

Pressing the case for wider  
economic, social and environmental  
measures of progress:  
a case study of the OECD Global Project.

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Tani Shaw declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of PhD in Sustainable Futures, in the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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## Thesis Abstract

Gross domestic product (GDP), as the primary economic indicator for national governments, is used as a proxy for defining and measuring societal progress. Interest in moving beyond GDP as a headline measure has seen the rise of new measurement frameworks for policy makers. The Human Development Index (HDI) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have emerged as two recognised frameworks that seek to incorporate societal priorities such as equality of economic opportunity, wellbeing and environmental sustainability. The adoption of new frameworks by policy makers has been limited, due to concerns regarding underlying assumptions and a lack of testing.

My object of study is an international project, run by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), that sought to increase the use of multidisciplinary measurement frameworks in policy development. My research looks at 'The effectiveness of the OECD Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies as an agent of change'. The Global Project was active between 2004 and 2012 and my research and data collection was conducted between 2009 and 2012. The research design involved adopting the role of participant as researcher for an extended period of immersion in the project, a review of formal documentation of the Global Project and fifteen semi-structured interviews. Three theoretical lenses are used in this study of the Global Project: frameworks for measuring progress, networks of networks, and agents of change.

The research delivered four main findings regarding the ability of the Global Project to effect change and achieve its objectives. Firstly, the research found that the Global Project stimulated a broad and inclusive multidisciplinary discussion on measurement frameworks among international stakeholders that created new network relationships, particularly between stakeholders from different disciplines. Secondly, this network structure both supported and impeded the achievement of outcomes. Thirdly, the Global Project generated impetus, momentum and a strong response from stakeholders of the OECD that influenced the development of the OECD Better Life Index measurement framework. Fourthly and finally, policy makers, whom the Global Project aimed to influence, were largely absent from the work of the Global Project.

The synthesis of these research findings examines the interrelationships between the role of change agent, the amorphous nature of network structures and the considerations present in the international discussion and adoption of measurement frameworks. The implications of the research findings are presented in the context of the adoption of new measurement frameworks by policy makers.

## **Format of the Thesis**

This thesis is a traditional monograph which begins by setting the contextual scene for the research, followed by a literature review, an outline of the research methodology and an introduction to the object of the research. This is followed by three core results chapters, a presentation of an intermediate synthesis and a meta-synthesis of research findings, and finally a conclusion and a discussion of the limitations and implications of the research.

## **Table of Contents**

List of Tables.....	9
List of Figures.....	9
Glossary of Terms.....	10
Acronyms.....	11
Chapter 1 – Setting the Scene.....	12
1.1 Topical Context.....	12
1.2 Motivation for Research.....	14
1.3 Approach to the Research.....	17
1.4 Structure of the Thesis.....	22
Chapter 2 – Literature Review.....	23
2.1 Introduction.....	23
2.2 Frameworks for Measuring Progress.....	23
2.2.1 Origins of Measurement Frameworks.....	24
2.2.2 Example I – Human Development Index.....	29
2.2.3 Example II – Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare / Genuine Progress Indicator.....	30
2.2.4 Example III – Millennium Development Goals.....	31
2.2.5 Example IV – Sustainable Development Goals.....	33
2.2.6 Characteristics and Themes.....	34
2.3 Networks of Networks.....	37
2.3.1 Origins and Definitions.....	37
2.3.2 Network Analysis.....	38
2.3.3 Network Typologies.....	38
2.4 Agents of Change.....	42
2.4.1 Origins and Definitions.....	42
2.4.2 Characteristics.....	44
2.5 Locating the Research within the Literature on Measurement Frameworks for Policy Development...	48
Chapter 3 – Methodology.....	49
3.1 Introduction.....	49
3.2 Development of the Research Question.....	49
3.4 Research Design.....	51
3.5 Primary Research Methods.....	54

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews .....	55
3.5.2 Qualitative Network Analysis .....	67
3.6 Addressing Potential Methodological Challenges .....	68
Chapter 4 – Overview of the Global Project.....	70
4.1 Introduction.....	70
4.2 Global Project’s Stated Goals .....	72
4.3 Global Project Structure .....	73
4.4 Phases of Development of the Global Project.....	77
4.4.1 Ramp-Up Phase .....	77
4.4.2 Peak Interest Phase .....	78
4.4.3 Wind Down Phase .....	78
4.5 Comparative Initiatives.....	80
4.6 Summary.....	81
Chapter 5 – Findings on the Global Project and Measures of Progress .....	82
5.1 Immeasurable Holistic Objectives .....	82
5.2 Unresolved Overarching Considerations.....	86
5.3 Influenced Generation of New Index .....	90
5.4 Lacking Influence Over Policy Makers .....	91
5.5 Findings in Relation to the Literature .....	95
5.6 Summary.....	97
Chapter 6 – Findings on the Global Project as a Network of Networks .....	99
6.1 Existing Network Relationships .....	100
6.2 Institution-Based Network Strategy .....	102
6.3 Networking for Advocacy .....	105
6.4 Social Capital.....	106
6.5 Outcomes of the GP .....	108
6.6 Findings in Relation to Literature .....	111
6.7 Summary.....	112
Chapter 7 – Findings on the Global Project as an Agent of Change.....	113
7.1 Source of Change Agents Authority .....	113
7.2 Global Project as Influencer .....	117
7.3 Credible Leadership .....	119
7.4 Change Inhibitors and Resistance .....	121
7.5 Findings in Relation to the Literature .....	122

