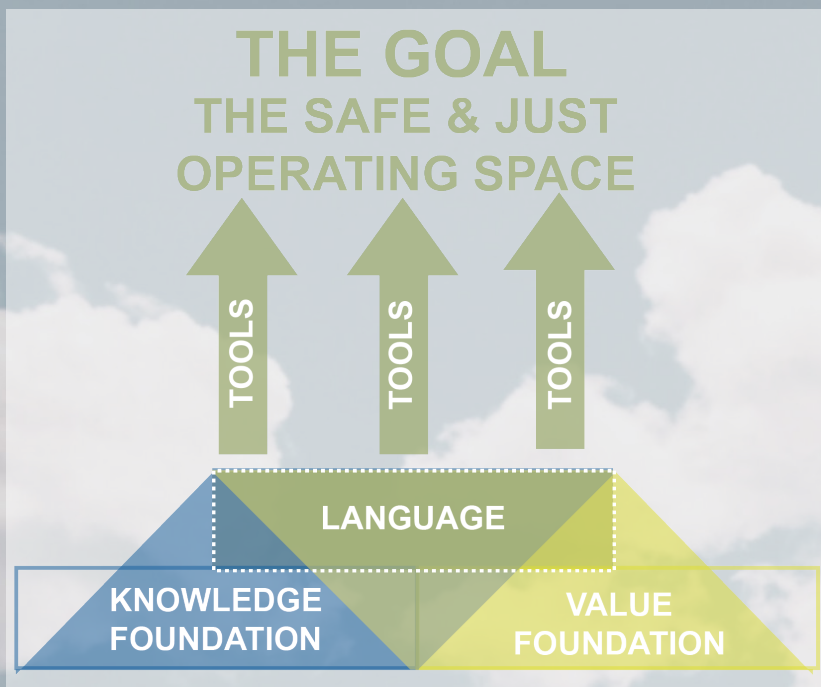


THE ECONOMISH GAME

Making sense of economics ... ish

Version 01
Spring 2021



THE iF MAN



THE BUT SQUAD



THE HOW ABOUTS

HOW TO PLAY

Rules

It's important to set the stage for your group of players. You will introduce the rules / instructions for the game.

This is a framework for discussing economic sustainability - there are no rights or wrongs. You are meant to challenge each other and discuss, but keep a positive attitude and have fun

Role playing is silly, so you might as well just lean into it

Once the characters are assigned and players have embodied their roles, players should try and start their statements / arguments and comments with IF, BUT, or HOW

ABOUT

Game Pieces

Character Cards - The character cards describe three archetypal groups of people, the If Man, The But Squad, and the How Abouts. The character cards are meant as a guidance for the concept cards

Concept Cards - The concept cards are two-sided. On the first side is an image. The image is meant to be a conversation starter. Each image is accompanied by a theme, and a short description. On the opposite side of the card are some suggestions for how the different characters might react to the image side of the card.

TIMETABLE



Part 1	Icebreaker!	5-10 min
Part 2	Introduce the characters	5-10 min
Part 3	The IF man vs. BUT squad round [optional break]	10-20 min
Part 4	The HOW ABOUTs round	10-20 min
Part 5	Reflection round	10 min

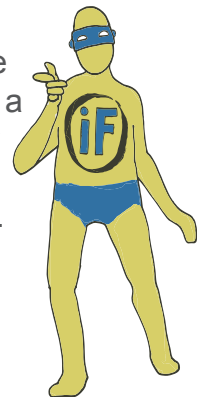
Introducing the characters

THE IF MAN

The IF-man comes from the school of mainstream economics. He has been thought to use the Neoclassical reductionist mathematical models to make sense of the economy. He trusts the free market ideals and laissez faire tendencies, and he believes that when each individual acts out of self interest and rational reasoning, the overall outcome will be the best possible for everyone. He believes that a growing total sum of economic activity in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is the most appropriate and known indicator for the prosperity of a well-functioning society.

While he has been thought to understand the economy itself as separate and independent from both the biosphere and society, he is beginning to see the shortcomings of his reasoning. Sometimes his economic models suggest actions that have unintended impacts on for instance society or the biosphere, also called externalities or market failures. That is why he sometimes listens to his younger cousin, who has studied the School of Environmental Economics to translate values, cultures, biological factors, etc. into monetary terms, so these can be accounted for in the mathematical economic models - in other words, so the externalities can be internalised. And thus, any market failure can easily be corrected.

