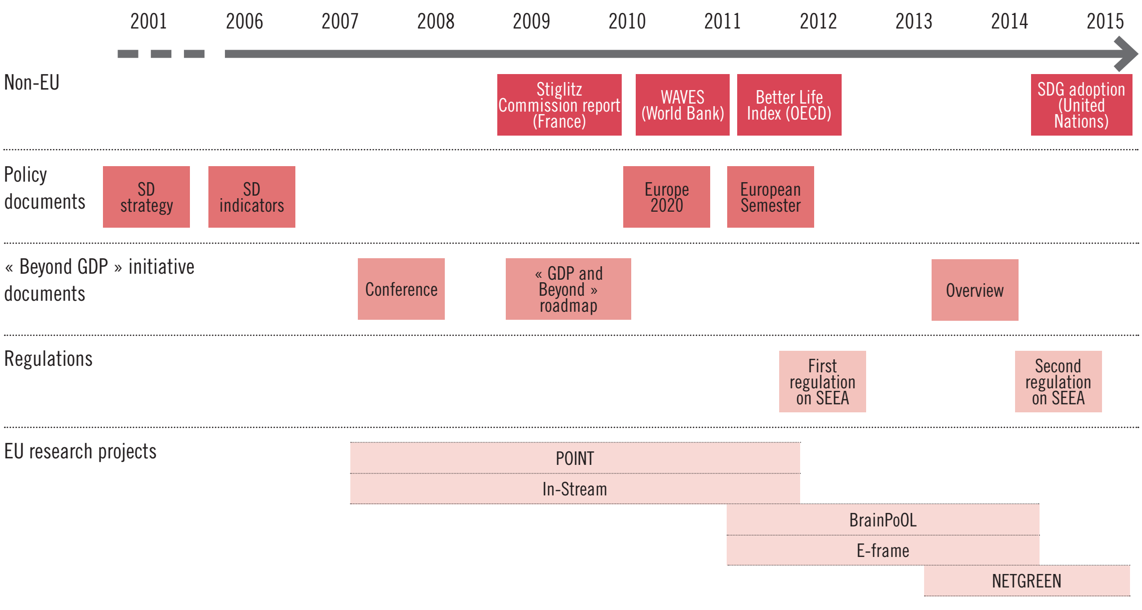
It is important to note that the relevance of the "form" of indicators varies according to the use intended for them. Thus, to have symbolic importance, indicators must be simple to understand

6. Discussions on the use of indicators in policy are largely initiated through the EU Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7). See the research projects POINT (Policy Influence of Indicators, 2008-2011) and BRAINPOol (Bringing Alternative Indicators into Policy, 2011-2014).

7. These semi-structured interviews took place under the Chatham House Rule in order to facilitate freedom of speech: participants are free to use the information received on this occasion, but must not reveal the identity or affiliation of the people who provided this information.

8. Meaning many of our fellow citizens no longer know which type of growth is concerned.

Figure 1. The European Union and the institutionalisation of the new indicators



and to communicate to the media and citizens. This condition is met by composite indicators such as GDP, the Human Development Index (HDI) or the ecological footprint, and even by dashboards comprising a limited number of indicators (around three). Steering public action using indicators also implies issues of communicability, since they must be made known to the whole political class, and even to citizens. But because they should enable ex-ante or ex-post evaluations of the effectiveness of a given policy strategy on the issue in question, they are more useful if disaggregated. This is why the Europe 2020 strategy, which is intended to steer EU public policies, uses eight indicators such as the employment rate or CO_2 emissions (Figure 1).

The symbolic use of an indicator also raises an issue of temporality: in order for an indicator to attain the status of a symbol, it must be ongoing and sustained over time. If GDP is seen to reflect progress, this is also because it became prevalent in national accounting as early as the 1930s and survives regular changes of methodology. But although the symbolic importance of indicators requires them to stand the test of time, their use as a steering tool cannot exceed the time horizon of public policy makers, and these indicators must be changed every 10 years, or even every five years.

