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Joint Meeting on Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making: Focus on Strategic Environmental Assessment

Public participation in the era of the green economy

Mr. Francesco La Camera, Ministry of
Environment, Land & Sea, Italy
francesco.lacamera@fastwebnet.it

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The Question

- The financial and climate change crises marking the end of the first decade of the 2000s.
- This double crisis, as it is often referred to, is perhaps the most significant challenge to the viability of current market-economy models

The Answer is in the functioning of the market

- Overall, policy responses under the various labels of green economy, green growth, sustainable growth, green new deal, reveal a common approach.
- The ‘green turn’ suggests a set of policies, including environmental taxation or subsidies, capable of changing price structures, making it desirable and profitable to move in the direction of green(er) production. The framing of the problem is mainly in terms of allocation, a traditional and central concern of mainstream economics.

The Answer and its philosophical roots

- Its philosophical roots may be found in the idea of justice of Kant's and, more recently, Rawls' liberalism (where rights are independent from any conception of the good). Here, the best way to achieve the maximum possible welfare, reflected by the level of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is through the affirmation of self-interest (the individual rights) in the economic sphere, expressed through the freedom to sell or buy goods and services, and to maximise profits and utility, with a limited role for the intervention of the state. This approach is deemed to embody the common good, without a prior conception of it.

True efficiency?

- Internalisation in the market of environmental aspects is under two conditions:
 - a) it is possible to estimate the physical impacts of production on environmental quality and their consequences;
 - b) it is possible to estimate a monetary value of such changes.

Furthermore

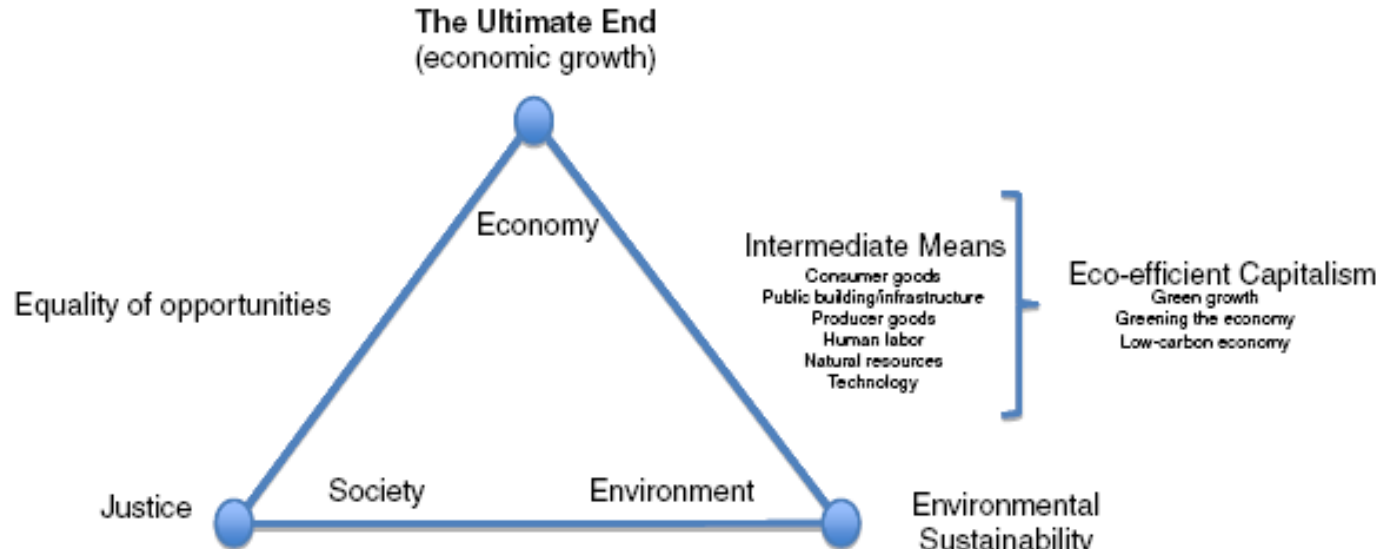
- the relations between the environment and the other systems are characterised by an increasing complexity, where the economic, environmental, institutional and social systems are reciprocally influencing each other and where it is not always possible to determine with certainty their future evolution.
- Efficiency does not guarantee sustainability (scale and just distribution)