If you are the IF-man, you say “IF” a lot because when your economic models attempt to simplify a complex world, you have to assume that IF only the world was as logical and rational as your models, then your models would apply perfectly.



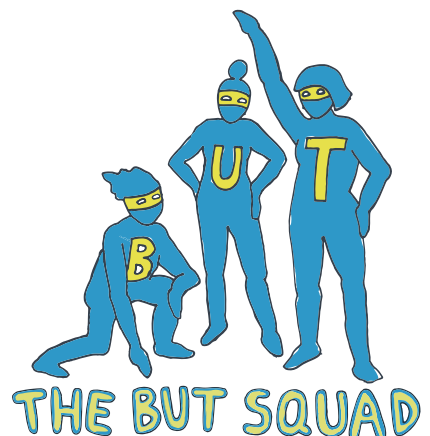
THE iF MAN

BUT-SQUAD

The BUT-squad is a community and they are sceptical of mainstream economic reasoning. The BUT-squad has studied a broad range of heterodox economic schools, such as complexity, ecological, feminist, institutional and behavioural economics, which means they see and point out the many limitations of IF-man's rational and reductionist mathematical models and interpretations of our complex world. As such, they don't trust that the current macroeconomic paradigm is in any way equipped to solve global problems with increasing inequality, environmental degradation, climate change, etc. The BUT-squad questions mainstream Neoclassical economics' purpose, or that it even has a purpose.

The BUT-squad acknowledge that the economy does not exist independent and separate from the biosphere and society, but that the economy is embedded in these. As such, they believe that accounting for energy- and resource input/output is fundamental, and they criticise IF-man for leaving these out.

When you are a part of the BUT-squad, you say "BUT" a lot, when you want to point out something fishy in IF-man's argumentation. You look at the state of the Earth and the societies that it supports and point to the discrepancies between what IF-man's models tells us should happen and what is actually happening.



HOW ABOUTS

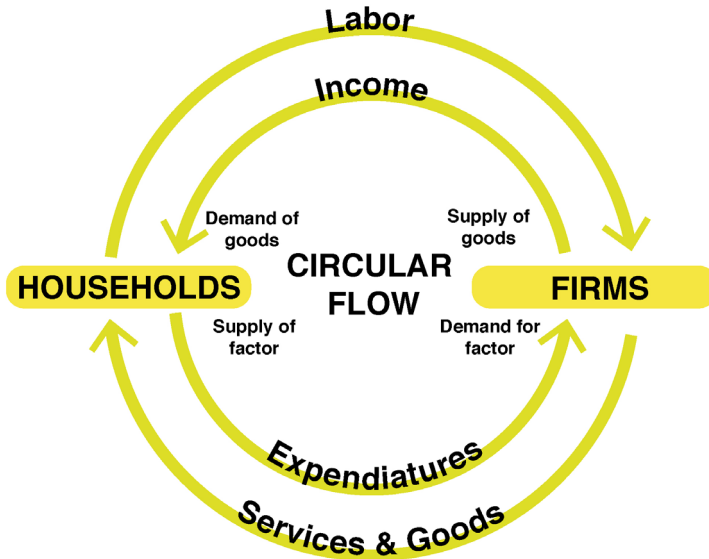
The HOW ABOUTS is a team of progressive change-makers. The HOW ABOUTS disagree with much of the fundamental knowledge and values of the dominant macroeconomic thinking. They are thankful for the BUT-squads sharp eyes and want to build upon their critique and utilise their fresh perspective to push for the transition needed. They want to challenge and change the current power structures resulting from the current mainstream macroeconomic paradigm.

The HOW ABOUTS has a democratic mindset, and believes in the benefits and fairness of diversity. The HOW ABOUTS want to live on an Earth in thriving balance and they advocate for respecting the planetary boundaries and for ensuring a fair and just distribution of wealth. The HOW ABOUTS is thus very eager to debate the kind of future they want, and how to transition towards it.

As a member of the HOW ABOUTS, you say “HOW ABOUT” whenever you want to suggest new ways of doing things or new ways of understanding things - even if you might not have all the answers yet.