3. THE NEW INDICATORS OF WEALTH IN EU POLICIES

3.1. The institutionalisation of the new indicators

The European Union is involved in the process of institutionalising the debate on the new indicators of wealth within the international organisations. The “Better Life” initiative launched by the OECD in 2003 is a pioneer in the field; it has resulted in the creation of an interactive tool to measure well-being (the Better Life index), which is used to compare countries according to the importance given to different well-being criteria. The United Nations also plays an important role in this movement, through the revision process for the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA), which aims to develop a standard statistical framework at the international level on the relationships between the environment and the economy. This initiative has been echoed by the World Bank, which encourages the use of the SEEA and the development of natural capital accounting through the WAVES project (Wealth Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services). Finally, in 2013, the United Nations set up a working group on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which follow on from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): the SDGs were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015.

These initiatives have fostered the consolidation of international statistical expertise on the new indicators of wealth.

In addition to statistical institutionalisation, the alternative indicators to GDP have also entered EU policies. Since 2001, the European Union has had a Strategy for sustainable development, which was supplemented in 2006 by the inclusion of 12 sustainable development indicators (European Communities, 2006). The Europe 2020 strategy advocating smart, sustainable and inclusive growth is based on eight indicators, six of which are environmental and social.

3.2. The "Beyond GDP" initiative

The "Beyond GDP" initiative began in 2007 with a conference organised jointly by the European Commission and the European Parliament. Since then, the initiative has been led by the Commission. The website for the initiative is hosted on the site of the Commission,[9] which has also been responsible for communicating on the initiative through the publication of newsletters since late 2008. Initially, two directorates-general managed the initiative: DG Environment (DG ENV) and DG Eurostat (the statistical office of the European Union). Two other DGs are now included in the initiative: DG Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN) and DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL). Although the goal of this expansion was to ensure broader support for the initiative, more effective dissemination of these indicators within the administrative services (which is essential for the "steering policy" use), and the decompartmentalisation of environmental and social issues, it also resulted in confusion about political leadership.

The initiative was formalised in 2009 through a Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament entitled "GDP and beyond: measuring progress in a changing world". The semantic shift operated between this title and that of the 2007 conference ("Beyond GDP – Measuring Progress, True Wealth, and the Well-being of Nations") reflects a realignment of the objectives of the initiative with those of the Commission, as set out in the opening speech of the 2007 conference: the goal is not to replace GDP or to adapt it, but rather to complement it. The communication also includes policy considerations linked to the resolution of the economic and financial crisis that erupted the previous year: the new indicators are seen as tools to assess the equity of the European recovery plan and to assist the European Union's ecological transition.

9. www.beyond-gdp.eu

In 2010, the European Parliament passed a resolution supporting the Commission's communication, and thereby legitimising it for all the European institutions (European Parliament, 2010). In its report, the European Parliament nevertheless stressed the lack of a strategy on the uses of these new indicators, and recalled the need to connect the work of the initiative to the European Union's overall policy strategy, especially the Europe 2020 strategy. Institutional recognition of the initiative also depends on the declarations of the Council of the European Union, which make several references to the issue of developing new indicators in the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy (European Council, 2012a; European Council, 2012b). Finally, other European Union institutions, such as the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, are involved in the initiative in an advisory capacity, and provide their opinions on its objectives and achievements (Committee of the Regions, 2011; European Economic and Social Committee, 2009, 2011, 2012).

