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Amplifying beyond-GDP indicator initiatives: a comparative analysis of eight national case studies

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ABSTRACT

Amid growing dissatisfaction with gross domestic product (GDP) as a measure of progress, national beyond-GDP indicator initiatives (BGDP IIs) have proliferated. These initiatives seek to reorient policies by providing more holistic metrics for progress, grounded in principles of sustainability, equity, and quality of life. While considerable work has been done on their conceptual design and methodological robustness, far less is known about how these initiatives broaden and deepen their reach. This study addresses this gap by examining the processes through which such initiatives amplify (i.e., scale and embed through pathways that increase impact potential). Drawing on a comparative qualitative analysis of eight prominent national cases, we employ the concept of amplification to identify pathways through which initiatives scale within, out, and beyond their original scope. These pathways include legal mandates, institutional integration, and collaborative governance processes, which either enable or hinder the amplification of BGDP IIs. Importantly, the analysis frames indicator initiatives not as passive metrics but as active tools of transformation. The findings underscore both the transformative potential and the structural limitations of existing BGDP IIs, offering new insights into their role in advancing post-growth governance and reshaping conceptions of societal progress.

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Amplification; beyond GDP; transformative indicators; progress measurement; socio-institutional change


Introduction

As the costs of economic growth become more visible (Fanning et al. 2021), particularly in the context of ecological breakdown and rising inequality (Rockström et al. 2023), scholars, policymakers, and civil society actors have called for alternative ways of assessing prosperity that prioritize human and planetary well-being over mere economic throughput (Raworth 2017). At the heart of this rethinking lie beyond gross domestic product (GDP) indicator initiatives (BGDP IIs). These initiatives, which go beyond the design and calculation of new indicators, seek to reorient policymaking by providing holistic metrics for progress (Costanza et al. 2009; van den Bergh 2009).

Underpinning this movement is a vision of economic systems that respect strong sustainability, equity, and well-being objectives, which some call “sustainable inclusive wellbeing” (Kubiszewski et al. 2025) or “sustainable wellbeing” (Hirvilammi et al. 2024). While the two concepts overlap substantially, we harness “sustainable well-being” to emphasize a systemic perspective on prosperity that links individual, social, and environmental dimensions. Within the broader movement for post-growth and well-being-oriented economies, BGDP IIs, such as the Living Standards Framework dashboard in New Zealand or the National Wellbeing Indicators in Wales, represent a critical site of innovation, contestation, and potential transformation (Hayden 2021; Jany-Catrice and Méda 2021).

The history of BGDP indicators is rich and varied (Jansen et al. 2023; Rum et al. 2024). For decades, researchers, civil society organizations, and international institutions have proposed new metrics reflecting efforts to measure “progress,” “prosperity,” “quality of life,” “well-being,” “sustainability,” and “happiness” beyond economic output (Barrington-Leigh and Escande 2018). Attempts have been made to bring these

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efforts closer to policymaking through comprehensive frameworks at local, national, and supranational levels (van den Bergh 2022; Battaglia 2025a), responding to public interest in alternative indicators of progress (Silvi and Bleys 2024). Despite this proliferation, however, integration of such indicators into core policymaking processes remains limited (Whitby et al. 2014; Lehtonen, Sébastien, and Bauler 2016; Hayden 2021; Battaglia 2025b). Many initiatives struggle to move beyond symbolic or technical roles. While the supply of indicators has grown, their actual implementation and transformative impact have not kept pace. This suggests that the conceptual and technical soundness of indicators, albeit crucial, is indeed not sufficient to unlock widespread use and influence (Kovacic and Giampietro 2015).

The critical question is under what conditions these initiatives can reshape the institutions¹ (e.g., governmental, statistical, regulatory), norms (e.g., metrological, evaluative, comparative), and policy practices (e.g., agenda-setting, budgeting, policy assessment) that currently define and steer progress. We address this question by harnessing a systemic, multi-level sustainability transitions-oriented framework and asking: How do national BGDG IIs amplify their innovations through scaling processes (in breadth and depth), thereby increasing their influence and impact potential? Answering this question requires looking beyond the indicators themselves to the broader initiatives in which they are embedded—including the actors, institutions, discourses, and political contexts that shape how indicators are constructed, interpreted, and mobilized (Whitby et al. 2014; Ottaviani, Le Roy, and O’Sullivan 2021). Thus, we treat indicators not as neutral tools, but as embedded initiatives that mobilize knowledge, actors, and values.

We analyze these dynamics through the lens of amplification, defined as the concrete processes through which initiatives extend their reach, become more deeply embedded in institutions, and potentially shift institutional logics, public narratives, and political norms (Lam et al. 2020).² While related to influence, amplification emphasizes pathways toward impact—concrete changes in policies, institutions, or societal values—even when such outcomes are difficult to trace directly. Thus, we focus on pathways likely conducive to sustainable well-being outcomes, though achieving this broad goal requires more than new metrics and targets. In this respect, institutional embedding matters because BGDG IIs can leverage deeper engagement in socio-political and economic systems and thus exert their transformative potential (Meadows 1999).

Empirically, we analyze eight case studies selected for their public, political, or media prominence and for their reflection of institutional and sociopolitical diversity. Using Lam et al. (2020) typology of amplification processes, we explore the mechanisms that enable BGDG IIs to move from marginal alternatives to deeply seated components of policymaking.

While research has only partially examined how indicators become embedded in policymaking (Corlet Walker, Druckman, and Cattaneo 2020; Kaufmann et al. 2023), recent scholarship has begun to unpack the dynamics underpinning the hegemony of growth-centered logics (Jones 2025) and the central role of GDP (Fioramonti 2017). Other studies have examined the enabling conditions for alternative indicators (Hoff et al. 2021; Malay 2019) or the impact of indicator initiatives (Battaglia 2025b), while multi-country studies highlight recurring implementation challenges, including limited stakeholder participation in Lepenies (2019) and difficulties in accessing deep leverage points within political systems (Kaufmann et al. 2023). A further strand of research emphasizes the role of politics in shaping national measurement and implementation processes, notably regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Lepenies et al. 2023; Beisheim et al. 2025) and national BGDG IIs (see Pagnon 2023 for France; Battaglia 2025b for Scotland and Italy). Hoekstra et al. (2024) apply theories of institutional change—including the multi-level perspective that also informs our work—to explore how to “tilt the scale” toward sustainable and inclusive well-being, which requires aligning concepts, norms, and language with both technical infrastructures (metrics, accounts, models) and governance mechanisms (targets, budgeting, implementation tools).

Despite these advances, no comparative study has systematically examined the full range of amplification processes across indicator initiatives using a multi-level analytical framework tailored to sustainability-oriented niches. This article addresses this gap by applying an amplification lens to eight diverse cases. This approach seeks to generate more systemic insights into the patterns and evolutionary trajectories of indicator initiatives, while establishing a robust foundation for impact assessment. The present article, therefore, aims to deepen our understanding of how such initiatives

can fulfill their transformative potential and contribute to a transition toward more just and sustainable futures.

