

The World Game

Bringing facts and figures to life

Overview

In this activity, participants visualise data on global relationships between GDP and environmental impact by arranging objects in the room. This gives them access to facts and figures which are otherwise often perceived as abstract and difficult to comprehend, enabling them to establish connections between them.

Instructions

Preparation

The necessary data and World Game spreadsheet can be found on the materials CD. To determine the distribution of the participants among the continents, the exact number of participants must be entered into the spreadsheet. Before the activity begins, a rough outline of a world map must be marked out on the floor with adhesive tape by the facilitators or the participants themselves.

Execution

In all, five parameters (population, GDP, GDP growth, oil consumption and CO₂ emissions) are explored. In the first stage, participants estimate how these parameters are distributed, and reflect this distribution by positioning themselves or certain objects on the world map. The actual data for each parameter is then revealed, and the objects are redistributed accordingly. The participants can briefly discuss the results. We recommend starting with the parameter world population, continuing with GDP and GDP growth, and concluding with oil consumption and CO₂ emissions.

1. To begin with, participants are given the task of positioning themselves on the different continents to reflect the distribution of world population, whereby each individual represents hundreds of millions of people. Once the participants have agreed on how to position themselves on the world map, the correct information for the parameter is revealed by the facilitator.

	10-25
	45 minutes
	Adhesive tape, objects such as chairs, balloons, etc. as symbols for the categories; Downloadable materials (< www.endlich-wachstum.de >): Spreadsheet, Instructions for the arrow layout, Background graphs
	The room must be big enough for an outline of a world map large enough to accommodate all the participants to be marked out on the floor.

To this end, data for each continent is shown on a sheet of A4 paper, and the participants rearrange themselves to reflect the data. The sheets are then displayed on the wall.

2. For the distribution of the next parameter, the groups making up each continent must decide what share of the parameter corresponds to their continent. Once the positioning of the objects representing the second parameter, GDP (the same total number of chairs as participants) has been agreed upon by all participants, the actual data are once again revealed, the chairs are rearranged, and the data sheets are displayed on the wall. The participants are then asked to express an opinion on the share allocated to them, e.g.: Would the chairs on your continent be enough for everyone to sit on? Is there a surplus or a deficit of chairs on your continent? The parameters Oil Consumption and CO₂ Emissions can be explored following the same procedure.

For the parameter GDP growth, instead of arranging objects on the map, participants place paper arrows with growth rates written on them as a percentage on the continents. The facilitator then reveals whether they are correctly positioned, and the arrows are added to the remaining data on the wall.

- In order to emphasise the global relationships between production, consumption and environmental impact, arrows representing relocation of production and exports are added to the picture, showing on the one hand the outsourcing of “dirty” resource and emission intensive industries, and on the other the main flows of goods between continents (cf. Materials).

Evaluation

After the final arrangement, the activity is assessed by discussing the following questions:

- > Which parameters did not match your expectations? Why?
- > How did this global distribution of wealth come about? Which historical processes contributed to it?
- > What relationships can you see between the different parameters?
- > What is the relationship between wealth and environmental impact in the various regions of the world?
- > What has prevented a more equitable distribution of global wealth? What would this require

Tips for facilitators

In this method, it is important to always refer to the per capita distribution of the various parameters, by relating them to the population figures represented by the number of participants on each continent. Instructions on how to use the arrows and background graphs can be found in the supplementary materials. The background graphs are taken from the Globalisation Atlas published by Le Monde Diplomatique (2012). We would like to thank Le Monde Diplomatique for their kind permission to reproduce the graphs for this method.

Variation

This method can also be used to compare different well-being indicators on a global level. How do the various continents compare in terms of their GDP/population according to the Happy Planet Index or the Human Development Index, and how big is their ecological footprint?

To begin with, the participants position themselves according to per capita (!) GDP. In the second stage, this result is compared with the two other well-being indicators and with the continents’ ecological footprint. To do this, the participants allocate cards with ranking numbers to the continents to indicate which continent they think performs best, second best and so in the respective indicator.

This will make it clear that per capita GDP does not necessarily correlate with other well-being indicators. We recommend starting with the HDI, as this is the indicator with the closest correlation to per capita GDP. Depending on the group’s prior knowledge, a short introduction to the various procedures for measuring well-being can be given for each additional parameter. Materials on the indicators can be found in the method “Measuring the Good Life” in chapter 3. The spreadsheet contains an additional tab for this variation (“Calculator variation 2”).

Suggestions for follow-up

The methods “Ein Indikator für das gute Leben – Expert_innen beraten die Enquete-Kommission” (“Indicators of the Good Life – Experts Advise the Inquiry Commission”, currently only available in German - see <www.endlich-wachstum.de>), “Measuring the Good Life – Standard of living indicators” (both in chapter 3) or the method “Jede_r hat das Recht auf ein Auto!” (“Everyone has the right to a car!”, chapter 4, currently only available in German) deal with issues of equitable distribution at a global level.