

The beyond GDP agenda: past, present, visions for the future

Panel 1 : GDP and alternative indicators of well-being

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BEYOND GDP

**A SUMMARY OF THE
CONTROVERSIES SURROUNDING
THE PRODUCTION AND USE OF
ALTERNATIVE INDICATORS TO GDP**

FÉLICIEN PAGNON

PHD IN SOCIOLOGY

POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHER – KEDGE
BUSINESS SCHOOL

A close-up photograph of a white pen drawing a jagged line graph on a piece of paper. The graph shows a general upward trend with several fluctuations. The background is a soft-focus image of the paper and the pen.

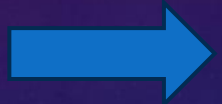
A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ALTERNATIVE INDICATORS TO GDP

- « Après la croissance : controverses autour de la production et de l'usage des indicateurs alternatifs au PIB »
 - A sociological perspective on alternative indicators
 - A qualitative analysis of quantitative tools
- Questioning the social practices rather than the indicators themselves
 - How they are produced ?
 - How they are used ?
 - Which indicators are dominant and why ?

PROBLEMATIZING BARRIERS TO EXISTING INSTITUTIONAL BEYOND GDP INITIATIVES

Factors working against alternative indicators

- Inertia : GDP as a technical convention, a political institution, a set of measurement practices
- Opposing forces : Players who discard the political script behind alternative indicators and/or disagree on their usefulness



But also : Heterogeneity and divisions between supporters of alternative indicators

Controversies on alternative indicators to GDP

- Economic conventions are at stake (Desrosières 2008, Gadrey 2006)
- Cleavages run through this social configuration : dominant and dominated voices



A FIELD SURVEY

- A sociological investigation
 - 43 Semi-structured interviews
 - Archives (OFCE, FAIR)
 - 3 Participant observations
 - Data and written sources
- A survey of statisticians, economists, and civil servants at local, national and supranational scales :
 - Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission
 - FAIR (Forum pour d'Autres Indicateurs de Richesse)
 - INSEE, Eurostat et OECD
 - Local authorities (Gironde departement, Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Pays de la Loire regions, Grenoble metropolis)
 - Members of parliament, assistants and administrators

3 PARTS

Sociogenesis and polarization of the controversy

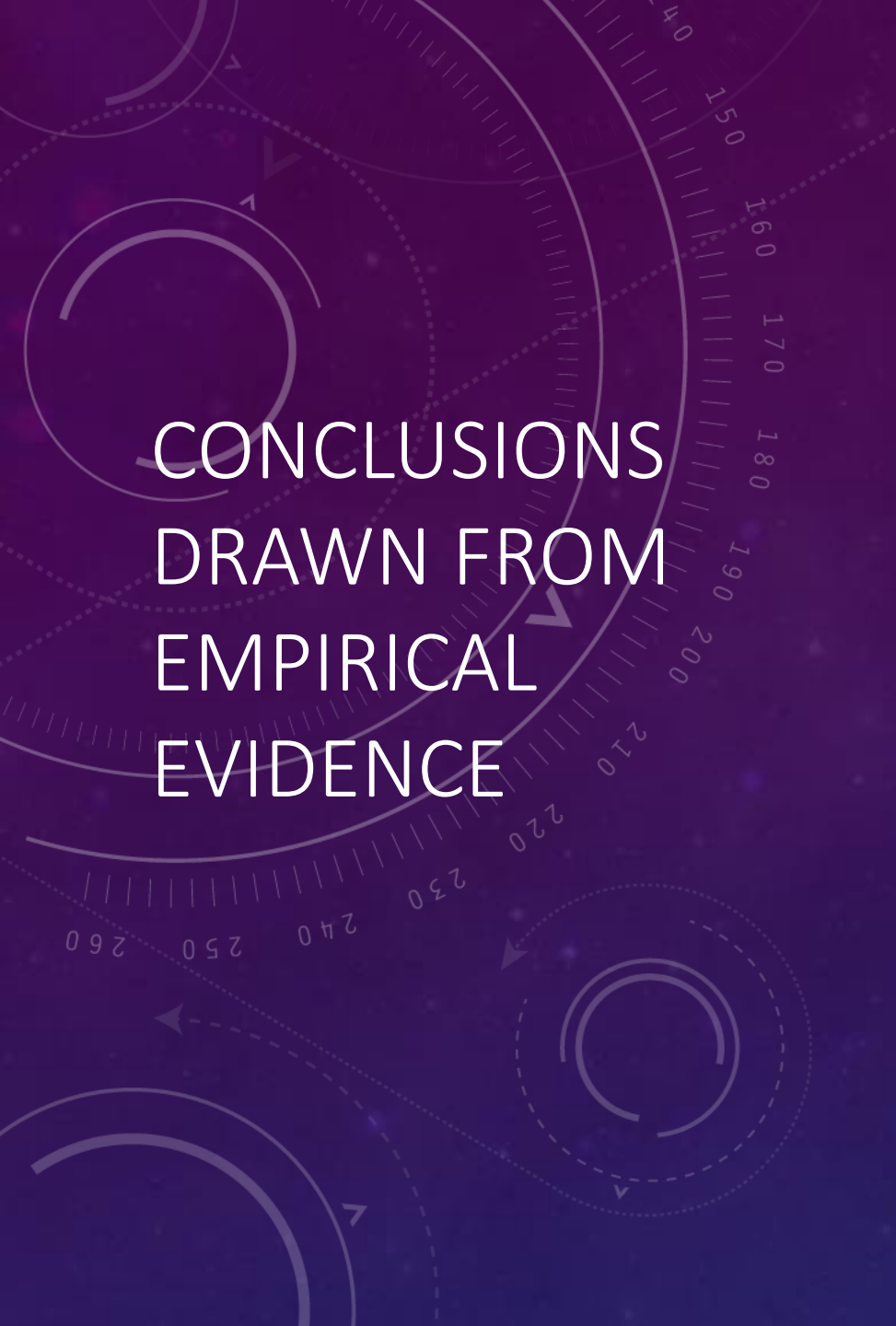
- Indicators emerge since the 1970s and develop over decades
- The Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission highlights the issue
- FAIR emerges to offer an alternative perspective