Conceptual background: beyond-GDP indicator initiatives and amplification processes

Beyond-GDP indicator initiatives: an exploration of their diversity, ambitions, and challenges

BGDP IIs have emerged across a wide range of geographical and institutional scales (Jansen et al. 2023). At the local and regional levels, many of these efforts reflect bottom-up processes aimed at developing place-based measures that respond to specific environmental, cultural, and socio-economic realities (Ottaviani, Le Roy, and O’Sullivan 2021). At the opposite end of the spectrum, supranational bodies such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations (UN), and the European Commission have developed global frameworks, including the Better Life Index, the Human Development Index, and the Social Progress Index. While these international initiatives are important in shaping global measurement norms and fostering cross-country comparability, they often privilege standardization over contextual sensitivity. Situated between these two poles, national-level BGDP IIs occupy a strategic middle ground. These initiatives are generally embedded within national policymaking structures, enabling them to navigate more effectively the balance between global relevance and local adaptability. Their positioning allows them to respond to domestic political priorities and social narratives while also aligning with broader international agendas (Exton and Shinwell 2018; Hayden, Gaudet, and Wilson 2022).

In this research, we focus on national-level BGDP IIs, as they represent a fertile ground for exploring amplification processes (Dethier and Roman 2024). Indeed, their dual anchoring—close to societal realities but institutionally connected—makes them promising sites for studying how initiatives extend their reach, embed more deeply within governance systems, and potentially contribute to systemic change. This focus is further supported by the central role of national governments in economic policymaking, including fiscal planning and budgeting—key levers through which BGDP indicators can influence decision-making and institutional change (Laurent 2022; Kaufmann et al. 2023). National initiatives can also act as translators and mediators—bridging local experimentation and global norm-setting and thereby playing a pivotal role in shaping how beyond-GDP concepts are operationalized across levels of governance (Ottaviani, Le Roy, and O’Sullivan 2021).

The evolution of BGDP IIs over the past decades has been marked by alternating waves of optimism and disappointment (Hoekstra 2019). The late 2000s represented a high point for the movement, catalyzed by the influential Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi (2009), which called for new metrics to better capture the complexities of well-being and sustainability. However, more than a decade later, many scholars have noted a sense of stagnation—or even disillusionment—with the field (Jany-Catrice and Méda 2021; Colman 2022). Despite the proliferation of BGDP IIs, their transformative ambition has been curtailed by institutional inertia, political resistance, or technocratic dilution (Bleys and Whitby 2015; Corlet Walker, Druckman, and Cattaneo 2020; Battaglia 2025b). Scholars (e.g., Hayden 2021; Colman 2022) have argued that the field continues to struggle between bold aspirations and modest practical influence.

Several interrelated factors explain this impasse. First, many BGDP IIs exhibit conceptual ambiguity and a weak theoretical grounding (Bleys and Whitby 2015; Usubiaga-Liaño and Ekins 2024). Core concepts like “well-being” and “sustainability” remain contested across disciplines, cultures, and political contexts (Hirvilammi et al. 2024). While this openness can foster inclusivity, it often undermines coherence and consensus. Second, BGDP IIs face significant methodological hurdles, raising difficult questions about indicator selection, weighting, tradeoffs, and transparency (Bleys and Whitby 2015; Munda 2015). The sheer volume of metrics available also risks indicator overload, leading to selective or symbolic uptake rather than substantive use (Hoekstra 2019). Additionally, certain BGDP indicators suffer from limitations in data quality, reliability, and timeliness, which causes them to lag behind GDP and other national accounting datasets. Third—and most crucial—are political and institutional barriers.

By contrast to GDP, with its deep embeddedness in economic paradigms and governance routines (Fioramonti 2017), BGDPIs often remain peripheral, underfunded, politically unsupported (Hayden 2021; Colman 2022), and lack powerful epistemic communities and advocacy coalitions to support deep transformation (Malay 2019). Even well-designed initiatives struggle against institutional inertia, policy lock-ins, and dominant discourses that resist structural change (Whitby et al. 2014; Bleys and Whitby 2015). This underscores that technical quality alone, albeit necessary, is insufficient for BGDPI indicators to gain traction. Indicators are not ready-made tools awaiting selection but socially and institutionally embedded objects. Their impact depends on being carried by networks of actors who give them meaning, connect them to public action, and ensure their ongoing relevance. Without such anchoring, they risk remaining symbolic or marginal (Lehtonen, Sébastien, and Bauler 2016). By analyzing national initiatives, we aim to uncover the pathways that enable BGDPIs to move beyond isolated experiments and toward broader systemic influence—offering insights that may also inspire beyond-GDP efforts at other levels of governance.

Niche amplification from a transitions studies perspective

Understanding how social innovations move from the margins to drive meaningful systemic change is crucial in today's interconnected socio-ecological crises (Avelino et al. 2019). This is especially relevant for BGDPIs, which may serve as powerful levers for transformation (Hayden 2021). To evaluate how these initiatives build influence at all levels of governance, the concept of (niche) amplification—developed within the broader multi-level perspective (MLP) framework—provides a useful analytical lens.

The MLP conceptualizes socio-technical transitions as dynamic interactions between three analytical levels: niches, regimes, and the broader landscape (Geels and Schot 2007). Accordingly, niches refer to protected spaces where radical innovations emerge, regimes encompass dominant industry structures and cultural norms, and landscapes represent broader external forces, such as political and environmental patterns, that shape long-term transitions. Within this framework, niche innovations often arise and challenge the regime in response to disruptions or pressures at the landscape level. These innovations emerge in protected spaces—termed niches—where actors can experiment without the immediate pressures of the dominant regime (Raven et al. 2016).

To understand the process through which niche innovations exert influence beyond their initial confines, Lam et al. (2020) offer a typology of eight niche-amplification processes categorized into three macro-processes: amplifying within, amplifying out, and amplifying beyond an initiative. *Amplifying within* involves strengthening and accelerating the niche internally. Mechanisms like (1) stabilizing—embedding the innovation in its context—and (2) speeding up—accelerating its development or impacts—are key to consolidating the internal robustness of the niche. *Amplifying out* refers to the geographic or sectoral diffusion of a niche through (3) growing (expanding reach), (4) replicating (copying into dissimilar but related contexts), (5) transferring (adapting to new contexts), or (6) spreading (disseminating principles). *Amplifying beyond* denotes deeper, system-level transformations. This includes (7) scaling up, where niches influence institutional arrangements or regime rules, and (8) scaling deep, which involves transforming values, beliefs, and cultural meanings. Each of the eight forms of amplification plays a distinct yet complementary role in the evolution of niche innovations, supporting their transformation from small-scale alternatives into powerful agents of transition.

We position BGDPIs within the MLP framework as niche innovations that challenge the dominant GDP-centric regime and may eventually contribute to transforming the growth-dependent capitalist landscape. GDP remains the default measure of performance and, by extension, of progress (Fioramonti 2017; Hoekstra 2019), embodying socio-institutional norms and power structures. GDP and national accounting lie at the heart of numerous policymaking and statistical practices well beyond economic domains. As the dominant proxy for power, prosperity, and well-being, GDP serves multiple functions, including allocating funds among countries (e.g., the EU's FEDER³ funds and development aid), setting contribution shares and voting rights in supranational institutions (e.g., the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank), assessing public deficits and debt sustainability, and evaluating policy desirability. These lock-ins stem from war economies, postwar reconstruction, geopolitical competition,

and the “dematerialization” of economic theory (Fioramonti 2017; Jones 2025). Its persistence is supported by several factors, including international standardization through the United Nations-backed System of National Accounts (SNA), which ensures comparability; its aggregation properties across scales (from local to global); and its frequent and timely release.