Views on the macroeconomic systems



THE CIRCULAR FLOW OF THE ECONOMY

THE CIRCULAR FLOW DIAGRAM

This old fella has been around for a long time - too long. It was drawn in 1948 by Paul Samuelson. He illustrated the economy as a closed-loop system, in an extremely simplified version, as he got the task of drawing the economy for engineering students, and had the creative freedom to “leave out whatever you [he] liked” (Raworth, 2018, p. 19). Economists up until 1972, were only taught Samuelson’s illustrations from the Neoclassical and Keynesian doctrines. This solidified the macroeconomic paradigm as being mainly of Neoclassical descendants. This way of representing the economy mimics natural sciences, but it views the economy as a closed loop, separate from Earth’s ecosystems. What does the illustration represent? How does it represent it? And what does it not represent?

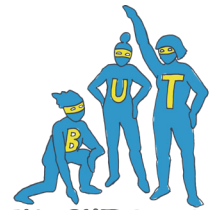
Views on the macroeconomic systems

IF we account correctly for these flows, we will know everything we need to know about the economy. Everything else is unrelated.



THE IF MAN

BUT it doesn't account for the resources and energy that make the production possible, and it doesn't account for informal activities such as cooking food in the households.



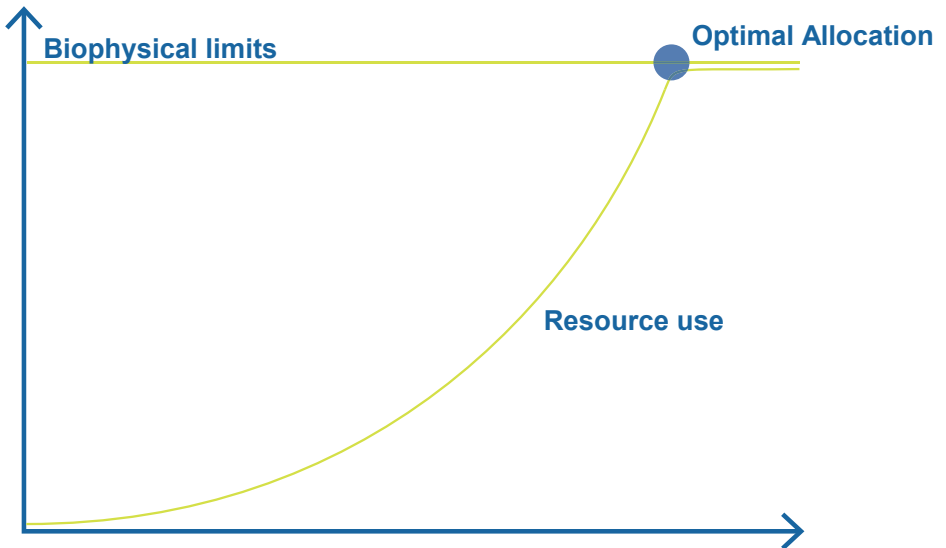
THE BUT SQUAD

HOW ABOUT we create a macroeconomic system that provides good lives for all within the planet's limits? A macroeconomic paradigm that acknowledges the many aspects of both the biosphere and society that the economy is dependent on?



THE HOWABOUTS

Resource use



OPTIMAL ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

In the current dominant macroeconomic paradigm there is a general belief in the possibility of optimal allocation of scarce resources from perfect competition in free market conditions. Ideally, that would look something like this representation; such conditions would ensure that our strain on the planet and use of resources would automatically stay within planetary boundaries, since the cost vs. the benefit would make it too expensive not to.

Resource use

IF only we ensure perfect market conditions, and don't interfere with these, then the market forces will ensure that resources are not exhausted, and ensure the innovation needed to substitute with new materials.



THE IF MAN

BUT as we know, we are not currently within planetary boundaries. We are quite far beyond and getting further away. This means optimal allocation of resources does not exist.