Efficiency and scale

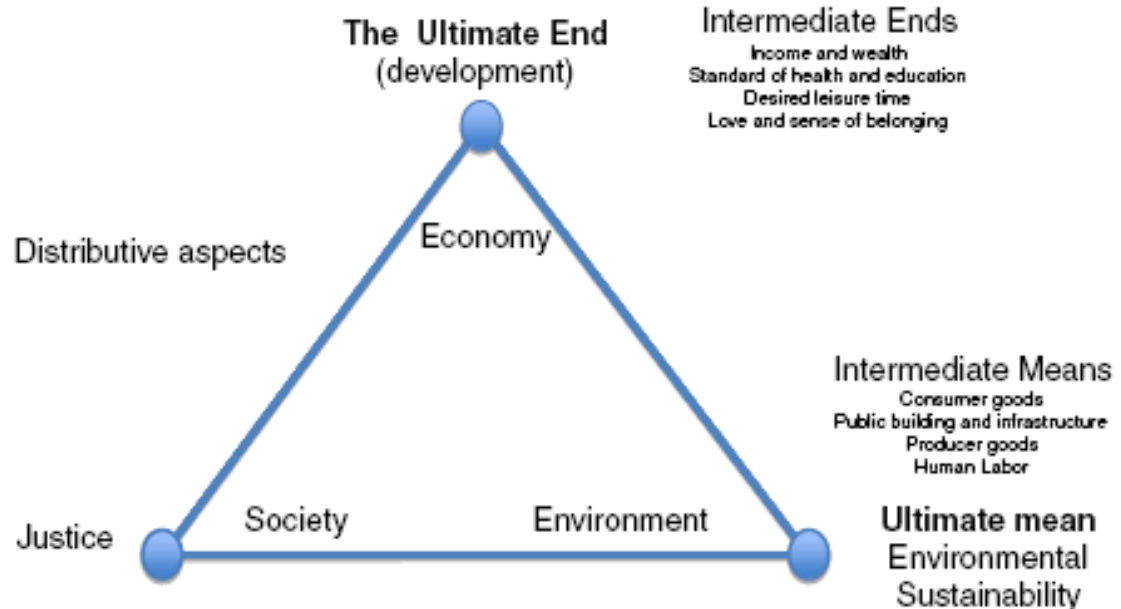
- Engaging with the concepts of scale and distribution leads us to focus on the need for a continuous improvement of the quality of life (development) as a legitimate aspiration of every human being.
- Growth refers to the quantity of goods and services produced and sold in the markets (central to mainstream economics), and must be constrained to maintain the life-supporting capacity of ecosystems, which benefit society as a whole. Development refers more broadly to quality of life and wellbeing, and it is always possible to pursue it, with a view to a more equitable society, at the global level.

Sustainable development triangle

**Green
economy**



**Public
Participation**



Environmental democracy needs a cultural change

- The real question is if the conception of the common good is to be left to the market or to the public participation.
- Environmental democracy may work better and be effective if the ecological rationality expressed by the theory of sustainable development will prevail both intellectually and concretely.
- Public should participate in the highest strategic decisions concerning the scale and the distributive (quality) aspects.

Recommendations

- In the recommendations a new paragraph may be added:
“The strategic assessment could be more effective if Sustainable Development Strategies are in place, at national as local level, providing for the scale and the distributive (quality) aspects of the economy, these to be considered as leading principles for all subsequent assessments”
- A task force or a consultant could be asked to investigate possible relationship between the SDS and the environmental assessment at strategic and project level

Recommendations

- Consider drafting of the new amendments to the Convention or new instruments to ensure to ensure full public participation in sustainable development strategies, or policies, formulation as well in decision-making that may have an impact on the implementation of such strategies or policies

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Analysis

Promise and shortcomings of a green turn in recent policy responses to the “double crisis”

Olivia Bina ^{a,c,*}, Francesco La Camera ^{b,1,2}



CHAPTER 2 Scale of Economic Activity and Environmental Taxation

Francesco La
Camera and Aldo
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The Aarhus Convention at Ten Interactions and Tensions between Conventional International Law and EU Environmental Law

Edited by Marc Pallemarts

CHAPTER 1 Economy, Ecology and Environmental Democracy

Francesco La
Camera