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Well-being and Prosperity beyond Growth

Discursive Struggles in the German *Enquete Commission on Growth, Prosperity and Quality of Life*

The debate about well-being and prosperity cannot simply be divided into green growth and degrowth proponents. Analysing the “beyond growth” debate, we have to acknowledge its complexity. If we pay attention to shared visions rather than opposing views, we will be able to move towards a constructive debate and possible policy changes.

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Abstract

To guarantee well-being and prosperity in a world with finite resources has been one of the major challenges in recent decades. Political controversies related to this challenge have, however, not yet been settled. Under the heading of “beyond growth”, the debate is currently regaining momentum. The paper analyses the debate through an in-depth case study of the German *Enquete Commission on Growth, Prosperity and Quality of Life* (2011 to 2013). Four “contestable truths” and transition pathways could be identified: the market and technology-friendly discourse of *Global Pioneering*, the lead-country oriented discourse of *Green Germany*, the sufficiency-based discourse of *Good Life*, and the critical discourse of *Global Environmental and Social Justice*. These discourses are likely to have different effects on the environment if they were to become dominant and if they were to become manifest in policies.

Keywords

beyond growth, degrowth, discourse analysis, enquete commission, Germany, sustainable growth

One of the most important yet unresolved questions today is how to achieve and guarantee well-being and prosperity for seven billion people in a world with limited resources. In the 1970s, the Club of Rome had already questioned the compatibility of continuous economic growth and the material limits of Planet Earth (Meadows 1972). 40 years later, this critique of growth is back on the agenda, currently regaining momentum in the academic world under the heading of “beyond growth” (Jackson 2009, Seidl and Zahrnt 2010, 2012, Victor 2008, WBGU 2011).

The “beyond growth” debate is typically characterized by a dichotomous division between proponents of green growth (UNEP 2011, World Bank 2012) and degrowth (Kallis 2011, Kerschner 2010, Martínez-Alier et al. 2010). Green growth is based on the principle of ecological modernization, which is predicated on the following ideas: environmental problems are manageable; they can be expressed in economic terms; solutions to problems can be reconciled with economic growth (Hajer 1995). According to this “efficiency-oriented approach to the environment” (Hajer 1995, p. 101), economic growth is consistent with ecological boundaries, provided that it is qualitatively different from traditional models of growth (Dryzek 2005, p. 168). Degrowth, by contrast, refers back to the French word *décroissance*. The term is commonly associated with a critical discussion of economic growth, development and the environment, which started three decades ago in grassroots groups and academic circles (e. g., Fournier 2008, Kallis 2011, Martínez-Alier et al. 2010). Proponents of degrowth are dissatisfied with recent policy changes regarding sustainable development and ecological modernization. They call for more dramatic changes in terms of behaviour and policy in order to tackle current global environmental problems through “an equitable and democratic transition to a smaller economy with less production and consumption” (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, p. 1741).

As I will argue here, the dichotomous division described above falls short of capturing the complexity of the “beyond growth” debate. Reducing the latter to these two positions forecloses a constructive dialogue on possible policy changes based on shared visions. The “beyond growth” debate is a conglomerate of different

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GAIA MASTERS STUDENT PAPER AWARD

Ina Soetebeer is the winner of the *GAIA Masters Student Paper Award*. Her paper *Beyond Growth – Discursive Struggles in the German Enquete Commission* was selected by an international jury and is now published in *GAIA* after successful peer review.

The *GAIA Masters Student Paper Award*^a addresses Masters students. They are encouraged to submit their results from research-based courses or Masters theses in the field of transdisciplinary environmental and sustainability science. The winner will be granted a prize of 1,500 euros as well as a free one-year subscription to *GAIA*. The award 2015 was endowed by the Andrea von Braun Stiftung.

^a For more details see www.oekom.de/zeitschriften/gaia/student-paper-award.html.

actors and agendas representing a complex set of ideas, concepts and values. Based on empirical evidence, this paper uses discourse analysis to investigate the “beyond growth” debate through an in-depth case study of the German *Enquete Commission on Growth, Prosperity and Quality of Life*, a committee of enquiry set up by the German Federal Parliament (Deutscher Bundestag).