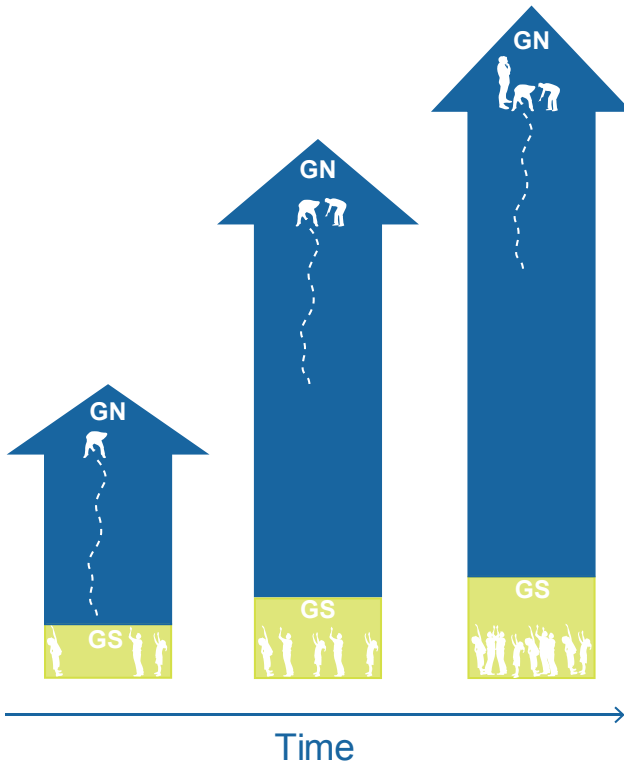
THE BUT SQUAD

HOW ABOUT we acknowledge that we have far transgressed many of the planetary boundaries, and our primary need is to reverse the damage done. And after that, we can see what our options are.



THE HOWABOUTS

Distribution



“LIFTING” OUT OF POVERTY

In the current macroeconomic paradigm, economic growth is considered the best solution for alleviating poverty. It is an attractive promise, that more means more for all and depending on how you slice it, you can argue for or against whether it is in fact working as a solution.

Distribution

IF our economic systems stimulate competition and growth, then that will result in increased innovation, efficiency and benefits will trickle down to those that are less well off.



THE IF MAN

BUT this idea has actually been disputed many times in concrete cases - it just shows up in a myriad of different disguises. And since economic growth has been accompanied by environmental degradation and climate change, it is simply too naive to believe that economic growth can eradicate poverty and inequality within the limits of the biosphere.

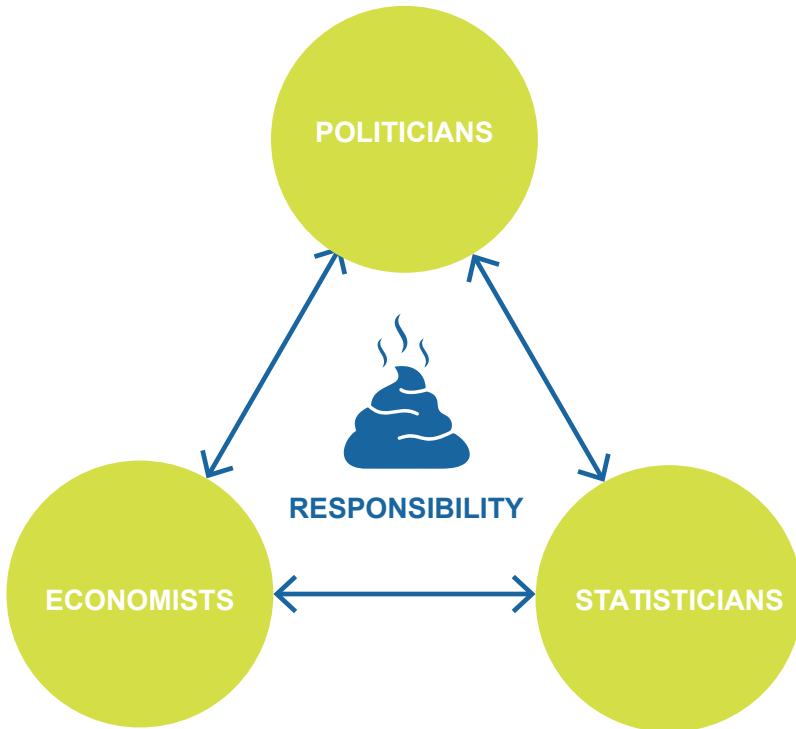


THE BUT SQUAD

HOW ABOUT we redistribute much more effectively to reverse the growing inequality.



Change



PASSING AROUND THE RESPONSIBILITURD

This silly representation says a little bit about the continued use of GDP-growth as an indicator of a prosperous society. The poo represents responsibility (hence the responsibiliturd). Economists may say that GDP should not be the only measure to govern with, politicians may say they use GDP to govern with because it is the measure they are presented with from economists and statisticians may say they only measure GDP because it is what they are told to do by politicians even though they do not believe it should be used as the only measure to govern with. And so the responsibility for taking action always seems to be passed on to the next person.

