

Tough times ahead in 2012 may provide space to question the primacy of growth and consumerism

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At the close of 2011, British Politics and Policy at LSE asked our contributors for their thoughts on the New Year 2012. In the first post in this series, [Mary Evans](#) finds that while, on the surface, there are few grounds for optimism for the coming year, there may be some chances to reconsider some of our most sacred ideas about growth and competition.



Thinking about 2012 brings to mind two quotations that I have always valued: the first is by Gillian Rose (from in *Love's Work*) and it is the advice that we should 'keep our minds in hell and despair not'. The second is the anonymous and often quoted advice to the young (and others) to 'not confuse what is the case with what you would like to be the case'.

Both these quotations seem to me to be eminently appropriate for 2012. In terms of global and national politics there seems to be no possible grounds for optimism. We are faced with the possibility of greater antagonism between the USA and Iran and, at home, the continuing onslaught by the Coalition Government on both the greater part of the public and the public sector. So supposing that the 'new' in the New Year will bring with it a sea change of entrenched attitudes must surely be only wishful thinking. There are many experts at this very moment writing up their dire predictions for 2012.

So it is easy to suppose that there is nothing good to expect. But perhaps (and just perhaps) it is not too delusional to consider that 2012 might, in all its difficulty, offer us a slight chance to consider some of the ideas that we seem to cling to: words such as 'growth' and 'competition'. For example, in the later months of 2011 it was heartening to read the [call by Keith Thomas](#) for unity amongst academics and universities to resist government policies towards the English universities. It is a call that implicitly challenges all those sought-after divisions between universities that have so long dominated academic life. Recognising the pointless competition in higher education opens up the possibility of thinking again about league tables in other educational contexts and- perhaps even better – opens up a way of thinking about what teachers and others are doing other than trying to 'win' an unwinnable game.

And perhaps, and perhaps even better, that often expressed resistance to endless consumerism might, through force majeure, become real. For many people 2012 is going to be a year of difficulty in paying for basic, essential needs (housing, heat, travel and so on). Without endorsing a puritan attack on 'buying things' there might (and again without confusing what we would like and what is real) be a space for thinking about the difference between 'real' resources that make people's lives better and buying stuff that makes a few (sometimes tax-avoiding) people rich. So in what will be much too interesting times, let us hope for spaces and leave no room for despair or delusion.

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