Following a short introduction of the approach, data and methodology, as well as the *Enquete Commission*, this case study identifies four discourses: the technology-friendly discourse of *Global Pioneering*, the lead-country oriented discourse of *Green Germany*, the sufficiency-based discourse of *Good Life* and the critical discourse of *Global Environmental and Social Justice*. The four discourses have got a different potential to become dominant and manifest in policies, depending on how convincing the solution scenario of the discourse will be as well as the support of relevant actors and their resources. Based on shared visions, a discourse alliance between *Green Germany* and *Good Life* might therefore be most promising to gain majoritarian parliamentary support.

Discourse Analysis: Concepts and Definitions

The case study is based on a moderately constructivist approach that acknowledges the subjectivity of knowledge and accepts the existence of multiple realities (epistemological relativism) (Jones 2002). I investigate the multiple realities that are emerging in response to the question of how to achieve well-being and prosperity in a world with finite resources, following the assumption that these social realities have an effect on the physical environment (ontological realism). Discourse is defined here as “an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices” (Hajer 2006, p. 67). It is further assumed that discourses compete with each other to gain discursive hegemony, which is attained when a discourse is institutionalized through policy processes and begins to determine the way actors frame problems and solutions (Hajer 2006).

An appropriate method to examine a highly institutionalized policy advisory body such as the *Enquete Commission* is the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD) developed by Keller (2011a, b, see also Keller and Truschkat 2013). SKAD is used to investigate processes and practices of knowledge production and circulation at the institutional level of today’s society (Keller 2011 a, p. 61). SKAD combines Foucault’s insights concerning the knowledge-power nexus of meaning and more recent scholarship on discourse with sociological approaches. By doing so and taking into account the broader sociohistorical and institutional context (Feindt and Oels 2005, Keller 2011 b), SKAD acknowledges the power and the productive character of discourse.

In line with the SKAD approach, this study builds on frames and storylines as the two constitutive discursive elements. *Frames* are units that ascribe meaning to certain aspects by judging and valuing them in a particular way and excluding other aspects and meanings (Schön and Rein 1995). As clusters of arguments, they provide answers to questions such as the following: What is the core problem? What is the preferred solution? Who is responsible and who will be held accountable? (Keller 2011 a, Keller and Truschkat 2013). *Storylines* are the second key analytical element. As logically condensed statements, they link individual frames to all other ones (Keller 2009, 2011 a). They are summaries of complex arguments that allow for communication between actors as different storylines sound reasonable to different actors (Hajer 2006, 1995). The study analyses the competing discourses by examining 1. which problems, solutions, responsibilities, and values are advocated (frames) and 2. how are they condensed to a story that policy actors rely on (storyline).

Data and Methodology

Building on an approach used in interpretative policy research (Yanow 2000),¹ I gained an overview of the case by conducting three interviews with key informants and by reviewing the following data set: official records of the *Enquete Commission*, publications by individual members, a sample of articles published in leading German newspapers, and entries on *Enquetewatch*, a blog by Konzeptwerk Neue Ökonomie,² which criticized process and outcomes.

The 800-page final report of the commission, which reflects the depth and scope of the debate, was chosen as a discursive snapshot for an in-depth qualitative content analysis.³ The document

¹ In contrast to positivist approaches, interpretative policy research presumes multiple realities. Therefore, ascribed “meanings – values, beliefs, and feelings or sentiments – (are) at the centre of inquiry” (Yanow 2014, p. 133).

² www.enquetewatch.de

³ In case no consensus can be reached, the report reflects political dissents through *minority votes*. They are formulated by singular voices or collectives that express dissenting viewpoints to the whole report, selective parts or single statements of the report. Dissenting viewpoints on minority votes are further expressed in so-called *reply statements* (Lentsch and Weingart 2008, pp. 155–156).

was analysed with the help of coding techniques used in grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) and with sequential analytical strategies taken from sociological hermeneutics (Flick 2007, Wernet 2006).

To complement the information generated in the previous step, semi-structured and theory-generating expert interviews with members of the *Enquete Commission* were conducted (Bogner et al. 2005, Meuser and Nagel 1991). Expert interview partners were identified by using the following set of selection criteria: the interview partner's representative position in the *Enquete Commission*, relevant publications on the topic, as well as a relative balance between parliamentary members and external experts (Bogner et al. 2005). In addition, a snowball sample technique was applied to identify experts (Littig 2008). In total, six expert interviews were conducted via Skype during the months of October 2013 and January 2014. The interviews were taped and transcribed. As required by ethical standards for empirical research, the interviewees have been anonymized and numbered consecutively from E1 and E2 for the experts who are not members of parliament and MdB1 to MdB4 for those who are members of parliament.