Diffusion of the controversy and appropriation of the indicators

- Among the statistical institutions and international organizations (INSEE, Eurostat, OECD)
- Among French Local Authorities (Gironde, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Pays de la Loire, Grenoble)

A « paradoxical » institutionalization of the indicators

- Eva Sas law voted in 2015
- A new public policy instrument : the report on alternative indicators to GDP



CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Institutionalization of alternative indicators to GDP over the last two decades

But only in specific social spaces



A wide range of players who disagree on which indicators to promote

Which diminish their critical potential

Power relations between players



Are alternative indicators to GDP successful ?

Depends on the intentions of players who promote them

But there is a real institutionalization among certain players

The background is a deep blue gradient with a subtle pattern of white dots. Overlaid on the left side are several concentric circular patterns. One large circle features a scale with numerical markings from 140 to 260 in increments of 10. Other circles of varying sizes are scattered across the frame, some with dashed outlines and arrows indicating a clockwise direction.

A NEW THEORETICAL FORMULATION

THE SOCIAL FIELD OF ALTERNATIVE INDICATORS TO GDP

THE THEORY OF FIELDS

- Social dispositions of the players
- Social positions in the field
 - Powerful / weak actor ?
 - Reformist / radical ?
- Stances (« prises de position ») in the controversy about alternative indicators