Yet, the persistence of deep, interconnected socio-ecological crises at the landscape level continually exposes the inadequacy of the current progress-measurement regime. This systemic pressure opens space for niche-level initiatives such as BGDG IIs to emerge and evolve as potential alternatives, offering new ways to conceptualize and measure societal progress (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi 2009; van den Bergh 2009). The financial crisis that began in 2007 opened the door to questioning both the economic system and its dominant measurement tools. However, the combined pressures of intensified global economic competition, declining productivity growth in many industrialized nations, and high levels of debt—both public and private—have brought GDP growth back to the forefront of economic agendas.

Amplification is a key concept in this context because BGDG IIs typically start as marginal alternatives to the central measurement regime based on GDP. While this applies to most civil society-led experiments, national BGDG IIs depart somewhat from the niche logic: when national governments support them, their institutional anchoring (in statistical and/or governmental departments) grants them greater legitimacy within the dominant regime, even as they continue to rely on experimental practices. But without mechanisms of amplification, these initiatives risk remaining isolated or being co-opted by the dominant regime without meaningful change (Whitby et al. 2014; Lehtonen, Sébastien, and Bauler 2016; Battaglia 2025b). Understanding the pathways of amplification thus allows researchers and practitioners to assess whether and how such initiatives can contribute to systemic transformation. For instance, amplification within ensures that BGDG IIs are robust and credible enough to withstand regime pressures. Amplification out mechanisms illustrate how successful BGDG IIs expand or inspire similar initiatives elsewhere. Critically, amplifying beyond addresses the heart of the necessary transformative changes. Scaling up might entail formal integration of new indicators into national statistical systems or policymaking processes (agenda setting, *ex ante* and *ex post* impact assessment, policy screening and selection). Scaling deep involves shifting public and political mindsets, fostering cultural change about what constitutes progress and success. Without such deep shifts, the adoption of alternative indicators risks remaining merely symbolic.

Drawing on the MLP framework, the concept of niche amplification allows us to map the mechanisms that support internal consolidation (amplification within), external diffusion (amplification out), and the transformation of mindset and rules (amplification beyond) in BGDG IIs. While existing research often focuses on either the internal properties of BGDG indicators or their hoped-for societal impact, little attention has been given to the intermediate processes through which these initiatives move from the margins to broader influence. By introducing and applying the amplification lens, our study fills this gap and offers a new analytical tool for understanding how alternative and peripheral BGDG IIs gain traction.

Materials and method

We adopt a qualitative, case-oriented comparative study design (Ragin 1999; Della Porta 2008) grounded in deductive reasoning to investigate how national BGDG IIs amplify their influence (see Lepenies et al. 2023 for a similar method). This approach allows us to apply an existing theoretical framework—Lam et al. (2020) niche amplification typology—to a new empirical context. By embedding the case analysis in this framework, we not only leverage the amplification typology to generate new insights into how BGDG IIs evolve within complex policy environments but also contribute to refining it with grounded empirical evidence. The methodology unfolds in three stages: (1) case selection, (2) data collection, and (3) data coding and analysis (Figure 1).

Stage 1: Case-study selection

This first stage involved the identification and selection of relevant national BGDG IIs based on a most-similar systems design (MSSD) (Della Porta 2008). Drawing on extensive reviews and databases

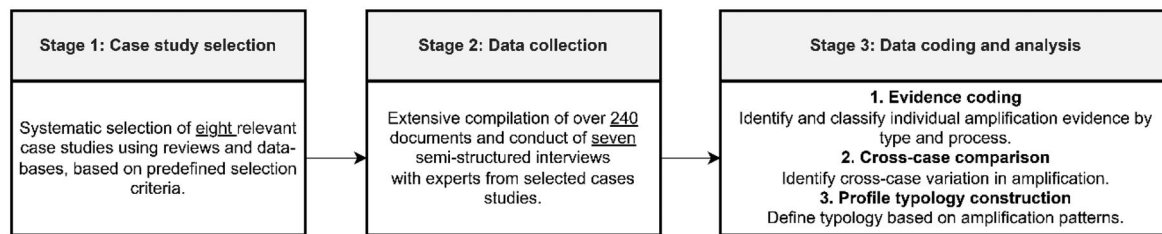


Figure 1. Methodology.

Notes: Each case study represents a national BGDPII. Amplification evidence is classified as Supporting, Ambiguous, Contradictory, or Absent. Amplification processes follow the eight-part typology of Lam et al. (2020). Cross-case results are assessed as showing comparatively substantiated, moderate, or limited amplification.

(i.e., Forum pour de Nouveaux Indicateurs de Richesse 2011; Chancel, Thiry, and Demailly 2014; Exton and Shinwell 2018; Forum International Pour le Bien-Vivre 2022; Hayden, Gaudet, and Wilson 2022; Cap Bien Vivre 2023; Gábos, Lelkes, and Cammeo 2023; Jansen et al. 2023), we compiled an inventory of over 100 initiatives. Each was systematically reviewed based on key features: geographical scope, duration, initiating actors, goals, methodological design (e.g., dashboards vs. indices), and the degree to which it sought to complement or replace GDP. We also assessed their institutional scale (local, national, international) and theoretical underpinnings.

Case selection followed three main criteria to satisfy the MSSD logic. First, we selected salient initiatives that had generated public, political, or media resonance and had already been the subject of prior research. This ensured both greater data availability (e.g., through earlier analyses) and that the initiatives had provoked public debate, political will, and, at times, opposition—thereby revealing barriers and enablers to their amplification. Such visibility distinguishes them from more technocratic processes (e.g., SDG national integration (Lepenies et al. 2023)) and highlights their relevance as sites of contested progress narratives. Second, we focused on national-level cases, given their pivotal position between local innovation and international standard-setting. Finally, we sought some degree of diversity in socio-political and cultural features to capture a range of contexts and amplification pathways. This resulted in a balanced and analytically robust sample for our case-oriented comparative study following an MSSD logic.

Stage 2: Data collection

The second stage of the research, conducted between late 2023 and early 2024, involved two complementary methods: desk-based documentary compilation and semi-structured interviews. This phase aimed to build a robust empirical foundation for analyzing amplification processes in Stage 3. The documentary review covered over 240 documents—including monographs, academic papers, grey literature, national communications, media articles, and blog posts—providing insights into the narratives, discourses, and political positioning surrounding each initiative. We included sources on precursor or associated initiatives when necessary to reconstruct the development pathways of the leading frameworks. Document collection proceeded until informational saturation was reached. Several of the selected initiatives had already been the subject of in-depth monographic studies, including doctoral theses, which drew on interviews, verbatim transcripts, and institutional archives. While we did not conduct these empirical investigations ourselves, we benefited from their findings indirectly through secondary analysis. A complete list of sources is provided in [Supplementary Material 1](#), with academic publications specifically marked to highlight their contribution based on prior in-depth analysis.

This material was complemented by seven semi-structured interviews with key informants directly involved in the design, implementation, or promotion of the selected initiatives. Interviewees were identified through purposive sampling based on their expertise and active involvement in well-being indicator initiatives, ensuring representation across policy, research, and civil society spheres (see [Supplementary Material 2](#)). Participants included, among others, national framework coordinators, academic experts, and representatives of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance.