Change

IF economists are following the statistical numbers, then their analysis, theory and results are unbiased and represent an objective truth. If politicians receive objective material they are able to make rational decisions. Thus the responsibility goes in circles with no one claiming it.



THE IF MAN

BUT if no one claims responsibility then how can anyone justify their material and the decisions being made?

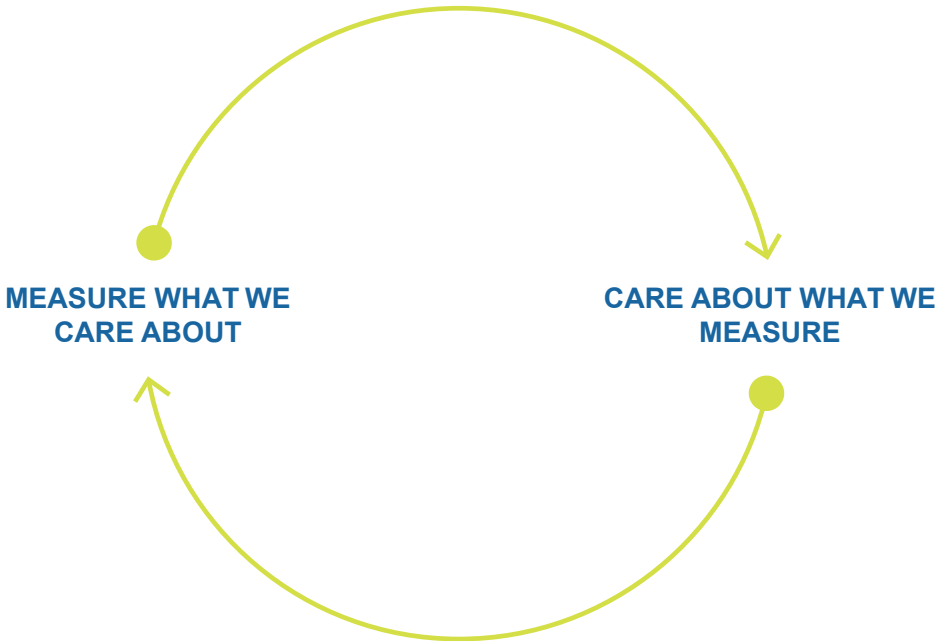


THE BUT SQUAD

HOW ABOUT the turd becomes something that we want to claim. That it is knowledge worth being proud of and we definitely can say holds a holistic representation how it can be useful to create a better tomorrow.



Change (2)



THE CARE LOOP

We measure what we care about and care about what we measure. This creates a self-perpetuating and reinforcing feedback loop that enforces the use of certain tools and goals. The use of GDP as a measure enforces the importance of GDP-growth as a goal. This loop can potentially be true for measures and goals that enforce regenerative impacts.

Change (2)

IF GDP is a representation of real economic activity and we know that a growing GDP leads to prosperity, then it is obvious that we are measuring the right thing.



THE IF MAN

BUT if GDP is not a reliable measure of prosperity, development, economic activity, etc. then why should we care about it?



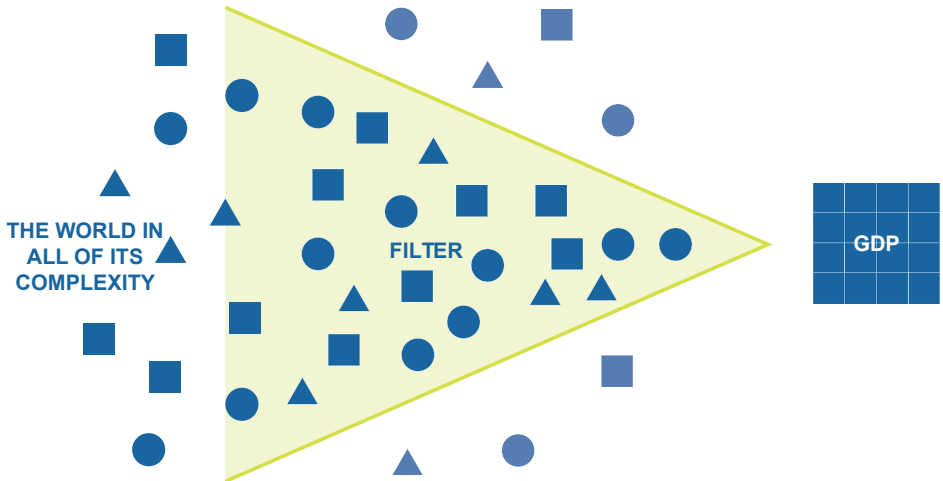
THE BUT SQUAD

HOW ABOUT we reevaluate what we care about and start measuring the different parameters that are important to good and sustainable lives on Earth?