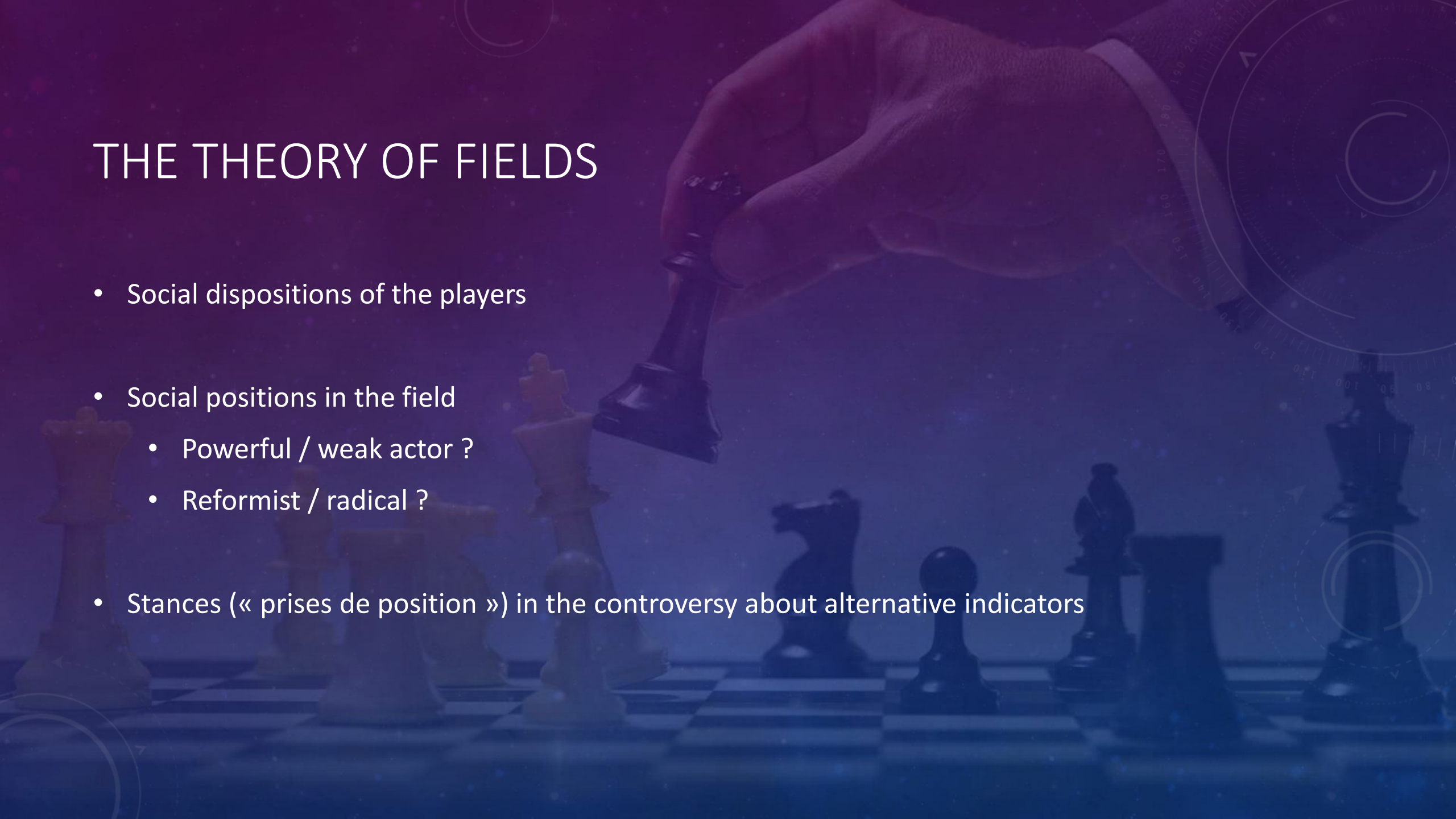


TABLE 1: ARGUMENTS PUT FORWARD BY THE PLAYERS IN THE CONTROVERSY

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| | France Stratégie | Local Authorities | Socialists (Government) | Ecologists (members of Parliament) | Stiglitz-Sen- Fitoussi Commission | FAIR |
|------------|---------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Production | Production by experts Polls | Production / Validation / Co- construction Citizen Panels | X | Production by Citizens | Production by experts (statisticians and economists) | Production by Citizens |
| Use | Dashboard 10 indicators | Design and monitoring of public policies | 10 indicators Annual report | 4 indicators Finance law | Dashboards | Aggregate indicators |
| Narrative | Quality of Growth | Sustainable Development | Quality of Growth | Post-growth | Green growth (Net Domestic Product) | Post-growth |
| Convention | X | X | Socioeconomic | Social and environmental | Socioeconomic Low sustainability (substitutability of dimensions) | Social and environmental Strong sustainability (footprints) |

THE SOCIAL FIELD OF ALTERNATIVE INDICATORS TO GDP

- Opposition of two poles : a radical one and a reformist one
- Asymetry of resources between the players : dominant voices vs. dominated