The interviews were guided by a structured interview protocol covering five thematic blocks: (1) the interviewee's role and background, (2) the initiative's development and stakeholder dynamics, (3) the objectives underpinning the framework, (4) perceived impacts and barriers to policy uptake, and (5) reflections and future directions. These conversations provided contextual and interpretive depth, complementing the documentary analysis by capturing how actors themselves understand the initiative's drivers, challenges, and evolving influence. Together, the documentary and interview data offered a triangulated evidence base to support the comparative coding and analysis in the final research stage.

Stage 3: Data coding and analysis

The final stage of the research involved systematically analyzing the empirical material collected during Stage 2 to assess how each initiative engages in different amplification processes. In *Step 1* of Stage 3, we identified all relevant evidence of amplification for each initiative and compiled it into a comparative matrix using Lam et al. (2020) amplification typology. This framework distinguishes three macro-processes—amplifying within, out, and beyond—each comprising specific sub-processes (e.g., stabilizing, growing, scaling up). Each item of amplification evidence was classified into four categories: (1) supporting (clearly demonstrating amplification), (2) ambiguous (open to interpretation), (3) contradictory (undermining amplification), and (4) absence of evidence.

In *Step 2*, we conducted a cross-case comparative analysis to evaluate the relative strength of amplification across initiatives. For each of the eight initiatives, we assessed whether the pattern of evidence pointed to comparatively substantiated amplification (strong supporting evidence exceeding that in other cases), comparatively moderate amplification (mixed evidence comparable to that in other cases), or relatively limited amplification (mainly contradictory, ambiguous, or no evidence). Therefore, rather than assigning numerical scores or aggregating items, we conducted a qualitative appreciation of the strength, coherence, and relevance of the available evidence within each amplification process and across case studies (Table 1).

In *Step 3*, we synthesized these results into a heatmap that visually represents the strength and distribution of amplification processes across cases. Complete coding of amplification evidence is provided in [Supplementary Material S1](#) and Table 2 summarizes the comparative results. The “overall” assessments reported in Table 2 for each macro-process (stabilizing, speeding up, scaling up, and scaling deep) were derived through an integrative qualitative interpretation of their respective sub-components. The heatmap analysis informed the development of a typology of amplification profiles (Kluge 2000), distinguishing systemic, selective, and constrained amplifiers. These profiles reflect different degrees of alignment across amplification processes and reveal the institutional, political, and contextual conditions that shape their occurrence or absence. The analysis thus offers strategic insights into the transformative potential of national BGDPIs.

Results

This section presents the main findings of the study, starting with a brief overview of the selected case studies, followed by a comparative analysis of amplification evidence across initiatives.

Selected case studies

The research focused on eight national BGDPIs: Measuring What Matters (MWM—Australia), Gross National Happiness Index (GNH—Bhutan), Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW—Canada), New Indicators of Wealth (NIW—France), Equitable and Sustainable Wellbeing Indicators (BES—Italy), Living Standards Framework dashboard (LSF—New Zealand), National Performance Framework (NPF—Scotland), and National Wellbeing Indicators (NWI—Wales). Their profiles are summarized in Table 1, with further details in [Supplementary Material 3](#).

Following the MSSD logic, the selected initiatives share several core characteristics that allow for meaningful comparison: they are all national-level efforts to move beyond GDP by integrating broader

Table 1. Selected beyond-GDP indicators initiatives.

Selected IIs	1st edition	Initiator	Implementation bodies	Legal framework	Main legal obligations	Complementary tools	Participatory process	Type	Main theoretical dimensions	# individual indicators
MWM (AUS)	2023	Treasury	Treasury	None	None	Closing the gap information repository; State of the environment report.	Limited	D.	(1) Cohesion; (2) Health; (3) Prosperity; (4) Security; (5) Sustainability	50
GNH (BHU)	2008	Suggested by the King, formulated by the government	GNH Commission; CBS	Article 9, Section 2 of the Constitution	"The State shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness."	GNH policy/project screening tools; Five-year plans; GNH checklist; RAF	Extensive	I.	(1) Community vitality; (2) Cultural diversity and resilience; (3) Ecological diversity and resilience; (4) Education; (5) Good governance; (6) Health; (7) Living standards; (8) Psychological well-being; (9) Time use	33
CIW (CAN)	2011	Researchers from the Atkinson Foundation	University of Waterloo	None	None	Community well-being survey; Canadian child and youth well-being survey	Extensive	I.	(1) Community vitality; (2) Democratic engagement; (3) Education; (4) Environment; (5) Healthy populations; (6) Leisure and culture; (7) Living standards; (8) Time use	64
NIW (FR)	2015	Parliament	INSEE; Parliament	Law no. 2015-411 (i.e., the "Sas Law") (2015)	Initially, INSEE published an annual NIW report. Obligation discontinued in 2018.	None	Limited	D.	(1) Social; (2) Economic; (3) Environment	10
BES (IT)	2013	ISTAT	ISTAT; Ministry of the Economy; Parliament	Law 163/2016, reforming the Budget Law (2016)	The Ministry of the Economy produces an annual BES indicators report, covering the past 3 years and future projections, which is included in the DEF and discussed by Parliament.	Appendix to the DEF; URBEs; Best	Medium	D.	(1) Health; (2) Education and training; (3) Work and life balance; (4) Economic well-being; (5) Social relationships; (6) Politics and institutions; (7) safety; (8) Subjective well-being; (9) Landscape and cultural heritage; (10) Environment; (11) Innovation; (12) Research and creativity; (13) Quality of services	152 for the long list; 12 for the short list
LSF (NZ)	2018	Treasury	Treasury; Government	Amendments of the Public Finance Act of 1989 (2020)	Treasury produces a well-being report every 4 years; well-being objectives guide budget policy decisions; annual fiscal strategy reports on alignment with well-being objectives.	Well-being reports; CBAX; He Ara Waiora; Well-being budget	Extensive	D.	(1) Individual and collective well-being; (2) Institutions and governance; (3) Wealth of Aotearoa New Zealand	103

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Selected IIs	1st edition	Initiator	Implementation bodies	Legal framework	Main legal obligations	Complementary tools	Participatory process	Type	Main theoretical dimensions	# individual indicators
NPF (SCT)	2007	Government	Government, Community Planning Partnerships	Community Empowerment Act (2015)	The government must consider National Outcomes in planning; review them at least every 5 years; and publish achievement reports as deemed appropriate (use of NPF in reports is optional).	Equality Evidence Finder; Wellbeing Economy Monitor; Local Wellbeing Economy Monitor	Medium	D.	(1) Children and young people; (2) Communities; (3) Culture; (4) Economy; (5) Education; (6) Environment; (7) Fair work and business; (8) Health; (9) Human rights; (12) International; (11) Poverty;	81
NWI (WAL)	2016	Government	Government; Auditor General; Future Generation Commissioner PSBs	WFGA (2015)	Public bodies must set and publish well-being objectives aligned with the 7 goals and take reasonable steps to meet them; Ministers must publish and present NWI and "milestones" to the National Assembly for Wales, including timelines for achievement.	Reports (Future Generations, Auditor General's Wellbeing, Annual Wellbeing, Future Trends, Local Wellbeing Plans); Toolkits (Visual Essentials Guide, Three Horizons, Future Generations Policy Leader).	Extensive	D.	(1) Prosperity; (2) Resilience; (3) Health; (4) Equality; (5) Community cohesion; (6) Cultural vibrancy; (7) Global responsibility	50

Abbreviations. AUS: Australia; BHU: Bhutan; CAN: Canada; FR: France; IT: Italy; NZ: New Zealand; SCT: Scotland; WAL: Wales; CBS: Center for Bhutan and GNH Studies; INSEE: National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies; ISTAT: Italian National Institute of Statistics; D.: Dashboard; I.: Index; DEF: the Economic and Finance Document in Italy; PSB: Public Services Boards; WFGA: Well-being of Future Generations Act; RAF: Resource Allocation Formulas.