The Enquete Commission on Growth, Prosperity and Quality of Life

Enquete commissions are non-permanent advisory bodies to the Bundestag and state parliaments; they are formally constructed to mirror the political composition of the Bundestag (or state parliament) while including both parliamentarians and external experts (Altenhof 2002). They are convened to "facilitate scientifically informed public policy and the effective resolution of political problems" (Brown et al. 2005, p. 86). These problems are highly complex, relevant to society, and unlikely to be solved through basic processes of day-to-day policy making (Hampel 1991, Lentsch and Weingart 2008). In the literature on enquete commissions, there is considerable disagreement concerning their effectiveness: whereas proponents of enquete commissions point to the innovative character of these commissions as an example of the Habermasian pragmatic model of policy making enabling collaboration between experts and policy makers, some critics have argued that enquete commissions remain prone to politicization because the commission's advisees are also members of the commission (Lompe 1991, p. 144).

The *Enquete Commission on Growth, Prosperity and Quality of Life* was officially established by the 77th session of the Bundestag on December 1, 2010; the constitutive meeting took place on January 17, 2011 (BT 2013). The *Commission* was composed of 34 members (17 parliamentary members, 17 experts). To reflect the majorities in the Bundestag, seats for parliamentary members



FIGURE 1: Overview of the *Enquete Commission on Growth, Prosperity and Quality of Life*, which was established in December 2010 and had its final session in April 2013.

were allocated as follows: six seats for the Christian Democratic Party (Christlich Demokratische Union/Christlich-Soziale Union, CDU/CSU), four seats for the Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, SPD), three seats for the liberal Free Democratic Party (Freie Demokratische Partei, FDP), two seats for the Greens (Bündnis90/Die Grünen), and two seats for the democratic socialist party The Left (DIE LINKE).

The overarching goal of the *Enquete Commission* was to recommend strategies likely to lead to a sustainable and fair economy (BT 2010). In order to achieve this goal, five working groups operated along two lines: organizing public expert hearings and holding meetings in camera. In addition, ten external scientific reports were commissioned. The final session was held on April 15, 2013, and the *Enquete Commission* submitted an 800-page final report (BT 2013) (figure 1).

The Four Competing Discourses

Based on the findings of the analysis, four competing discourses could be identified. These can be summarized as follows: *Global Pioneering*, *Green Germany*, *Good Life*, and *Global Environmental and Social Justice*. Resting on a broad set of ideas, concepts and values, the discourses differ with regard to their economic philosophy, their stance towards unilateral environmental policy making, their sustainability understanding and strategies, their preferred solutions and change agents. In the following, the different discourses, with their storylines and frames, are described in greater detail.

Discourse 1: *Global Pioneering*

The discourse called *Global Pioneering* is a neoliberal and technologically optimistic discourse (figure 2, p. 182). The storyline is as follows: in light of contemporary economic, environmental, and social challenges, apocalyptic scenarios are inappropriate. Questions concerning the access to resources and Germany's economic competitiveness are at the core of the discourse. Unilateral policies are not regarded as viable solutions because of in-

ternational competitions and related leakage effects.⁴ Technological innovations and global governance alliances are proposed as means to achieve prosperity and well-being. The discourse consists of the following frames, which will be discussed in greater detail below: “the need to grow”, “resource abundance”, “dilemma of the nation state”, and “global alliances”.

According to the logic of the frame “the need to grow”, people who are sceptical of growth are pictured as irresponsible since they not only misunderstand the role of the state but also ignore the human desire for progress: “It does not depend only on state framework conditions whether there will be economic growth in the long run but especially on the employees’ and entrepreneurs’ willingness to perform, their creativity and spirit of innovation as well as their commitment to progress” (BT 2013, p. 43).⁵ The entrepreneurial spirit is emphasized and it is argued that technology is the solution and not prayers for temperance: “To direct the main efforts and to have humans restricting themselves in main areas of life is in the long run a dead-end street. If resources, supposed to be finite, are consumed less rapidly, they will run out someday anyways. From the perspective of intergenerational justice, we thus have to use our efforts to develop helpful technology instead of calling for frugality” (BT 2013, p. 715).