7.6 Summary.....	124
Chapter 8 – Synthesis .....	126
8.1 Introduction.....	126
8.2 Intermediate Themes from Research Results .....	127
8.2.1 Vision and Objectives .....	128
8.2.2 Leadership .....	130
8.2.3 Organisational Structure .....	134
8.2.4 Outcomes .....	136
8.3 Synthesis of Meta-Themes .....	139
8.3.1 Comparative Understanding of the GP as a Network .....	140
8.3.3 Prompted Development of Your Better Life Index.....	143
8.3.4 Policy Makers Largely Absent .....	146
8.3.5 Global Project Stimulated Debate .....	147
8.3.6 Mixed Outcomes of Network Structure .....	147
8.3.7 Change Agency as a Set of Dynamic Interactions.....	149
8.4 Summary.....	157
Chapter 9 – Conclusions .....	158
9.1 Main Conclusions.....	158
9.2 Implications for Research .....	162
Appendix A - Relationship Network Map Resulting from Participation .....	165
Appendix B - Interview Questions .....	166
Appendix C – Sample of Coding on Measures of Progress.....	169
Appendix D – Istanbul Declaration .....	171
Bibliography.....	173



## List of Tables

<b>Table #</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
Table 1	Summary of measurement frameworks according to objective, dimension and limitations	35
Table 2	Network typologies	41
Table 3	Conceptual framework of change agent attributes	47
Table 4	Interviewee matrix	56
Table 5	Sample of themes emerging from coding	65
Table 6	Sample coding for measures of progress No. 1	170
Table 7	Sample coding for measures of progress No. 2	170

## List of Figures

<b>Figure #</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Page</b>
Figure 1	Global GDP from 1960 to 2017	15
Figure 2	Iterative process of exploration	17
Figure 3	Intersection of theoretical lenses	21
Figure 4	OECD Global Project – stakeholder groups	55
Figure 5	Sample of the initial coding inserted into margin whilst transcribing	61
Figure 6	Thematic development based on Constructivist Grounded Theory	66
Figure 7	Structure of the Global Project	73
Figure 8	International measurement framework initiatives	75
Figure 9	Australian measurement framework initiatives	76
Figure 10	Global Project – Milestone events and phases of evolution	79
Figure 11	Thematic development based on Constructivist Grounded Theory II	126
Figure 12	Intermediate themes from research results	127

Figure 13	Dynamic factors in vision and objectives	130
Figure 14	Dynamic factors in leadership	133
Figure 15	Dynamic factors in organisational structure	136
Figure 16	Dynamic factors in outcomes	139
Figure 17	The OECD Global Project's role as "Change Agent" as a set of dynamic interactions	150
Figure 18	Relationship network map resulting from participation	165

## Glossary of Terms

Agent of change	A type of leadership possessing a set of characteristics that bring about effective leadership of a process of substantive transformation
Framework	A structured set of measurements that is designed to achieve a particular vision for development and is methodologically aggregated and integrated to reflect the prioritisation of certain measures
Measurement and indicators	In the context of my research indicators are used to undertake measurement. Measurement is the action of measuring something. Measurement of wellbeing, for example, may be achieved using qualitative and quantitative indicators.
Network	A voluntary, self-regulating, interdependent set of relationships connected through a value chain of mutual benefit, rapport and trust
Progress	A concept of development for human societies

## Acronyms

AoC	agent of change (plural form: AoCs for 'agents of change')
GDP	gross domestic product
GNP	gross national product
GP	OECD Global Project 'Measuring the Progress of Societies'
GPI	Genuine Progress Indicator
HDI	United Nations Human Development Index
IBN	institution-based network
IO	international organisation
ISEW	Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare
MAP	Measures of Australia's Progress
MDGs	United Nations Millennium Development Goals
MoP	measures of progress
NoN	network of networks (plural form: NoNs for 'networks of networks')
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SON	self-organising networks
TAN	transnational advocacy network
UN	United Nations
IO	international organisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SNA	social network analysis
TAN	transnational advocacy network
TSM	transnational social movement
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSEEA	United Nations System of Economic Accounting