

The Stockholm Seminars

- focusing on the dynamics and stewardship of social-ecological systems

Improving *real* productivity: - from labour productivity to multidimensional measure of productivity

Dr. Charles Hall

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Thursday 8 November 13.00-14.00

Beijer Hall, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Lilla Frescativägen 4

Labor productivity is often cited as the means which have made modern societies wealthy. But how, in fact, is labor productivity derived? Many people think that labor productivity comes from simply being clever, by figuring out in some basic way how to do something better.

In fact, labor productivity is usually derived by using more energy per worker hour. For example, in agriculture we have given each farmer much larger muscles in the form of tractors, agro chemicals and so forth. Because the productivity has been increased, this has allowed a massive increase in the amount that we could pay labor. This approach worked enormously well during the early to mid part of the last century, however, it requires a continual expansion of overall production for it to be effective over time.

If we have reached the point where it is no longer possible to use more and more material resources due to depletion, then we can have a problem because by making labor more productive we are in effect making energy less productive. If energy is approaching maximum quantities that can be generated, then something has to give. One solution, not too popular, is to make labor less productive and pay less.

About Charles Hall

Charles Hall is a Systems Ecologist who received his PhD under Howard T. Odum at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of seven books and more than 250 scholarly articles. He is best known for his development of the concept of EROI, or Energy Return On Investment, an examination of how organisms, including humans, invest energy into obtaining additional energy to improve biotic or social fitness.

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The seminar is organised in collaboration with Global Utmaning.