As suggested by the frame “resource abundance”, the finiteness of natural resources is described as a historical relict from the 1970s: “The finiteness of resources – that has again and again been an issue we could do little with. As far as I know, even working group three disproved this argument, stating that we do not have a problem with resource scarcity – we are not anymore at the state of knowledge of the Club of Rome 30 years ago. In the instance of facing a problem, there is a problem with natural sinks” (MdB3). On the contrary, it is argued that scarcities foster technological innovation and enable alternatives to become not only available but also economically profitable: “Peak Oil has not been reached yet, even if for some oil fields and oil regions the production is declining. The OPEC⁶ price policy (and withheld reserves) is key in this regard as well as technological innovations through which always new sources are explored and efficiency rates are improved” (BT 2013, p. 389).

The frame “dilemma of the nation state” is based on the idea that the scope of action of a single nation state remains limited due to an international market competition and leakage effects. Even if Germany is willing to take responsibility for global environmental problems, unilateral policy making is regarded as contra-productive: “Extensive unilateral policy making in Germany is neither economically (cost-intensive, harming competitiveness, globally ineffective) nor ecologically effective (leakage effects, e.g., carbon leakage). Unilateral policy making only serves as good practice. Its international impact, however, remains unknown since it is highly uncertain how growing industries, especially in the emerging and developing countries, will proceed” (BT 2013, p. 547).

Based on these arguments, nation states are still regarded as important actors. The frame “global alliances” conveys the idea that policy making should be done at a supranational level: “The objective of a pioneer role (in the broader sense) is to increase the

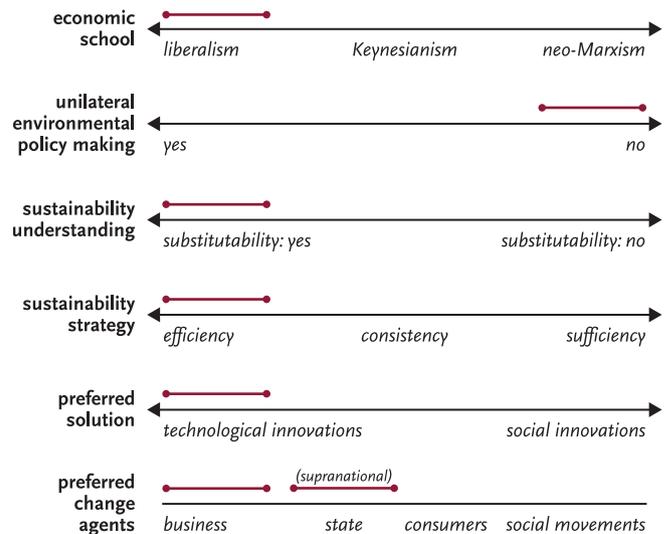


FIGURE 2: Discourse 1: *Global Pioneering*. The discourse is neoliberal. Resource scarcity is not considered a problem. Efficiency and technological innovations are the key to prosperity. The discourse calls for policy making at a supranational level. It regards economic actors and the nation state as important change agents.

feasibility of global frameworks and supranational cooperation as well as enabling additional margins for cooperation at the international level“ (BT 2013, p. 520). To not lose comparative advantages, Germany’s role in enabling well-being and prosperity is to further strengthen supranational policy making.

Discourse 2: *Green Germany*

The discourse called *Green Germany* is characterized by a sense of ambiguity concerning the role of technology and market forces (figure 3). The main storyline emphasizes technological and economic risks and calls for more regulatory policies at a national level. There is a belief in policy diffusion and green technology. Unilateral environmental policy making is proposed as a favourable solution to boost or at least stabilize Germany’s economy. More specifically, the discourse consists of the following four frames: “growth limits”, “technological risks”, “economic costs of environmental problems”, and “Germany as a first mover”.

The finiteness of natural capital is a central element of the frame “growth limits”: “It seems that there is something to be negotiated about. Fact is that there is nothing negotiable. (...) Even if we grow slower, we will reach the limits set through finite resource, and exceed them” (MdB2). As argued, there is a total misconception as to what sustainability is and what it does: “The ecological dimension is to be taken a priori since economic activities

4 *Leakage* is a term used to describe the situation that businesses transfer their production to other countries because of raising costs and regulatory constraints (Görlach et al. 2008).

5 The quotes are translated to English *mutatis mutandis*, using alterations where needed in the translation process.

6 Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (editor’s note).

have to stay within the ecological boundaries. Only based on this a priori appreciation, the three dimensions of sustainability make sense” (BT 2013, p. 106). Natural capital should thus not be substituted by man-made capital.