3.3. Assessment of objectives of the 2009 roadmap

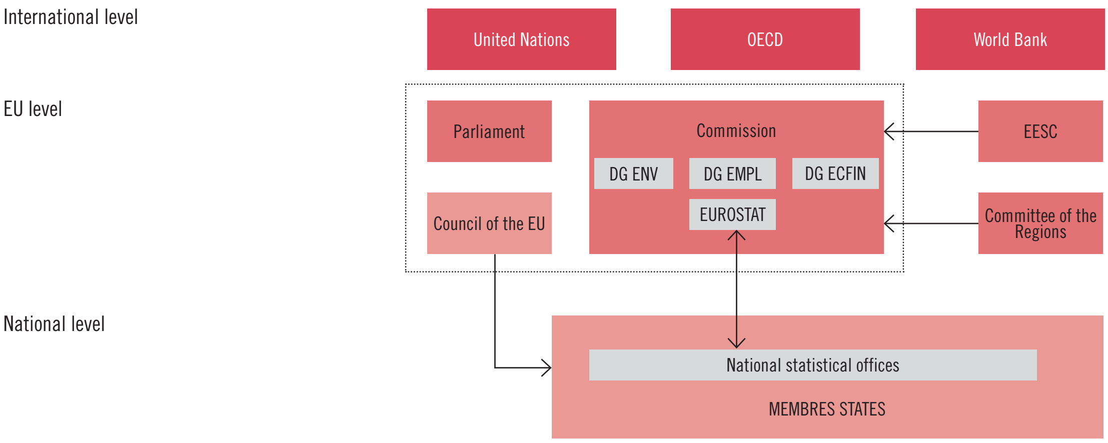
The 2009 communication sets out five actions to be implemented in the short and medium terms. In 2013, the Commission produced a working document assessing these objectives (European Commission, 2013). Two categories of action seem to stand out upon reading these documents. The first concerns the improvement of existing accounting frameworks, whether through more frequent environmental and social data updates, or the alignment of national accounting frameworks with UN norms. The second category of action is the creation of new indicators.

3.3.1. Improving accounting frameworks

In 2009, the European Commission recognised the discrepancy between economic and financial data updates on the one hand, and environmental and social data updates on the other. By way of example, social and environmental data have a time lag of around two and a half years and one and a half years respectively, whereas for GDP, this lag is no longer than three months.[10] In the context of the "Beyond GDP" initiative, different measures have been taken to speed up the data collection

10. Source: interviews. GDP estimates given the same year are however only provisional estimates, which are refined over time. The definitive estimate is thus only released in N+3 in France.

Figure 2. Stakeholders in the "Beyond GDP" initiative



process and to develop statistical methods that help to improve indicator updates. These efforts have resulted in improvements in greenhouse gas emissions data updates. Another avenue for action has been the development of interactive tools enabling citizens to provide real-time information to the European Environment Agency about the quality of their environment, for example concerning noise[11].

The other activity aimed at improving accounting consisted in harmonising social and environmental accounts in member states. This objective is part of the efforts made by the United Nations to develop a standard statistical framework on the relationships between the environment and the economy. In this respect, the initiative made some substantial progress since it contributed to the adoption by the Parliament and the Council of two regulations[12] obliging the member states to integrate six SEEA modules into their accounting systems: greenhouse gas emissions, environmental taxes, material flows, environmental protection expenditure, environmental goods and services sector, and physical energy flow accounts. For social issues, national accounting systems now contain some information, but the Commission considers progress made to be minor.

3.3.2. Developing new indicators of wealth

In order to reduce socioeconomic disparities between the regions of the European Union and between social categories, in 2009 the Commission called for the development of disaggregated indicators enabling more effective measurement of the distribution of wealth and inequalities. This goal resulted in the development of poverty and development indexes calculated for each of the 227 EU regions, serving to inform EU cohesion policy.[13] Different indicators have also been developed to provide information on socioeconomic inequalities at the EU level, such as the "at risk of poverty" rate[14] or the indicator comparing the highest and lowest incomes.[15]

The Commission's other goal in terms of the creation of indicators was the development of two composite indicators intended to complement GDP: an environmental index and a well-being index at the EU level. However, this goal has not been achieved. Although the Commission spearheaded the development of two composite environmental indicators—an indicator of environmental pressures generated in the EU, and another indicator including environmental pressures generated through imports—these are still at the pilot stage. Where well-being is concerned, no aggregated indicator has been developed.

