



**Numbers & Narratives:
representing, reducing or
removing complexity?**

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How do Indicators matter in Global
Governance? And why?

PALGRAVE
HANDBOOKS



THE PALGRAVE HANDBOOK OF INDICATORS IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Edited by Debora Valentina Malito,
Gaby Umbach and Nehal Bhuta



Contemporary Indicator Culture (Merry, 2016):

- Post-metrological Realism
- Normativity
- The Contextual Power of Indicators

Sustainable Development

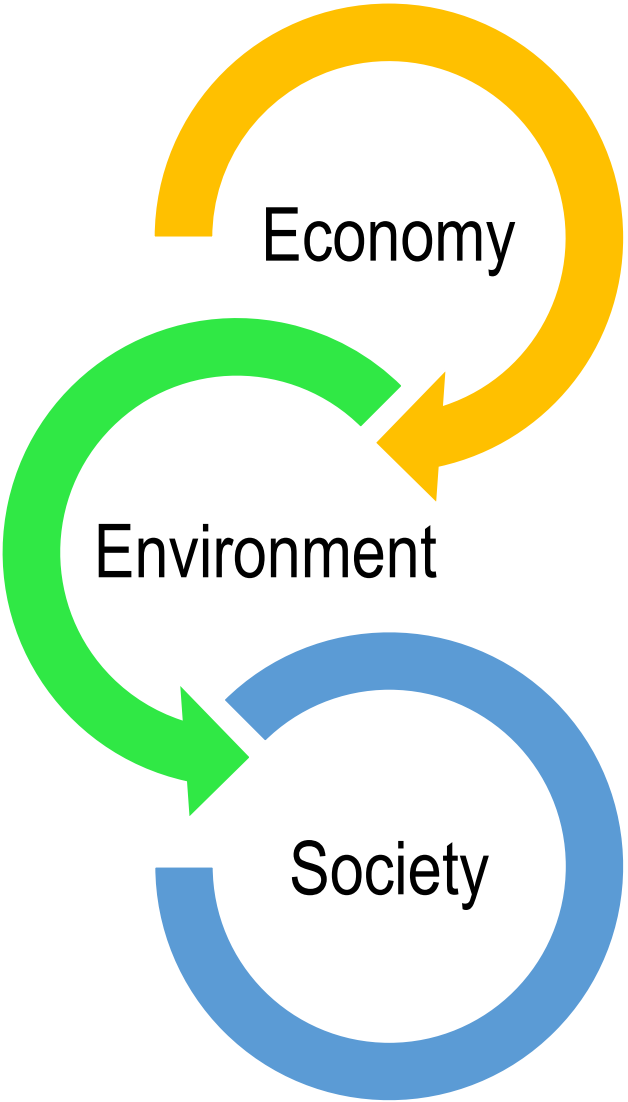


Table 1.
Metrics of
Sustainable
Development

	Pillar	Provider	Measure
Indices of sustainable development		United Nations UNDP	UN Sustainable Development Indicators Human Development Index (HDI)
		Centre for Environmental Strategy (CES) and the New Economics Foundation (NEF)	Index of sustainable and economic welfare (ISEW)
		European Commission	EU Sustainable Development Indicators
Indicators of sustainability	Environment-based	Yale University's Center for Environmental Law and Policy Columbia University's Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), World Economic Forum	Environment Sustainability Index
		RobecoSAM	Sustainability Performance Index
		WWF	Living Planet Index
		Global Footprint Network	Ecological Footprint (EF)
		ITT Flygt	Sustainability Index
		Environmental Risk Rating	ECCO-CHECK Index
		US environmental Protection Agency	Environment Quality Index
		United Nations <i>Environmental Program</i>	Environmental Vulnerability Index
	Social-based	UNDP	Gender Empowerment Measure
		Overseas Development Council	Physical Quality of Life Index
		Gallup-Healthways	Well-Being Index
		Sustainable Society Foundation	Index for sustainable society
	Economic-based	European Commission	Internal Market Index
		Ifo Institute for Economic Research	Business Climate Indicator
		European Central Bank	European Labour Market Indicators
		OECD	Composite Leading Indicators
		World Bank	Genuine Savings (GSs)
		UNEP	Composite sustainable development index