The frame “technological risks” calls for a more nuanced assessment of technological solutions: “Can we solve the problems that have emerged from the Industrial Revolution through a more intensive use of technological innovations including ‘geoengineering’ and by making these technological innovations globally accessible, or do we need a *Code of Ethics* that prevents us from doing everything that is technologically possible” (MdB4). Technology is described as a double-edged sword. It might help to prevent humanity from further exceeding the limits set by nature or it might even make matters worse: “The Oil Age is reaching its technical and ecological limits. At all costs, efforts are done to prolong the Oil Age. Against every ecological reason, engineers are searching for new fields in the most remote places, in areas that are extremely difficult to access” (BT 2013, p. 393). Referring to extraction practices such as fracking, deep-sea extraction, oil sands mining, this frame suggests that politics have to manage certain risky technologies in a more rigorous manner.

The frame “economic costs” suggests that the costs of economic growth, when it involves depletion of natural resources and pollution, can be higher than its benefits: “Damages through the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services are also methodologically difficult to capture. GDP only witnesses damages to the environment when the costs are real. Until then, damages to the environment are just invisible parts of a production mode that produces externalities and maintains itself at the cost of the environment” (BT 2013, p. 154). Welfare indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP) are perceived to be misleading in this respect.

The frame “Germany as a first mover” rests upon the idea that Germany has to lead by example, for instance, by applying unilateral policy making and policy benchmarking based on the idea of Keynesianism: “Being a first mover in the market sends a sign to other states indicating that making the transformation to a more sustainable economy is worth it. German products in international markets are often regarded as being attractive and competitive based on its ecological and social standards that are traceable and transparent” (BT 2013, p. 75). Environmental policy innovation and efficiency are believed to pay off, especially in the long run: “An economy that puts environmental protection and resource productivity centre stage benefits from a higher economic performance: a high resource productivity is very likely to strengthen the competitiveness, thus, further boosting the economy” (BT 2013, p. 156).

Discourse 3: Good Life

The discourse referred to as *Good Life* emphasizes sufficient lifestyles (figure 4, p. 184). The storyline considers absolute consumption levels and unsustainable lifestyles to be major obstacles that prevent humanity from achieving prosperity and well-being. Rethinking and downsizing current production and consumption

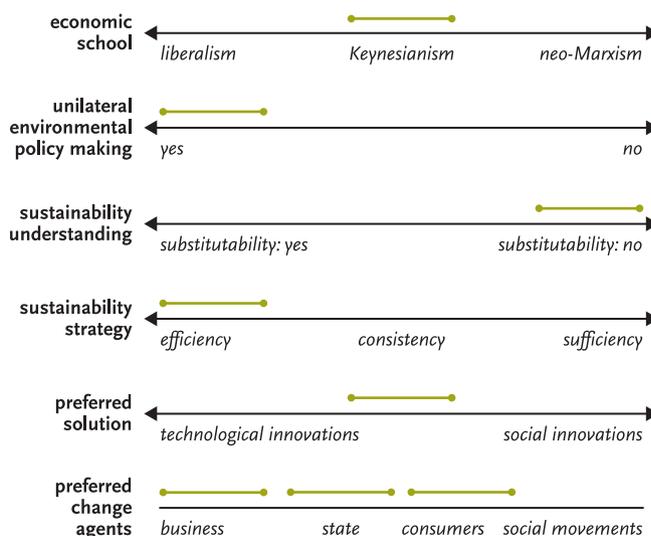


FIGURE 3: Discourse 2: *Green Germany*. Rooted in Keynesian thought, the discourse advocates for regulatory policies and unilateral environmental policy making. Resources are considered finite and not substitutable. The discourse is characterized by an ambivalent attitude towards technology. The state, enterprises and consumers are called upon to initiate change.

levels are proposed as solutions. There is a strong emphasis on changing values, virtues, and the state as facilitator. The discourse consists of the following frames: “unsustainable lifestyles”, “behavioural and cultural change”, and “politics of making things possible”.