Finally, the last goal in terms of the creation of indicators consisted in developing a European sustainable development scoreboard. The indicators developed in the context of the Strategy for sustainable development suffer from data update problems and a lack of communication. "*The aim of the SD [Sustainable Development] Scoreboard is*

11. www.eea.europa.eu/mobile
12. Regulations 691/2011 and 538/2014 adopted by the Parliament and the European Council. See Figure 1.
13. EU cohesion policy is the EU's main investment policy. It targets cities and regions in order to support economic dynamics, sustainable development and citizens' quality of life.
14. The percentage of the population living in households with an income below 60% of the national median income.
15. Ratio of the top and bottom income quintiles.

to complement the existing EU set of SD Indicators (SDIs). The SDIs are for monitoring the objectives and actions of the SD strategy in detail, but not for communicating overall achievements and challenges in the area of SD" (European Commission, 2013: 24). The challenge for the sustainable development scoreboard was to go beyond the use of sustainable development indicators as a tool for steering public action, in order to give them symbolic importance. But this goal has not been achieved.

4. WHAT IS THE SITUATION FOR EU GOVERNANCE?

4.1. Progress at the statistical level, and mixed results for the creation of new indicators

First, it is clear that some significant progress has been made in terms of improving existing accounting frameworks, whether in terms of socio-environmental data updates or the harmonisation of accounting systems at the EU level. Considerable efforts have been made to address the issue of social and environmental indicators in the field of statistical research, whether for methodological research or the provision of additional resources for data collection. This contribution transcends the borders of the European Union, as shown by the statistical partnerships with international organisations such as the OECD, the United Nations or the World Bank.

For the development of new indicators, the picture is less clear. New indicators have indeed been developed, especially social ones: the risk of poverty and social exclusion, income disparities, consumer conditions, etc. However, in terms of composite indicators to complement GDP, or the sustainable development scoreboard, the European Union has not achieved its goals.

4.2. New indicators with no symbolic importance at the EU level

Composite indicators and limited scoreboards could have a symbolic importance, reflecting a common view of progress and "imposing" this view. Unfortunately, as we have just seen, the European Union has failed to produce such indicators or scoreboards.

Why? Beyond the methodological challenges posed by the construction of these indicators, it appears that it is more a case of political challenges having restricted this goal. Composite indicators and scoreboards imply political consensus on what is supposed to be measured and therefore valued, or in other words a common view of what is meant by sustainable development, or even of the European Union's political project, by prioritising and articulating the different goals and corresponding indicators, or of what is meant by social and environmental well-being. However, a common view of this kind is far from existing within the EU institutions (Sébastien and Bauler, 2013).

Moreover, the production of such indicators with symbolic importance, as well as their actual symbolic effect, requires the prior involvement of civil society, including the media, which are completely absent from the "Beyond GDP" initiative, for example, or at least a real communication and dissemination strategy once these indicators have been better defined. GDP has thus acquired a symbolic dimension through its use as a negotiating tool in social forums, whether within companies or during discussions between states and their social partners. By becoming a political issue in the defence of private interests in the context of social negotiations, GDP has gained visibility in citizen's individual existence, and has consequently acquired a symbolic status. Where the "Beyond GDP" initiative is concerned, communication efforts are limited to a dedicated website, which is unclear for citizens and the media. Citizen participation in the choice of indicators, especially when they aggregate different policy dimensions, increases their legitimacy and their potential for widespread adoption. Furthermore, over and above than the final indicator chosen, it is the process of debating and choosing indicators that can help to change the common view of European progress, between member states and between groups of stakeholders. The performative effect of indicators is associated with an effect that can be described as "procedural". However, it is clear that the "Beyond GDP" initiative, like the European Commission roadmap, is centred on statistical points and aimed solely at expert debate, with the general public largely forgotten.