Table 2. Heatmap of the amplification processes across selected BGDG IIs.

Amplification typology (Lam et al. 2020)		Amplification processes	BGDP IIs							
			MWM (AUS)	NIW (FR)	CIW (CAN)	NPF (SCT)	BES (IT)	LSF (NZ)	NWI (WAL)	GNH (BHU)
Amplification within	Stabilizing	Integration								
		Cultural embedment								
		Legal embedment								
		Stability across governments								
		OVERALL								
	Speeding up	Framework improvement								
		Complementary tools								
		Gatekeepers								
		OVERALL								
	Amplification out	Growing								
Replicating										
Transferring										
Spreading										
Amplification beyond	Scaling up	Reporting and monitoring								
		Specific policy evaluation								
		Political targets								
		Budgetary allocation rules								
		Enforcement mechanisms								
		Results in policies								
		OVERALL								
	Scaling deep	Overall reception								
		Influence on thinking								
		OVERALL								
Amplification profiles typology			Selective amplifiers		Constrained amplifiers				Systemic amplifiers	

Notes: The heatmap presents the results of “Stage 3” using a color-coded scale to indicate the relative strength of amplification processes across cases. Comparatively substantiated amplification is shown in dark grey; comparatively moderate amplification in medium grey; and comparatively limited amplification in white. Amplification categories written with small caps distinguish them from their subcomponents.

dimensions of sustainable well-being, and they all aim to complement—rather than replace—GDP. They engage with the broader vision of sustainable well-being, albeit to varying degrees (ranging from relatively distant—MWM, BES, NIW—to very close—NPF, NWI—with GNH, CIW, and LSF in between; see Dethier and Roman 2024).

The selection predominantly features Global North cases to ensure analytical consistency across relatively comparable governance systems and shared challenges related to BGDG IIs. In fact, apart from Bhutan, selected case studies are OECD countries that (1) have long-standing traditions of GDP-based economic policymaking and (2) host well-established critiques of GDP and vibrant civil societies that promote sustainable well-being and alternative progress indicators. Indeed, despite the varying lifespan of the initiatives—ranging from Scotland’s NPF (2007) to Australia’s recently launched MWM (2023)—they all build on long national traditions of policy experimentation with sustainable well-being frameworks. Bhutan’s GNH, included as a contrasting Global South case, offers a distinctive conceptual foundation and implementation pathway, thereby enriching the comparative lens.

Most initiatives are government-led, except for Canada’s CIW, which has been developed within academia. State-led initiatives benefit from political (and thus, also, potentially broader institutional) legitimacy and greater potential for integration, while non-governmental efforts may offer independence but face greater political and sustainability challenges.

Despite these similarities, the cases vary in their institutional setups and legal anchoring—dimensions that allow us to examine how such differences shape amplification dynamics. A dedicated commission steers Bhutan's GNH, while MWM and LSF are housed within national treasuries. Others, like Scotland's NPF and Wales' NWI, follow more distributed governance models. Legal backing ranges from constitutional enshrinement (Bhutan) to statutory mandates (Italy, Scotland, Wales) to a complete absence of legal anchoring (Canada, Australia). Legal mandates typically enhance institutional stability and policy continuity. Several initiatives are supported by operational tools—such as Bhutan's screening tool and five-year plans (FYP), New Zealand's CBAX and He Ara Waiora, or Italy's BES budget annex—helping to translate abstract indicators into concrete policy guidance. These tools also vary in scale and function, from survey-based tools (Canada) to decision-support systems (Australia, New Zealand). Stakeholder engagement also varies. While some initiatives have involved limited consultation (e.g., France), others—like Wales—pursue more participatory models, including national dialogues. Participation, while often cited as a legitimacy-enhancing feature (Le Roy, Offredi, and Ottaviani 2015; Jany-Catrice and Méda 2021), varies widely in both form and influence across selected case studies.⁴

Cross-national amplification evidence and comparison

This section gathers key patterns from the comparative analysis of the eight national BGDG IIs, using a structured framework of amplification processes—within, out, and beyond (Table 2).

Amplification within

Focusing on mechanisms for stabilizing and speeding up, this section explores how selected BGDG IIs are embedded in their institutional and cultural contexts, build resilience against shifting political environments, and enhance their frameworks and tools.

Stabilizing. Stabilizing refers to the process by which niches consolidate their presence and resilience within the institutional (e.g., administrative and statistical) and political landscape, ensuring durability over time and across political shifts. In the context of national BGDG IIs, our analysis indicates that stabilization can occur through multiple interrelated mechanisms: policy integration, cultural embedment, legal institutionalization, and political resilience.

Effective integration of BGDG IIs into the policy landscape requires both horizontal (across ministries, sectors, and agencies at the same level of governance) and vertical (across governance levels—from local to international) integration. Such alignment enhances policy coherence, relevance, coordination, and institutional resilience. New Zealand's LSF illustrates this well: horizontally, it is embedded within the Treasury and linked to tools like CBAX and He Ara Waiora, and it is connected to cross-ministerial coordination via the Social Wellbeing Board. It also informs the Wellbeing Budgets, fostering multi-agency collaboration. Vertically upward, the LSF aligns with international agendas through its alignment with the OECD's recommendations and New Zealand's membership in the Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo) initiative, strengthening its institutional position. However, limited vertical downward integration at the subnational level remains a challenge.

Cultural embedding also enhances legitimacy by aligning BGDG IIs with local values and identities. Scotland's NPF and Wales' NWI exemplify this situation. The NPF builds on extensive public consultation, while Wales' NWI, shaped by the “Wales We Want” dialogue, promotes cultural dimensions such as the Welsh language and identity, enhancing societal resonance and buy-in. Similarly, New Zealand's LSF has increasingly integrated the He Ara Waiora framework, developed by the Treasury in partnership with Māori experts, to embed Te ao Māori (the Māori worldview) in the Treasury analysis and recommendations of sustainable well-being policies.

Observation of the case studies suggests that legal frameworks are another crucial stabilizing force. Legislative backing embeds BGDG IIs into governance routines and protects them from shifting political winds. In Wales, the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFGA) mandates public bodies to pursue long-term well-being goals. Bhutan's Constitution enshrines GNH and Italy's Budget Law

integrates BES into fiscal planning. By contrast, France's NIW lost momentum after its reporting obligation was breached, illustrating how legal fragility can compromise institutional durability.