THE HOW ABOUTS

Views on the macroeconomic systems



GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP)

Though the GDP was never meant to represent what a good and prosperous nation is, through history, it kind of has anyway. A big and growing GDP is seen as the measure of just that. It is an incredibly simplified measure that shows only fractions of a complex reality.

Views on the macroeconomic systems

IF we can translate all economic activity into a single number to govern with, then we can make all-encompassing and rational decisions in a complex reality.



THE IF MAN

BUT can we really justify that GDP is a true representation of all economic activity? Can we really translate all economic activity into a single number?

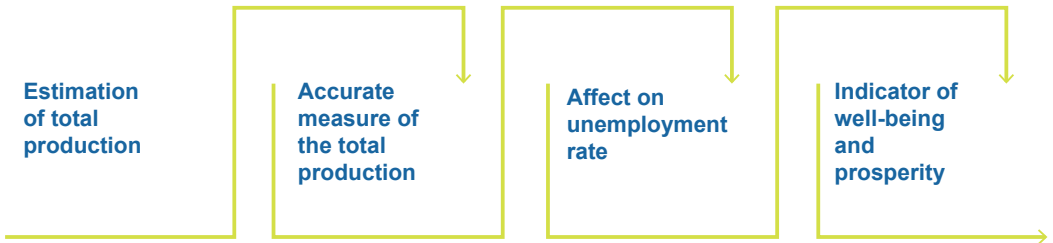


THE BUT SQUAD

HOW ABOUT we realise that we cannot use a simplified and reductionist number as the main steering device for governing and work determinedly towards replacing it with the Doughnut.



Views on the macroeconomic systems (2)



HOW GDP SIMPLIFIES REALITY

GDP is an estimation of total production. This is however often misunderstood as an accurate measure of the total production. The total production is understood as having an all-encompassing affect on the unemployment rate, and the unemployment rate is interpreted as an indicator of well-being and prosperity. Through these iterations of misunderstandings, interpretations and translations the GDP as an estimation of total production, ends up as an indicator of well-being and prosperity.

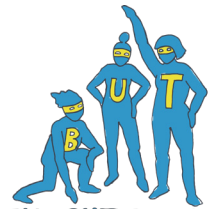
Views on the macroeconomic systems (2)

IF our well-being and prosperity is dependent on low unemployment rates, and growing the production results in more employment, GDP is an appropriate indicator for prosperity and well-being.



THE IF MAN

BUT GDP does not account for the energy and resources needed to drive the production and it is simply not sustainable to ensure well-being and prosperity through production alone.



THE BUT SQUAD

HOW ABOUT we realise that the goal is well-being and prosperity, and many aspects affect these, so we can't rely on GDP growth alone to deliver on well-being and prosperity.



Distribution and resource use



THE EVEN OUT/CLEAN UP CURVES

These curves illustrate very popular ideas of the dominant paradigm: that through economic growth, inequality and pollution will increase respectively, but only to a certain level after which they will decrease, presumably after having secured a higher standard of living for all. The curve at the top is called the Kuznets curve, and the curve at the bottom is called the Environmental Kuznets curve.

Distribution and resource use

IF economic growth will even out both inequality and pollution, we just need to continue growing and wait.



THE IF MAN

BUT these curves are based on ideas and hopes for the future and not based on empirical data.

