

Webwatch

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The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity

<http://www.teebweb.org/>

The economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) is an international initiative that aims to raise the awareness of the biodiversity economic value, and how ecosystems degradation and biodiversity losses can lead to growing costs and environmental and/or social problems.

TEEB was founded by the German government and the European Commission following a suggestion made at the Postdam G8 + 5 meeting in 2007 that stressed the need for a comprehensive study on the economic impact of biodiversity loss. Currently, TEEB is based on UNEP and it is supported by the European Commission and a number of governmental organizations of western countries.

The TEEB initiative is divided in two phases, of each the first phase has already finished with the release of a report in 2008. Currently phase 2 is under way and a preliminary report was issued on October 2010. The main deliverables of TEEB are focused on the following areas: (1) science and economic foundations for cost estimation of biodiversity loss; (2) identification of opportunities for business or better policy making at regional, national or international level; (3) decision making support; (4) business risks identification and quantification; and (5) how citizens and consumers influence biodiversity. The various studies and reports are done in partnership between the

various members of the initiative, with the cooperation of experts, either internal or external to the project.

The TEEB website is one of the key deliverables of the project. Its main goal is to present and describe TEEB activities, while making available to everyone interested the main results of its activities. Thus, the site includes one section “about TEEB,” entirely devoted to describe its history, organization, and current members. In the “information material” section, news about TEEB, press releases, newsletters, reports, and other information is available, most of them for free. It is divided by topics, with each item described in detail. The site has specific sections for various stakeholders, such as policy makers, business, and citizens, where particular information, namely reports specifically aimed to different stakeholders can be found. The final reports that are published as books are not freely available, but the preliminary reports can be found and downloaded for free, with links to partners where more information may be found. The synthesis reports of each phase can be found in a dedicated section, with translations in several languages. A listing of events and TEEB contacts are also available at the site. An interesting offset of the project, developed mainly for educational purposes, is the Bank of Natural Capital, <http://bankofnaturalcapital.com>, created in late 2010. It tries to transmit and present to the general public the core concepts studied by TEEB and its main results.

Many more information can be found at the site that is well designed and easy to navigate, though some pages are hard to read because of the small font used. A search facility is available in each page to help users in finding the right information. Although the area where TEEB develops its activities seems narrow, it is of interest to many of the stakeholders with interests in sustainability, economic development, among many others, making this site a very valuable resource.

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The Story of Stuff

<http://storyofstuff.org/>

The “Story of Stuff” is a project created by Annie Leonard after the release in 2007 of her animated documentary with the same name. The main goals of this project are to increase and extend its videos’ impact, leading to a broader and insightful discussion of the environmental, social and economic impacts addressed by the movie, and the development of a network of various stakeholders interested and engaged in sustainability and economic and environmental justice. The project is sponsored by the non profit organization “The Tide Center” (<http://www.tidescenter.org/>), and it is supported by grants and donations from public or private organizations, and by the revenues of its book and DVD sales.

Vital to the project development and growth is the website. There you can find and download the original video “The Story of Stuff.” It focuses on the life cycle of common goods, trying to promote sustainability while criticizing the consumerism of western societies, clarifying why current behaviors are unsustainable and should change. Since then, more four animated videos were produced by this project, all of them also available from the site, and dealing with more specific subjects: “the story bottled water,” “the story of electronics,” “the story of cosmetics,” and “the story of cap and trade.” All of them focus mainly in the current state of affairs from a consumers point of view, and suggests forms of behaving more sustainable. To facilitate the presentation and discussion of the videos in schools or other public settings, annotated scripts and notes are also available for download from the site. Versions of the scripts in other languages, as well as the sub titled videos can be found at the international site: <http://www.storyofstuff.com/international/>, to amplify the international significance of this site.

The site has a simple appearance and it is easy to navigate. Besides the movies, that can be seen for free either online or downloaded after registration, the site has other sections dedicated for other subjects. A resources section gives information on how to use the materials available at the site, and in the events area meetings, and other reunions direct linked with the project are listed. In most of the pages references to specific news in media are given through direct links. Other news, videos, or general information of interest can be found in the blog. Other part of the site lists some teaching tools developed with other partners, which can be downloaded, and focusing on the main themes of the project videos, in particular, being more sustainable as a more educated and environmental friendly consumer. Instructions to keep updated on the project activities, and to help it, either through donations or by buying the book “The Story of Stuff” or DVD versions of the documentaries, are given at the site.