Finally, stability also depends on the initiative's capacity to withstand political turnover. This is reinforced not only by law and culture but also by institutional independence, modest resource needs, and credibility. Italy's BES, managed by ISTAT, the independent national statistics agency, has remained stable across multiple governments. Canada's CIW, developed independently of the federal government, has continued despite lacking formal political support. Australia's low-profile MWM avoids political interference because it operates with minimal resources.

Speeding up. Speeding up refers to accelerating a niche initiative's capacity to evolve, streamline implementation, and influence its context in a timely manner. In the case of BGDG IIs, this process occurs primarily through three interconnected mechanisms: updating conceptual frameworks, developing complementary tools, and appointing oversight actors or "gatekeepers" to sustain momentum and ensure accountability.

Updating conceptual frameworks allows BGDG IIs to remain relevant in shifting social and environmental contexts. Canada's CIW, for instance, continuously revises its indicators to reflect evolving societal realities. Scotland's NPF benefits from regular reviews mandated by the Community Empowerment Act (2015), which has gradually reshaped its focus and metrics. These examples show how adaptive refinement—whether voluntary or legal—enhances policy salience and prevents obsolescence.

Complementary tools also help operationalize BGDG IIs by translating frameworks into actionable guidance. New Zealand's CBAX model, developed by the Treasury, allows agencies to evaluate policy proposals against economic and well-being outcomes aligned with the LSF. Similarly, Italy integrates BES indicators into fiscal planning using modeling tools to estimate policy impacts on sustainable well-being. While not independently validated, these tools nonetheless support scenario testing and inform decision-making.

Gatekeepers help ensure initiative continuity and institutional anchoring. In Wales, the Future Generations Commissioner enforces the WFGA by overseeing public bodies' compliance and suggesting improvements—successfully influencing decisions such as halting new road construction in favor of low-carbon options. In Bhutan, the GNH Commission and Center for Bhutan and GNH Studies share gatekeeping responsibilities, overseeing data integrity and policy coherence. France's NIW, by contrast, is monitored by the Forum pour d'Autres Indicateurs de Richesse (FAIR), a civil society group, which, lacking formal authority, plays a more limited watchdog role. These examples highlight how designated actors can enhance legitimacy and drive continuous engagement, particularly when backed by political recognition and legal mandates.

Amplification out

Amplification out is subdivided into two pathways: dependent (growing and replicating) and independent (transferring and spreading), revealing diverse dynamics through which initiatives broaden their reach and influence. Our analysis shows how BGDG IIs scale horizontally by reaching new people, sectors, or geographies.

Growing. Growing reflects the internal expansion of a BGDG II within its context. Some initiatives, such as New Zealand's LSF and Bhutan's GNH, have become deeply embedded in policy and budgetary processes, thereby supporting greater institutional anchoring. Others, however, have seen stagnation or decline. Canada's CIW and Italy's BES both initially gained national prominence but have since refocused on localized applications, such as provincial indices or regional pilots. France's NIW has declined due to discontinued reporting and competing priorities, such as the SDGs and green budgeting. In resonance with the findings of Lepenies et al. (2023), the French case illustrates how the SDGs institutionalization can crowd out other BGDG IIs by diverting resources and creating the impression that progress measurement is already adequately addressed. These diverse trajectories highlight that growth depends on political will, institutional alignment, and sustained policy interest.

Replicating. Replicating involves implementing an initiative in a dissimilar context while maintaining dependence on the original model. This mode of amplification out has occurred sporadically. For example, Ontario's Trillium Foundation uses CIW indicators to guide public funding decisions. Similarly, Scotland's NPF has inspired several civil society organizations, while the BES has inspired legislative uptake at the regional level in Puglia. Though limited, these examples show how replication can strengthen coherence across governance scales. However, this differs from vertical integration: supra- or sub-national uptake initiated independently by supranational or local actors is distinct from extensions developed at the national level.

Transferring. Transferring entails adapting an initiative to a similar context with significant contextual adjustments and greater autonomy. This process is more prevalent in countries with decentralized governance. New Zealand's LSF has inspired local well-being frameworks in regions like Waikato. Bhutan's GNH has also influenced international well-being metrics through the Alkire and Foster (2011) method, which underpins multidimensional well-being indices in countries such as Colombia and Mexico. However, challenges persist—particularly regarding the scalability of resource-intensive methodologies like GNH in larger, more diverse countries.

Spreading. Spreading captures the diffusion of core principles and discourses without replicating or transferring specific frameworks. For instance, the GNH has had global resonance, influencing UN initiatives and the SDGs, while it has been actively promoted through self-organized international conferences. Wales' NWI is also shaping global discussions, notably through the Future Generations Leadership Academy and participation in international networks. Furthermore, initiatives such as WEGo—featuring countries from our case studies (i.e., Scotland, New Zealand, Wales, and, to a lesser extent, Canada)—foster normative alignment around sustainable well-being, including the use of indicators (Mason and Büchs 2023; Hayden 2025). These examples demonstrate how values and concepts originating in specific initiatives can influence broader discursive and institutional landscapes.

Amplification beyond

This section examines the macro-process of amplification beyond, which focuses on the niche's influence on deeper institutional structures and societal values. Unlike amplifying within and out, which enhances reach and replication, amplification beyond targets paradigm-level change. While this macro-process is central to impact, we consider that it builds on and is reinforced by the stabilizing and diffusive dynamics of the previous two amplification macro-processes.

Scaling up. Scaling up represents a crucial amplification pathway for BGDG IIs, allowing them to influence higher levels of policymaking and challenge incumbent institutional logics. This process involves integrating the BGDG II into governance frameworks and policy design. Drawing on the typology developed by Kaufmann et al. (2023), we identified five governance levers as mechanisms through which BGDG IIs can be mainstreamed into public policy (listed here in ascending order of strength): (1) reporting and monitoring, (2) policy evaluation, (3) political targets, (4) budgetary allocation rules, and (5) enforcement mechanisms.

The first lever, reporting and monitoring, serves as the foundational layer for data collection and dissemination. It supports evidence-based policymaking, transparency, and accountability, and it facilitates the appraisal of policy outcomes. All initiatives examined, except for Canada's CIW, which is not formally state-led, incorporate some degree of institutionalized reporting. However, the depth and regularity of this process vary widely. Wales' WFGA provides the most comprehensive model, mandating annual progress reports, local well-being assessments, and long-term future trend analysis. In contrast, countries like France and Scotland have had more fragmented and discretionary reporting mechanisms, which have likely limited the operational influence of their BGDG II.

Policy evaluation represents the second lever and includes both ex-ante and ex-post assessments of policy impacts. Ex-ante evaluations—such as New Zealand's CBAX and Bhutan's GNH policy screening tool—help assess potential impacts before implementation. Ex-post evaluations, like Italy's

trend analysis of BES indicators and Wales' public body reviews under the WFGA, focus on learning from implemented measures. Together, these evaluations enhance coherence in public policies. Despite promising examples, only a few initiatives consistently apply these evaluations to guide decision-making.

Political targets form the third lever, setting the strategic direction for policy through defined objectives. Quantitative targets, as seen in Wales and Bhutan, provide measurable benchmarks and enhance the capacity to monitor progress. Qualitative targets, used in Scotland's NPF, offer directional guidance while allowing political discretion. While most initiatives articulate an overall vision, few establish concrete targets for individual indicators. Notably, France's NIW lacks a defined theoretical framework and explicit targets, weakening its ability to steer policy effectively.

