

Green Economy Losing Steam?! I'm Seeing Red!

by Carol McClelland, PhD



On August 19, 2011 the New York Times published a story entitled, "[Number of Green Jobs Fails to Live Up to Promises.](#)" The bottom line of this article was that the government's attempts to create jobs through stimulus have failed. They use the microcosm of a green jobs training program and a solar company in San Jose as Exhibit A and B for the failures of the green economy.

When I first read this article I was seeing red.

Red flags that is!

Although I'm not a statistician or an economist, I've been following the ebb and flow of the emerging economy long enough to see past the headline. To know that the descriptions of the examples are so skewed that's they can't be used as the basis for a broad brush statement about the green economy. In other words, the bottom line conclusions made in this article are, in a word, bogus.

I thought it would be helpful for you to see how I approach an article like this to assess it and come to my own conclusion about what's being reported.

Start by checking out the original source referenced in the article.

In the 7th paragraph of the article, the author references a study by Brookings entitled [Sizing the Green Economy: A National and Regional Green Jobs Assessment](#) that was released in mid-July 2011.

I clicked through to take a look. In this case there's a report, executive summary, methodology, appendices and an [interactive map](#). The interactive maps is a powerful tool that allows you to use a variety of drop down menus to slide the date by industry sector, subsector, job growth, metro area, state, and the country. As a side note: I highly recommend you play around with the map to see what you glean from the experience. It's a good resource to know about as you research your own target industry.

If the article doesn't include any link to their original source, pay attention! I was reading another article that had me seeing red the other day where a report was mentioned, but the title of the report was nowhere to be seen. I searched a number of articles and still didn't find any more information. Just this fact made me very suspicious.

Look for commentaries about the original article or report

If you aren't comfortable assessing the nitty-gritty of a report, do a search for other commentaries about the report or article. Although you still need to pay attention to the details, you can often pick up nuances you didn't notice yourself.

This is a great way to begin to pick up on alternative views, additional conclusions, and additional related material.

In response to the article above, I found a variety of articles highlighting the release of the Brookings report and three articles on GRIST and Climate Progress.

- On August 23, 2011, "[NYT green-jobs story ignores 'explosive grow](#) or [Absurd NY Times Story on Green Jobs Ignores "Explosive Growth" Documented in the Sector](#)
- On September 24, 2011, "[Getting the Facts straight on green jobs](#)"
- On October 4, 2011, "[Green jobs by the numbers](#)"

Evaluate what You've Found

- Consider the Media Source and Author. Often the publication itself will give you clues about its focus or perspective. With this information you can do a better job of assessing the veracity of the article. Over time you'll collect information about a variety of blogs and news organizations.
- Look at Their Definitions. If you are reading an article about the green economy, take some time to determine what the authors or researchers working definition of green jobs? What job titles or industries are they including or excluding? For instance, does the data on renewable energy include or exclude smart grid jobs? Are they including green building and energy efficiency, but not green transportation or green hospitality positions? Are they considering green finance or environmental policy researchers or environmental advocates? As you can see, if they aren't including a large swath of green careers (consider our Green Economy Map as a reference point), then you might want to take their conclusions with a grain of salt or discredit them entirely.
- Assess the Scope. Are the conclusions described in the article or report based on what's happening in a county? A state? A region? A particular industry? It's very important to understand the true scope of the piece or report before you extrapolate the conclusions to the entire green economy.

It may take some time to learn how to assess all the moving parts that shape and define the emerging economy. In the coming months I'm planning a series of articles, and hopefully short videos, to help you learn how to make better sense of the sound bites, articles, and reports that are being released at increasing rates these days. With some trying to provide proof that the green economy is the real thing, and other trying to debunk the green economy, it's important to stay engaged in the conversation.