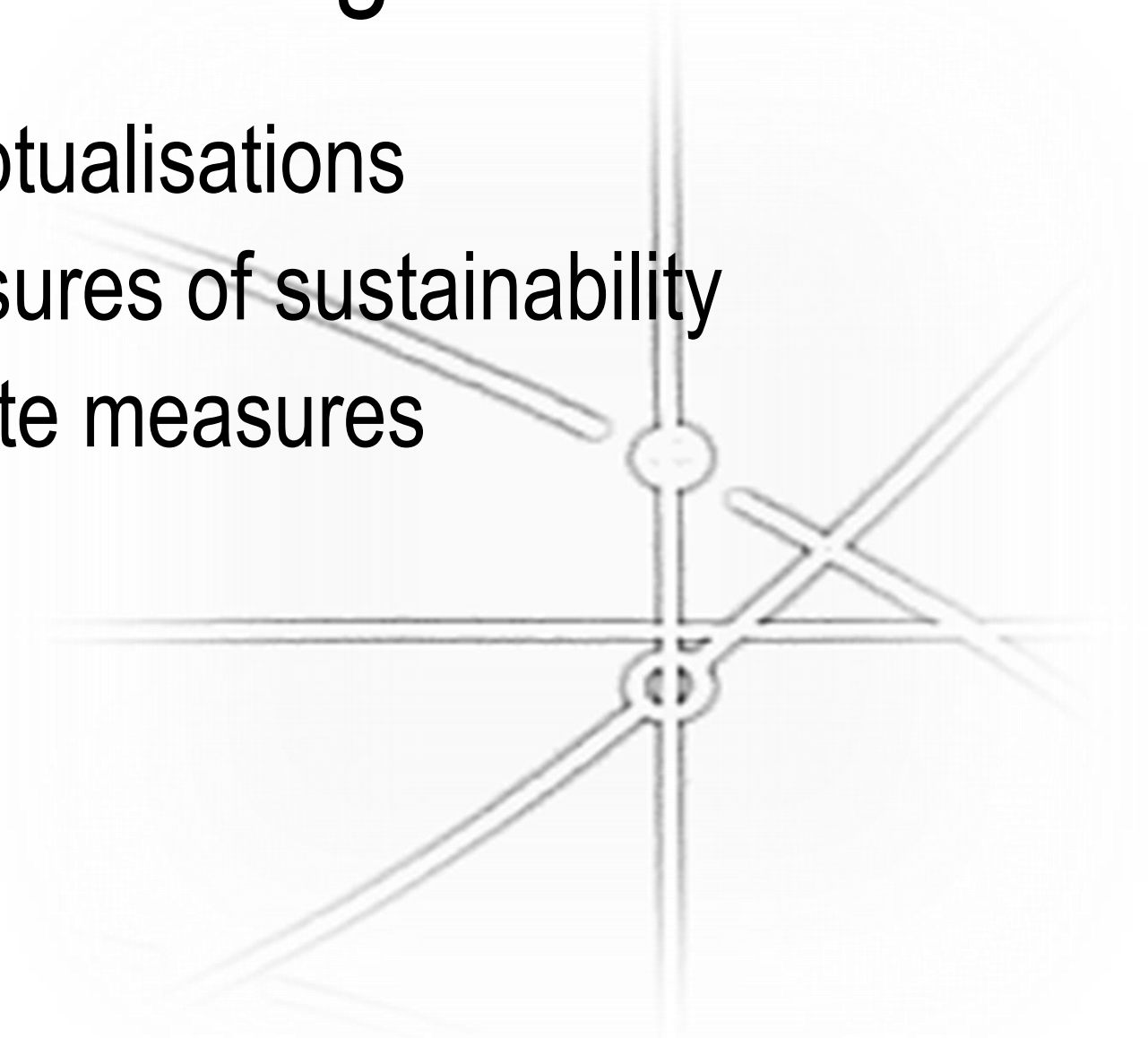
National Measures

- the 'Canadian Index of Wellbeing'
- the British 'Measuring National Well-Being'
- the 'Gross National Happiness Index' of Bhutan
- the Thai 'Sustainable Development Index'
- the Korean 'Sustainable Development Index Resource'
- The Chinese 'Environmental Performance Index'
- The Malaysian 'Quality of Life Index'



Problems and Shortcomings

- Many and vague conceptualisations
- Mono-dimensional measures of sustainability
- Non-actionable aggregate measures