The fourth lever, budgetary allocation rules, addresses how BGDG IIs are embedded in financial decision-making. Only a few countries—most notably Bhutan and New Zealand—have made substantive progress in aligning budget processes with sustainable well-being goals. Bhutan uses a Resource Allocation Formula (RFA) that includes GNH metrics to guide equitable public spending. New Zealand's well-being budgets aim to prioritize allocations based on LSF domains. Other countries, such as Italy and Scotland, have made initial steps by linking indicators to economic planning or participatory budgeting processes, but integration remains limited overall.

Enforcement mechanisms, the fifth and most decisive lever, remain largely absent across the cases that we studied. Most initiatives lack binding requirements or penalties for noncompliance, limiting the extent to which sustainable well-being objectives are translated into enforceable commitments. The notable exception is Wales, where the WFGA introduces a “comply or justify” model. Public bodies must explain any divergence from the commissioner's recommendations, thereby ensuring at least a soft form of accountability.

Scaling deep. Before discussing the findings on *scaling deep*, it is important to note that this dimension is inherently more challenging to document empirically than the other amplification processes. *Scaling deep* refers to transformations in values, norms, and collective meaning systems—changes that tend to evolve gradually, often beneath the surface of observable institutional or policy shifts. As such, they are only partially traceable through documentary and interview material of the kind used in this study. The analysis that follows, therefore, offers an indicative interpretation based on available signals rather than a comprehensive account of normative and cultural change.

The public reception of BGDG IIs varies across contexts. While initiatives like the MWM remain largely underexposed, others like CIW, GNH, LSF, NPF, and NWI have received more substantial attention, including civil society critiques. The CIW, for instance, attracted significant media coverage upon its launch, which was marked by a highly publicized release; however, it also faced criticism regarding the aggregation of its composite index and the methodological choices underpinning it. In Scotland (NPF) and Wales (NWI), stakeholders have noted that these frameworks often fall short of being truly transformative, lacking radical ambitions. In contrast, Bhutan's GNH enjoys strong domestic support.

Challenges persist in translating sustainable well-being principles into concrete institutional change. For instance, in Wales, the Senedd's (Welsh Parliament) Public Accounts Committee has noted weak implementation of sustainable well-being duties. But reports from the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and Audit Wales on the implementation of the WFG Act at 10 years show that it has gained prominence. Many public bodies have relied on it when shaping their well-being goals, and stakeholders have a good understanding of the Act and frequently report being influenced by it in their work or in their organizations, which is a sign that some scaling deep is underway. In New Zealand, critics call for broader cross-government engagement beyond the Treasury, suggesting the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet should take a more active role in integrating the LSF. In France, scholars and civil society have criticized the NIW for its politicization, casting doubt on its credibility as a transformative tool.

In shaping communication and public discourse, BGDG IIs exert uneven influence. Wales stands out for shifting societal narratives from “sustainable development” to “well-being,” using inclusive, extensive public consultations such as “The Wales We Want” to anchor the NWI in public dialogue. Bhutan's GNH similarly engages broad audiences through education and business initiatives and participatory processes. In Italy, the BES has received comparatively high media coverage—more than Scotland's NPF—reflecting a long tradition of well-being measurement. Yet, despite this visibility,

well-being remains secondary to economic growth in Italy's public and political discourse. Elsewhere, such as in Scotland and New Zealand, the initial momentum around sustainable well-being narratives has waned due to inconsistent government promotion, limiting public resonance.

Discussion: toward a typology of amplification profiles

Based on our comparative analysis, most initiatives exhibit a strong degree of stabilization, largely due to their legal foundations and cultural alignment with their territories. Exceptions include newer or less institutionalized initiatives, such as Australia's MWM, which face limitations linked to their early stage of development. The process of speeding up remains uneven. While many initiatives have strengthened their conceptual foundations and developed complementary tools, they underutilize gatekeepers—key actors who could help scale their influence more effectively.

Amplification out appears generally weak. Most initiatives—especially newer (Australia's MWM) or waning ones (France's NIW)—have not significantly diffused beyond their initial scope. Among outward mechanisms, growing stands out as the most prominent, suggesting some territorial traction. However, there is minimal replication or transfer between initiatives, reinforcing concerns about the fragmented nature of the beyond-GDP movement.

Amplification beyond remains limited overall, reflecting the challenges BGDG IIs encounter in transforming dominant rules (scaling up) and societal values (scaling deep). Notably, New Zealand's LSF, Bhutan's GNH, and Wales' NWI stand out for having achieved progress in these areas, with GNH and NWI shining across all three amplification domains. Their success highlights how strong internal alignment across amplification processes can support broader systemic influence. Yet, even leading initiatives would benefit, for instance, from stronger integration into budgetary processes and more robust enforcement mechanisms.

The analysis suggests that advancing the amplification potential of BGDG IIs requires a coherent strategy that reinforces interdependencies between internal consolidation, outward diffusion, and systemic embedding. To interpret these diverse trajectories, we propose a typology comprising three broad amplification profiles: (1) systemic amplifiers, (2) selective amplifiers, and (3) constrained amplifiers. This categorization captures the depth and breadth of amplification processes observed within each initiative (Table 2). However, this typology should not be viewed as a strict classification; rather, it represents a continuum along which initiatives can be situated, depending on the extent and coherence of their amplification dynamics (Kluge 2000).

Systemic amplifiers—exemplified by Wales' NWI and Bhutan's GNH initiatives—demonstrate substantial and coherent amplification across all three domains. These initiatives tend to be institutionally embedded and strongly supported by legal mandates, linked to complementary analytical and evaluative tools, and subject to ongoing oversight by dedicated bodies, such as commissioners or commissions. They engage in active international dialogues and appear to exert discursive influence beyond their borders. Although assessing direct policy impact is beyond the scope of this study, there is empirical evidence that both Wales' NWI and Bhutan's GNH have informed policy planning, influenced strategic resource allocation, and contributed to global policy discourse on alternative progress measures (e.g., Truijens and Georgieva 2021; Colman 2022).

Selective amplifiers, including New Zealand's LSF, Scotland's NPF, Italy's BES, and Canada's CIW initiatives, display moderate levels of amplification. These initiatives often show some degree of institutionalization—such as integration into national budgeting processes or policy planning tools—but amplification tends to be partial and uneven. Their influence beyond their immediate operational settings is typically more limited, and their success often depends on political will. These initiatives are characterized by partial institutional integration, use by specific ministries or agencies, the development of some complementary tools (e.g., cost-benefit frameworks or well-being assessments), and some degree of stakeholder participation. However, their international diffusion and capacity to scale deep remain limited.

At the other end of the spectrum, constrained amplifiers—represented by Australia's MWM and France's NIW initiatives—exhibit little or inconsistent evidence of amplification. In these cases, we can attribute this limited amplification either to their nascent stage of development, as with MWM,

or to discontinuities and reduced momentum following initial political or institutional support, as seen with NIW. These initiatives tend to lack firm legal or procedural grounding, invest little in complementary tools, and operate without stable coalitions or long-term champions. Consequently, their ability to influence policy, spread to other contexts, or shape the global beyond GDP discourse remains low at this stage.