4.3. Non-harmonised steering of public action using new social and environmental indicators

The new indicators of wealth are used in European Union governance in a disorganised manner without any real visibility: each EU policy or strategy has its own set of indicators, despite the fact that these overlap in terms of goals. Although the Europe 2020 strategy is consistent with the goals of the EU Strategy for sustainable development, the environmental and social indicators mobilised in both strategies are different, which poses problems of coherence at the EU level. This raises the question of whether the use of harmonised indicators would ensure more widespread adoption or greater coherence of EU policies. This harmonisation of indicators nevertheless requires agreement on a common approach to sustainable development. It would of course have been helpful if an exercise such as the "Beyond GDP" initiative had created a forum in which this kind of political project could be discussed, but this was not its initial goal, which explains why it failed to initiate discussions on the coordination between the different EU strategies. However, it laid the foundations to do so with the harmonisation of national environmental accounts.

Table 2. Comparative table of sustainable development indicators and Europe 2020 indicators.

Type of indicators	Strategy for sustainable development (12 indicators)	Europe 2020 strategy (8 indicators)
economic	GDP growth/inhabitant	Employment rate
	Domestic material consumption relative to real GDP	Ratio of GERD to GDP
	Official development assistance as share of gross national income	
environmental	Total GHG emissions	CO2 emissions reductions targets (as % relative to 1990 levels)
	Gross inland energy consumption by fuel type	Share of renewable energies
	Changes in farmland bird populations	Reduction in energy consumption (in Mtep)
	Fish catches outside safe biological limits	
	Energy consumption of transport relative to real GDP	
social	At-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers	Share of early leavers from education and training
	Current and projected old-age dependency ratio	Population aged 30-34 with tertiary educational attainment
	Healthy life years and life expectancy at birth, by sex	Number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion
	Level of citizens' confidence in EU institutions	

Another question raised is that of the coherence of indicators developed at the EU level with those developed at the national level. In France for example, the Sas bill adopted in April 2015 provides that the major reforms undertaken by the government must be evaluated according to well-being and sustainability indicators. However, the scoreboard for these indicators[16] proposed by France Stratégie and the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (Aussilloux et al., 2015) was defined without attempting to ensure coherence with the EU sustainable development indicators or the Europe 2020 strategy indicators. This issue of coherence between the different levels of governance is even more acute given that the United Nations recently adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals accompanied by 167 targets, which the countries are expected to achieve by 2030. The choice of indicators for the SDGs should not be entirely free choice, and should instead help to inform collective discussions on the key challenges of transforming our societies. The debate on the indicators for the SDGs chosen by the member states and those of the European Union is one of the major issues of the reform of the EU growth strategy 2020-2030.

4.4. The new indicators in the EU policy debate?

Without seriously challenging the reference framework represented by GDP, it is clear that the social and environmental indicators and discussions linked to the "Beyond GDP" initiative have provided the environmental and social "causes" with new policy tools. By generating additional information about the issues associated with these two dimensions of human development, the new indicators serve as "ammunition" in the EU policy debate to legitimise these dimensions.

The European Semester, which is an institutional mechanism for the coordination of economic and budgetary policies within the European Union,[17] provides an interesting illustration. The crisis revealed an increase in inequalities in the distribution of wealth and income (European Commission, 2014), which led the Commission to integrate a new scoreboard of key social and employment indicators in the Semester (European Commission, 2014). As regards the environment, it is interesting to note that the European Parliament and the Council have taken up the key argument of the initiative—the need to complement GDP with other indicators in order to appreciate

16. There are 10 of these indicators: the employment rate, productive assets, private and public debt, healthy life years, subjective well-being, income inequalities, the population with tertiary educational attainment, the carbon footprint, the abundance of birds and the recycling rate.

17. www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-semester/

the sustainability of progress—and are calling for the integration of environmental indicators in the European Semester (European Parliament and European Council, 2013), a tool for budget alignment that is central to the EU policy debate, given the importance of these criteria in the relationships between the EU and its member states since the 2007 crisis, but also previously. The policy options may therefore be changed, as shown by the initiative underway to "green" the Semester.[18] The new indicators of wealth are therefore clearly of use in the policy debate, which will potentially enable their subsequent use in the steering of certain EU policies.