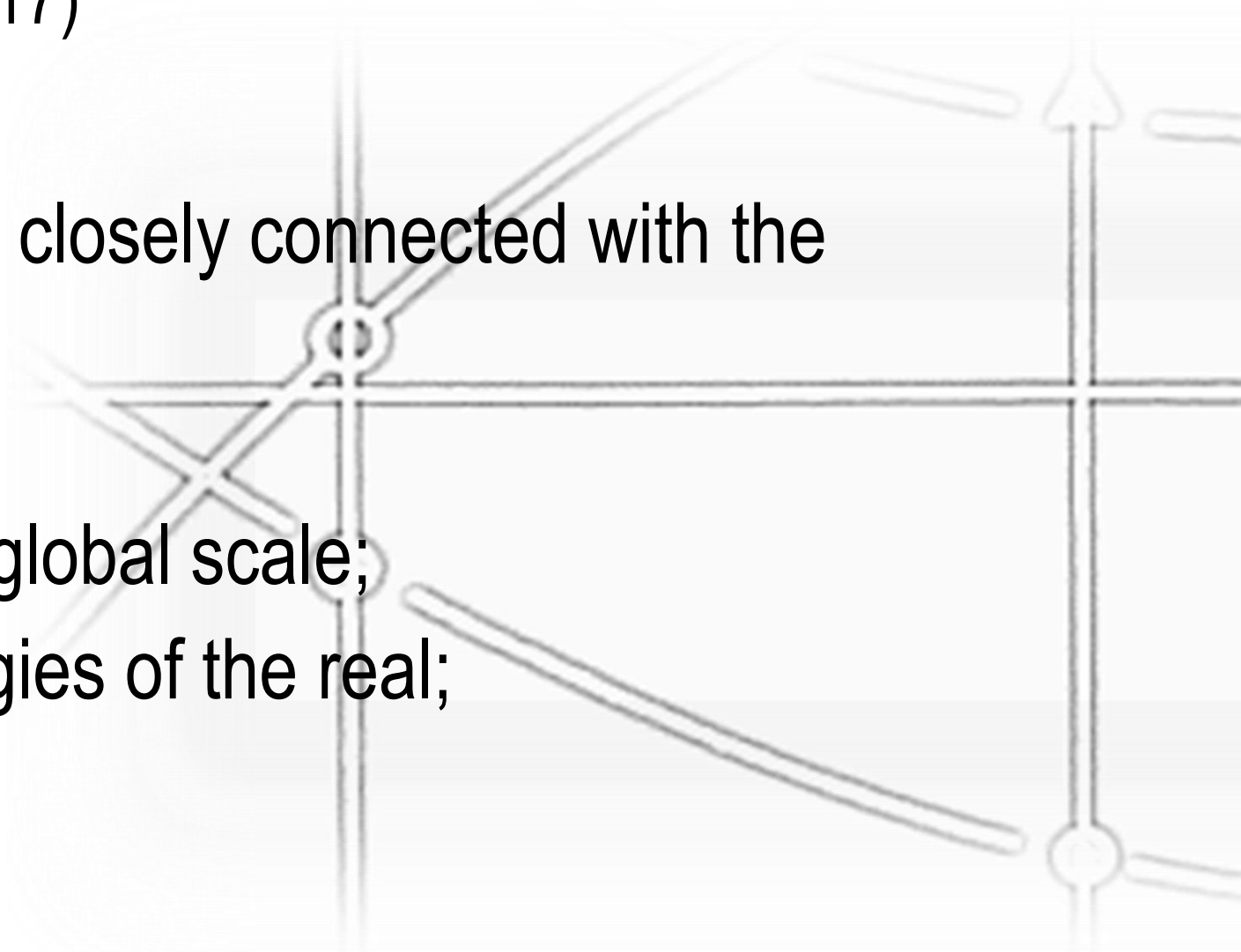
Indicators in Global Governance: Why?