Other materials, information, and links to other relevant sites can also be found at the site, where the search facility in each page can be helpful. In an overall appreciation, this site does a good job on promoting the project and serve as a repository of its main deliverables. Although aimed for the general public, consumers, and educators, the site has information that may be pertinent to other people such as policy makers or working in marketing or product development.

Forum for the Future

<http://www.forumforthefuture.org/>

Forum for the Future (FFF) is a British non profit organization founded in 1996 whose main mission is the promotion of sustainable development. To accomplish that goal, this organization works with a wide variety of partners, in particular business and governmental institutions, in the identification of current or potential problems, and the development and implementation of practical policies and/or strategies to tackle them. Many of its partners are leading multinational companies, such as PepsiCo, Vodafone, among many others.

FFF activities are focused on a small number of areas that are believed to be vital to sustainable development in the short term. They include: (1) the retailer sector, in particular branded manufacturers and tourism organizations; (2) city management and development; (3) financial institutions and their role in a more sustainable economy; and (4) systems thinking applied to the challenges and problems of sustainability. In each focus area, FFF engages with other partners in projects with very specific goals, according to the needs and aims of the various stakeholders involved. Examples include a sustainable city index aimed for British cities, that is now several years old, a toolkit to help companies in finding their business case for sustainability, taking into account the conflicting desires and goals of all relevant stakeholders, among others.

The main results of each project, mainly reports and other written publications, can be found at the website. Moreover, in dedicated sections the structure, history, accomplishments, and a description of the FFF activities are presented in detail. News about events, either sponsored or directly linked to FFF activities can be found in a specific section. Of particular interest is the publications section. There it is possible to find and download many reports, studies, and other information done by this organization in a wide variety of themes. The FFF journal can also be accessed directly from the main webpage. While not free, articles can be read online. To promote the discussion and interchange of ideas, the site also includes a

blog where it is possible to find news and discussions on various themes. Forms of keeping updated with FFF activities are given at the site, in particular through a free e-mail newsletter.

The website has a clear appellative design, and it is easy to navigate through their pages. Although most of the materials available were developed with British partners and reflect their specific settings, they are of interest for people from other background, especially from western and European Union countries. Thus, the site is a valuable reference to people working in the sustainability area, green economy, and environmental policy making.

Open IO

<http://open-io.org/>

Open IO is a project jointly administered by the Applied Sustainability Centre and the Sam M. Walton School of Business of the University of Arkansas. Its main goal is to provide a public resource and easy to use tool to assess the sustainability of products and/or services, based on life cycle assessment, and input–output analysis. The project was funded initially with contributions from private organizations, and currently is supported by the staff of the Sustainability Consortium (<http://www.sustainabilityconsortium.org>) a non for profit organization created to address the challenges of sustainability.

With this goal in mind, the staff members of both institutions created a comprehensive database of the environmental impacts associated with the production and consumption of goods and services, following a supply chain and life cycle assessment perspective, and focused on the United States reality. Open IO is a tool suited for LCA studies, being all the environmental impacts accounted for in currency units, namely US dollars. Thus, the database is aimed to practitioners familiar with LCA and other similar environmental analysis techniques, having a basic understanding of input–output economic and environmental models.

The main purpose of the website is to serve as a repository for the database that can be downloaded for free.

Several versions and sets of information are available in various formats in the download sections, making it possible to use it in different software programs, either general purpose or LCA specific, such as SimaProTM. Documentation on how to use the various databases can also be found in the site. For people interested in making a fast assessment of a product or a service a web calculator is available in the “Visualize!” section. Just by using some pull down menus it is possible to do an evaluation of the potential environmental impact of various different life cycles stages, using selected impact categories, for a wide range of products and services. In other sections of the site, a presentation of the tool and its background can also be found to help people understand how the tool and database can be used in practice. The site also includes a blog (<http://www.open-io.blogspot.com/>) where news about Open IO can be found as well as some ongoing discussions on related subjects.

The site presentation is very simple and focuses on the main deliverables of the project, the databases and the online calculation tool. A downside is the scarcity of information on the methodologies used for data collection on the LCA, and an introduction to input–output analysis that might be helpful to people without that expertise. Yet, the data available, even with a limited geographic coverage, and the future inclusion of other tools, databases, and even teaching materials, makes this site a relevant stop now and even more in the future.

Final words

We will return on the next issue with a fresh selection of sites. If you know of sites that are worthy of being presented, send us all relevant information to the following e-mail address: amartins@fe.up.pt. Any suggestions will be considered with great attention for possible publication. In that case, the contributors names will be acknowledge in this column. Surf well.