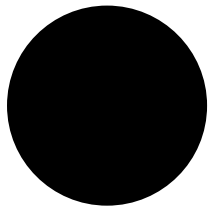


THE JEVONS PARADOX AND OTHER STONES ON THE ROAD TO SUSTAINABILITY

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“A society that consumes is a society that grows and, therefore, prospers”. This has been the mantra with which the generations of industrialization and the era of well-being have grown up, and it is still currently the one that articulates our society and strategic economic policies, although, perhaps in a more timid or controversial way, if possible. For years now we have been hearing that our consumption model cannot be sustained, unlimited economic growth is not possible on a finite planet. At least not in the way we understand it.

Reports such as Stern or the new Dasgupta report on the economics of biodiversity show data that proves it: between 1992 and 2014 the "produced capital" per capita (roads, buildings or factories) doubled, and the "human capital" (education or health) increased by around 13% globally. However, "natural capital" per capita, which measures all the goods and services that nature offers, fell by 40% in the same period. As the author of the previous report on the economics of Climate Change Nicholas Stern points out, “we are taking from the Earth much more than it can bear” and concludes by stating that “we will end up paying for it”.

As a result of these increasingly perceptible data and evidence, the demand for an alternative, more conscious or “sustainable” consumption model has emerged and grown. However, it is far from models more focused on reducing consumerism or the great feared and devilish decline, understood from the measurement of wealth in terms such as GDP. Consumption based on the efficiency of resources and materials, recyclability and reduction of its polluting capacity are a trend, but they do nothing other than continue increasing the consumption curve upwards. We find ourselves with the Jevons Paradox: the more efficiency, the more energy use and consumption.

PARADOJA DE JEVONS

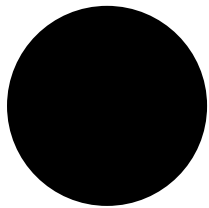


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There are already voices, in addition, that alert about the effects and impacts derived from renewable energies that seemed to be the panacea of the environmental crisis, since, although they do not emit Co2 in the process of generating

energy, are great demanders of very finite mining resources that are already being affected (as is the case with solar plants) or are difficult to manage at the end of their life useful, (as in the case of wind power) even when the demand they cover to date today with respect to fossil fuels it is still minimal. So, we change straws plastic for cardboard straws, but all for single use; food ecological, but in disposable containers; private electric cars, but vehicles private in the same way; fossil energies for renewables, but without reducing the energy demand. And the jewel in the crown today: physical consumption by the digital.

Companies like the well-known Amazon, which alone accounts for 44% of online purchases that take place in the US, have come to stay and break with the physical model of consumption at street level. Beyond the business model, that much has been called into question in recent years in relation to working conditions and other strategic issues, this type of "trade", It generates an environmental impact of which we are still little aware. The effect of the so-called "last mile", in which the consumer was searching on foot or in public transport their needs or goods to acquire, it becomes obsolete and supplanted by a model where a private transport takes us to our residence an individual product, many times in 24 hours. All this with the consequent increase in traffic, vehicle fleets and used fuel, without obviate the fact that many of the transports work at half load due to the flow irregularity, less predictable and more diverse. And this has already been reflected in figures in the US: according to the Monthly Energy Review, the leading energy statistics report from the Administration in the US, in 2016 the freight transport sector exceeded for the first time in emissions to the energy sector since 1979. Thus, almost 25% of these emissions would correspond to medium and heavy trucks, coming from especially the famous "last mile" that we have mentioned. But this is not just a US thing. In the Basque Country, the transport sector has already surpassed the industrial sector in emissions, influenced by these new habits too.



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Weeds have to be uprooted, or so we've always been told. Why then don't we tackle the problem of resource use and consumption in the same way? It seems that placing all hope in future technology will not be the solution to save us from the impacts of our habits. We will have to dare to look inside.

Sara Soloaga

There are no comments yet.