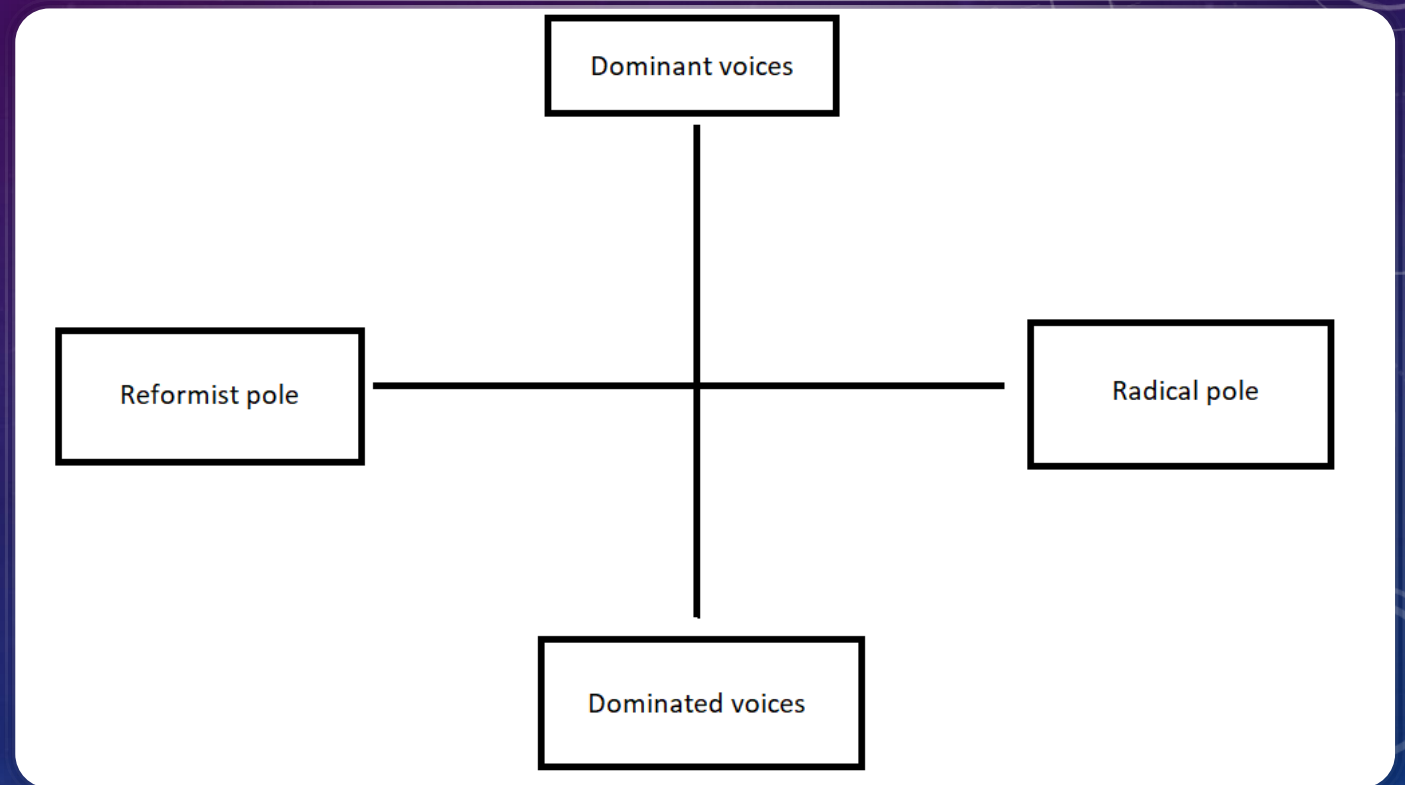


Table 2: A polarized controversy between reformists and radicals

Source: Félicien Pagnon

| Position in the field | Reformist pole | Radical pole |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Dispositions | Economists, statisticians from the INSEE, national and supranational civil servants | « Heterodox » economists, ecologists, philosophers, local civil servants, associations members |
| Stances | | |
| • Production | Experts should produce indicators | Citizens should produce indicators |
| • Use | Dashboard | Synthetic indicators |
| • Narrative | Quality of growth | Post-growth |

A MORE DETAILED ANALYSIS OF PLAYERS STANCES

Roughly speaking, there is a dividing line between

Reformist players : Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi commission, International Organizations, French Government

Radical players : FAIR, Local authorities, ecologist Members of Parliament

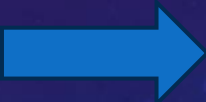


Reformist pole intends to maintain accounting institutions (GDP), whereas radical pole offers a more radical narrative (going « beyond » GDP)

e.g. enlarged national accounts at the INSEE

GOING FURTHER WITH SOCIOLOGY OF CONTROVERSIES

- Sociology of fields offers a « reductionist » conception of social oppositions which pit players promoting alternative indicators
- However, members of the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission, OECD members, etc. do not all agree on everything in the debate about indicators



Controversy analysis might help to go further, with a more detailed analysis of scientific, technical and political arguments

- E. G.

| Dimension of the controversy | Position 1 | Position 2 |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Indicators Aggregation | Dashboard | Synthetic indicators |
| Scale of analysis | Individual | Collective |
| Monetarization | Yes | No |
| Relation to GDP | Increase (Green GDP) | Substitution |

CONCLUSION

- Purpose : A reflexive tool for statisticians and practitioners to grasp at a glance the oppositions between proponents of alternative indicators to GDP



How to merge controversy analysis and theory of fields ?

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