Conclusion

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature on beyond-GDP indicator initiatives (BGDP IIs): How do these initiatives succeed—or fail—in amplifying their influence and contributing to systemic change? Our in-depth comparative analysis of eight national BGDP IIs through the lens of Lam et al. (2020) niche-amplification typology offers new insights by identifying the mechanisms of amplification—and the barriers that constrain it.

The first contribution of this study lies in a set of insights that provides a toolbox for policymakers and practitioners seeking to anchor alternative indicators within existing governance systems. While no country in our sample achieved systemic influence through a single channel, our findings underscore the importance of coherent, multi-directional strategies. Particularly impactful mechanisms include the legal integration of indicators into national planning frameworks (as in Wales), the use of budgetary instruments to operationalize sustainable well-being goals (as in Italy and Bhutan), and legal mandates and oversight bodies that ensure continuity across political cycles (e.g., Bhutan's GNH Commission or Wales' Future Generations Commissioner).

Second, this research contributes a typology of amplification profiles—systemic, selective, and constrained amplifiers. The typology offers a valuable framework for assessing the current position of BGDP IIs and informing future strategy. It highlights enabling conditions such as cultural and legal embedding, institutional integration, cross-sector coordination, and participatory engagement. Rather than fixed categories, these profiles represent a continuum of influence, allowing initiatives to position themselves and identify strategic pathways for evolution. The multidimensional nature of our approach, which we believe enables meaningful progress in describing beyond-GDP initiatives, could, in future research, lead to the elaboration of a set of criteria or a checklist. Such a list could contain “ability to shape sustainable well-being goals in public bodies/in private organizations at other scales,” “ability to influence what are considered legitimate and desirable societal goals throughout society,” or “ability to serve as a screening tool for policymaking.” Inspired by our translation of generic amplification processes into ones specific to beyond-GDP metrics, this checklist could be consolidated and made more operational. It could serve as a guide for governments and other actors in designing systemic programs or plans to enable a genuine paradigm shift.

Third, this study shows that metrics alone are insufficient to drive transformative change. We argue for a shift in perspective: from seeing indicators as static measurement tools to understanding them as active components of broader transformative initiatives. Rather than functioning merely as parameters (Meadows 1999), BGDP IIs can become catalysts for systemic change when anchored in alternative visions of progress and thus contribute to transforming not only the regime of statistical information but also its underlying cultural and political landscape. By viewing BGDP IIs holistically—where conceptual framing, actor engagement, and their role as “boundary institutions” (Bauler 2012) converge—they emerge not only as reflections of societal change but as instruments actively steering it (Hayden 2021; Waddock 2024). This framing carries important implications for research and practice. For scholars, it calls for a shift from viewing indicators as isolated variables to studying them as embedded socio-political instruments. For practitioners, it stresses the importance of aligning technical innovation with institutional strategy and cultural engagement. The success of BGDP IIs depends not only on the metrics they promote, but also on their capacity to navigate and challenge entrenched institutional logics—particularly the persistent growth dependencies and imperatives that shape national policymaking, regulatory frameworks, and lobbying dynamics (Keyßer, Steinberger, and Schmelzer 2025). Without addressing these systemic constraints, BGDP IIs risk being marginalized or co-opted—just as broader post-growth and sustainability-oriented efforts have been (Mason and Büchs 2023; Hayden 2025). Potentially relevant avenues in this respect could involve mobilizing other

systemic frameworks, such as systemic policy design (Jalonen and Uusikylä 2025) or a critical understanding of various knowledge-action models for sustainability transformations (Sokolova 2023).

Fourth and finally, our work offers a critical perspective on certain technocratic, top-down approaches to the beyond-GDP agenda. While our findings highlight the importance of scaling up, scaling beyond, and international cooperation, they also underscore the significance of autonomous institutional dynamics at sub-global levels. The fact that Wales' NWI has gained more traction than France's NIW, despite the latter's stronger academic and international profile and emphasis on cutting-edge conceptual design, underscores the critical role of embedding BGDG processes within broad-based dynamics and context-specific realities. These dynamics can achieve a relatively high degree of amplification compared to predominantly top-down international approaches, such as the national implementation of the SDGs (e.g., Beisheim et al. 2025). This observation supports the creation of platforms or forums for exchanging best practices, feedback, and tools for integrating indicators into public policy, rather than designing a one-size-fits-all beyond-GDP plan. The goal is to disseminate not only statistical or conceptual innovation (which, of course, must remain central), but also social and institutional innovation. Accordingly, while calls to "institutionalize a 'Beyond GDP' metric (set) around the world" (van den Bergh 2022, 2) aim to improve visibility and international comparability, our cases suggest that polycentric, context-responsive dashboards or indices can generate strong amplification effects. We therefore see promise in international coordination alongside local adaptation, rather than a uniform global set. This pursuit reframes the objective from enforcing complete consensus to enabling communicability across diverse conceptions of prosperity (Kubiszewski et al. 2025).

This study has limitations. First, the small number of cases constrains generalizability, as in many small-N comparative designs (Della Porta 2008). We prioritize controlled diversity to demonstrate the heuristic value of the amplification approach for BGDG IIs and to propose an initial typology. Including additional cases from the Global North or South could refine the typology. Also, exploring less prominent cases could illuminate why some efforts stagnate or are interrupted. Second, while triangulated, evidence draws from selective interviewee perspectives and uneven documentation across cases, constraining cross-case depth. Moreover, capturing changes in values, norms, and narratives remains a methodological challenge; ethnographic or longitudinal designs could more precisely trace such shifts (e.g., Dufour 2019). Third, other methodological strategies—such as quantitative, mixed-method, or longitudinal research—could test and refine emerging patterns (including "scaling deep"), map interactions among amplification processes, and relate them to policy or economic outcomes.

Despite these limitations, we contend that this study makes a timely and meaningful contribution. By characterizing amplification pathways, proposing a typology of amplification profiles, and framing indicators as active instruments of change, we offer a strategic and diagnostic lens for both researchers and practitioners. The challenge ahead lies in embedding progress metrics into ambitious, anchored, and institutionally resilient initiatives—capable of turning new visions of progress into transformative realities.

Notes

1. For the purposes of this article, we adopt a definition of *institutions* inspired by Hodgson (2006): they encompass all forms of established, structured, and routinized collective action that shape or organize social practices and interactions. By *institutionalization* or *institutionalizing*, we refer to the processes through which specific practices acquire these structured and routinized characteristics and begin to play a structuring role. Additionally, we use the term *institutions* to mean the diverse range of concrete collectives or organizations that carry out institutionalized actions.
2. We use "amplification" not to imply that initiatives already produce macro-level outcomes that are merely reinforced, but to foreground pathways toward impact. We acknowledge that the term may be imperfect for initiatives with limited early outcome effects; future research could develop an alternative concept that retains the within/out/beyond heuristic while avoiding this connotation.
3. In the context of European Union policy, FEDER stands for Fonds Européen de Développement Régional. In English, this is the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).
4. We acknowledge that this selection involves interpretive choices and that alternative configurations could have been justified, as discussed in the conclusion. Our selected set of cases, however, offers a balanced diversity of contexts and institutional types consistent with the study's exploratory objectives.

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All interviews were conducted with the written informed consent of the participants, in accordance with ethical research standards.

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT 4 (OpenAI 2023) to improve the text readability. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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