5. CONCLUSION

For more than a decade, therefore, EU policies and strategies have included environmental and social indicators. The agenda for "alternative" indicators to GDP has nevertheless gained considerable visibility since 2007 and the launch of what is now known as the "Beyond GDP" initiative. Far from challenging the merits of GDP, the goal of this initiative was to provide new indicators in order to take greater account of the social and environmental dimensions of human development, and to use these to improve EU governance. More than a decade after the launch of the debate, our analysis provides a mixed picture. The initiative has enabled considerable progress to be made in terms of accounting, with the improvement of socio-environmental data collection and the expansion of accounting systems to include environmental and social issues. It has also contributed to the development of international statistical expertise on this question, and has played a part in the creation of several new indicators. It has thus laid the foundations for, but failed to produce, composite indicators and scoreboards that are easy to communicate, which are essential to a political and "symbolic" use of the new indicators of wealth by the European Union. It may, however, be assumed that the initiative has had an influence on EU policy options, especially through the argument developed around the limitations of GDP. Some more disaggregated indicators have also made headway as instruments to steer EU public action, even within the Europe 2020 strategy, although this has contributed to the growing number of scoreboards composed of around 10 indicators including economic, social and environmental dimensions.

18. ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/green_semester /about_en.htm

Much work remains to be done to ensure that the EU produces, but also specifically uses, the new indicators of wealth: the people we met over the course of this study unanimously acknowledged that the key challenge for the new indicators of wealth was that of their use.

In particular, the cognitive framework of the European institutions remains centred on economic and financial indicators, as shown by the mechanisms for budgetary and fiscal coordination implemented further to the financial crisis. Although in 2009, the Commission saw the economic crisis as an opportunity to develop new indicators of wealth that were not limited to GDP growth alone, the reading of the crisis in 2010 was purely economic and financial (European Commission, 2010). GDP growth was reaffirmed as an absolute priority, along with job creation and fiscal consolidation. The European Economic and Social Committee (2012) noted that: "a little less than two years after the above-mentioned communication, the European Commission itself, while pursuing new ways of seeking development and social progress [...] is still employing conventional tools and approaches that focus on only certain dimensions of the economic aspect and leaving out the bulk of social or environmental aspects". In this context, it is not surprising to note the progressive weakening of political support from the Commission for the "Beyond GDP" initiative, as mentioned by many of the people interviewed. The initiative is thus chronologically discontinuous: the assessment of the roadmap, initially planned for 2011, only took place in 2013, and did not benefit from the media visibility that characterised the 2007 conference and the 2009 roadmap.

To conclude, it is worth noting that in its 2013 working document on progress made by the initiative, the Commission recognises that the issue of uses of the new indicators remains problematic, and identifies a certain number of challenges—mostly technical or methodological—to be addressed. The key message of the Commission is that the more we improve the scientific quality of indicators, the more usable they will be. This hypothesis is nevertheless radically questioned by social science research focusing on uses of indicators in policy making. Thus, according to Sébastien and Bauler, it is not so much the scientific quality of indicators that determines their use in policy making, but rather the cognitive frameworks of users, as well as the general political context in which the indicators are developed and used (Sébastien and Bauler, 2013). The authors stress the limitations of leaving it to the experts to define indicators, thereby excluding stakeholders that are likely to use them, especially policymakers and citizens. The disconnect between scientific discussions on the new indicators and their use in the political sphere is also highlighted in the reports and opinions of the European Parliament and the consultative bodies for the initiative (Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety of the European Parliament, 2011; European Economic and Social Committee, 2012). Including policy makers and citizens in the process of defining indicators, especially composite indicators with symbolic importance, is no easy task, in the sense that it would give greater visibility to the ideological divides contained in the methodological choices for measuring "what really counts". But the development of new indicators of wealth at the EU level would undoubtedly have as much to gain from the democratisation of their selection procedures as from the strengthening of their intrinsic scientific quality.

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