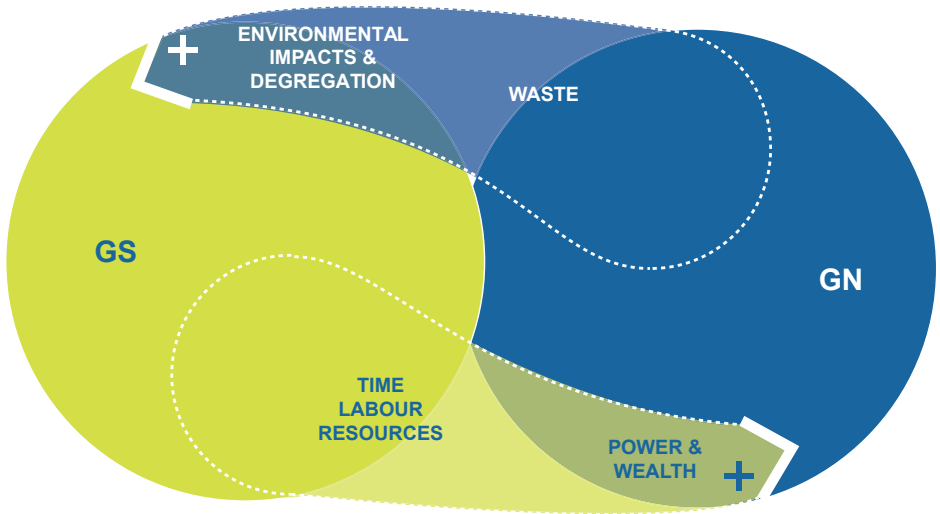


THE BUT SQUAD

HOW ABOUT we don't just sit tight and wait for something that obviously hasn't happened, but instead actively work on both reducing inequality and cleaning up pollution before the consequences become insurmountable.



Distribution



THE DOUBLE FUNNEL OF ACCUMULATION

The double funnel illustrates how time, labour and resources are sucked from the Global South into the Global North, making wealth and power accumulate. It shows how waste (in many forms) pour back into the Global South from the Global North, accumulating and creating environmental degradation. This is ofcourse a somewhat caricatured image of the uneven trade between the Global North and Global South.

Distribution

IF we have perfect market conditions, the inequality and pollution will be evened out and cleaned up again.



THE IF MAN

BUT have you considered that the ways in which the market has been operating through history has perpetuated these dynamics of unequal trade, to the point that perfect market conditions are an abstract pipe dream?



THE BUT SQUAD

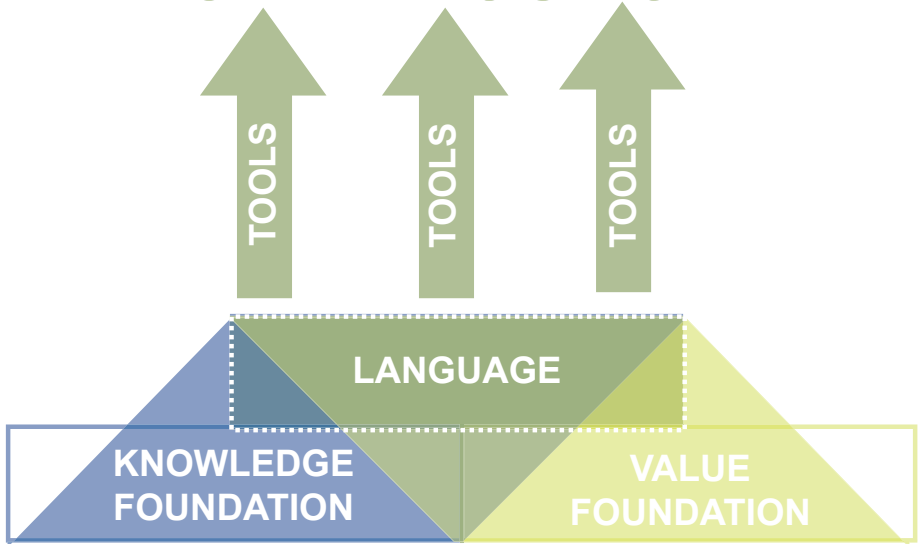
HOW ABOUT we create regenerative and distributive economies that allow people and places to thrive?



THE HOWABOUTS

Change

THE GOAL THE SAFE & JUST OPERATING SPACE



THE GOAL OF MACROECONOMICS

The current macroeconomic paradigm is built on an outdated knowledge- and value foundation. It is based around an esoteric and abstract language, which has fostered the use of tools that do not make sense in a complex world with complex problems. A new value- and knowledge foundation is needed to create an inclusive language and tools to steer humanity and human activity into the safe and just operating space.

Change

IF only everyone acts rationally and focuses on maximising utility, there is no need to change anything.



THE IF MAN

BUT we know that people have many more values, driving forces and reasons for acting, than rationality and utility maximisation. So why pretend?



THE BUT SQUAD

HOW ABOUT reevaluating the knowledge- and value foundation of our economic system, and creating an inclusive language and new tools, so we can all take part in steering towards the goal of getting human activity within the safe and just operating space?



THE HOW ABOUTS

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