Recent contributions speak of *Scorecard Diplomacy* (Kelley 2017), *The Politics of Numbers*, and *How Numbers Rule the World* (Fioramonti 2014), while others refer to rankings as a “Tool of Global Governance” (Cooley and Snyder 2015) or evoke the *Quiet Power of Indicators* (Merry et al. 2015)

Conceptual Power

(Bhuta, Malito and Umbach 2017)

- Perceptions: Indicators as closely connected with the exercise of power;
- Trust: Faith in numbers;
- Knowledge creators on a global scale;
- Generators of new ontologies of the real;

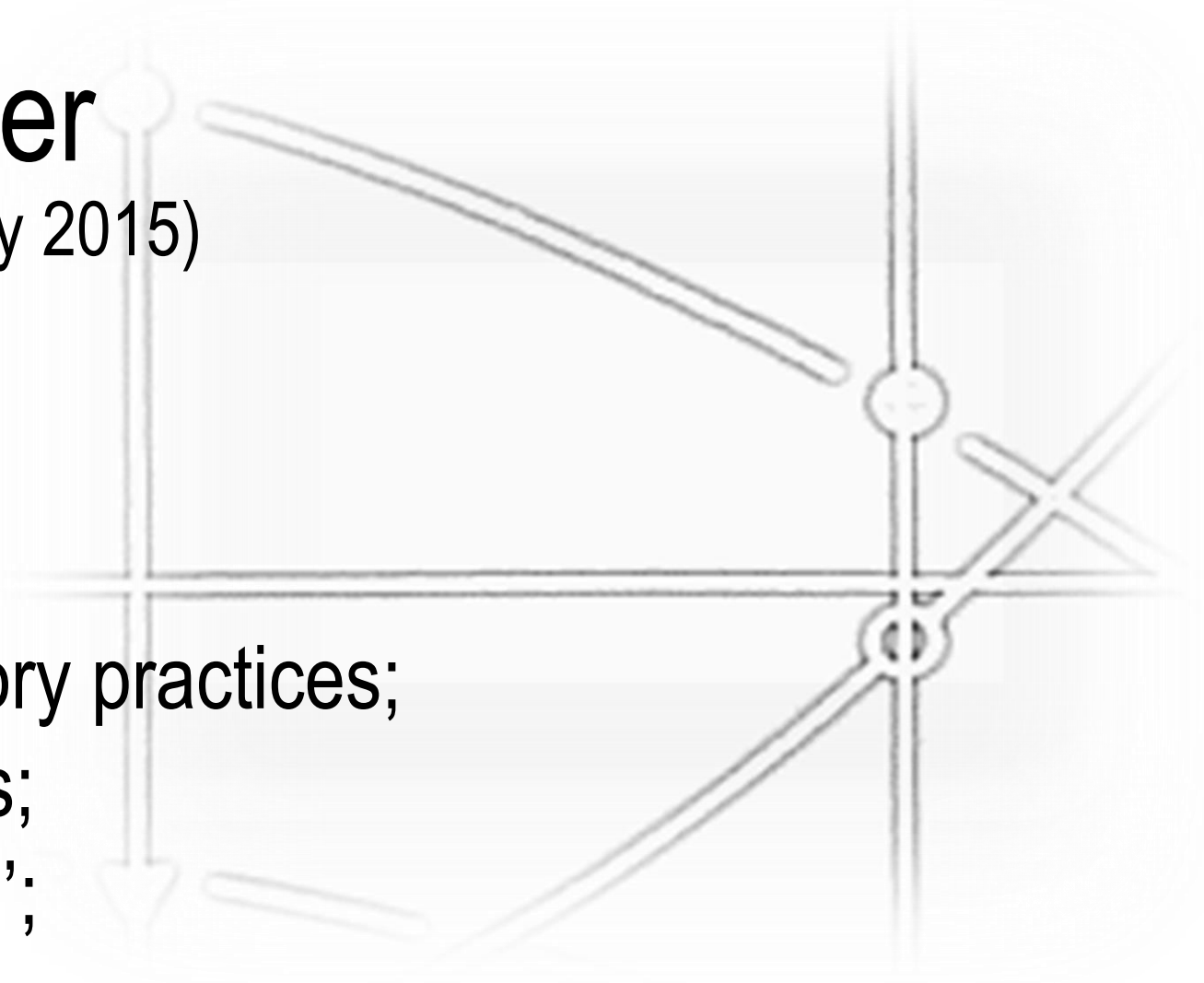


Political (Soft) Power

(Cooley, 2015, Kelley 2016, Merry 2015)

Indicators act as:

- Judges;
- Means of global regulatory practices;
- Means of advocacy tools;
- Organisational 'branding';



Conclusion

Quantification and ranking have become a way of doing politics that must be engaged beyond the specific disciplinary knowledge (such as statistics and econometrics) that underwrites their claims to objectivity.