According to the logic of the frame “unsustainable lifestyles”, overall consumption levels are regarded as too high. However, awareness of the problem is not reflected in behaviour, which is often referred to as the attitude-behavioural intention gap: “Evidence shows that often citizens who are concerned about the environment have the highest ecological footprint. Be it that the apartments are equipped with the highest energy standards, be it that vacations are spent in harmony with nature, but therefore long-distance travels are undertaken” (BT 2013, p. 785). It is further criticized that facts about energy and resource savings can be misleading: “The fact that people travel by plane to the Bahamas when they have energy savings of 350 Euros was first thought rather funny. Likewise, it was initially considered rather amusing that the efficiency gains in heating did not lead to the absolute reduction of fossil fuels consumption but quite contrary to an increase since the living space per person has been increasing faster than the efficiency improvements” (MdB2). These rebound effects⁷ are, as argued, not taken into consideration to the extent they could and possibly should.

The frame “behavioural and culture change” is closely related to a call for a “shift towards greater appreciation of immaterial val-



⁷ Rebound effects commonly occur in situations when the reduction of input per unit output leads to an increase in output. Santarius (2014) distinguishes various types of rebound effects.

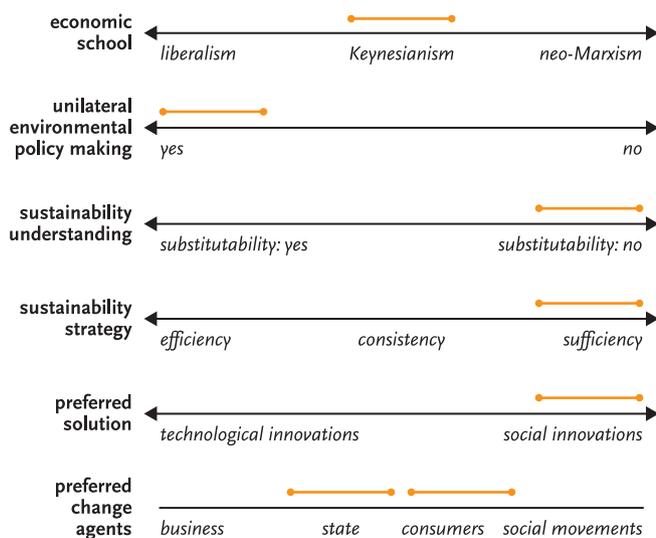


FIGURE 4: Discourse 3: *Good Life*. The discourse revolves around sufficiency and sufficient lifestyles as key concepts. Natural resources are endangered by overconsumption. Hence, there is a need for change. The discourse emphasizes the role of policy making and social innovations. Preferred agents of behavioural and culture change are the consumers and the state.

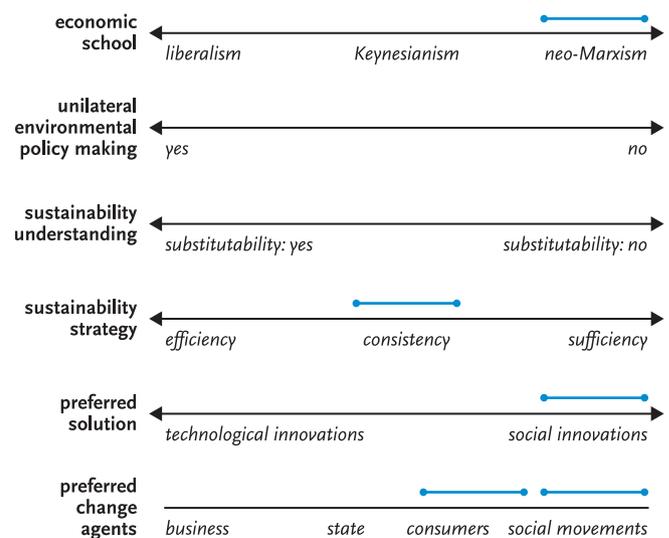


FIGURE 5: Discourse 4: *Global Environmental and Social Justice*. To overcome current environmental problems due to predominant commodification practices, the anti-capitalist discourse proposes to develop alternative economies (based on co-operatives and solidarity) and adopt consistency as sustainability strategy. Social movements and consumers are regarded as bearers of (social) innovations. No statements can be made with regard to unilateral environmental policy making and the underlying sustainability understanding.

ues" (BT 2013, p. 653). Focusing on economic growth is, in many respects, misleading: "The emphasis on economic growth assumes that a good and successful life is only possible with growth. If this holds true, humans are indeed characterized as creatures merely determined by material consumption and the desire for greater consumption. In fact, values are essential for ensuring prosperity and quality of life, especially the question about virtues and the good life" (BT 2013, p. 106). To move towards a culture of less materialism, sufficiency as a key concept "in the sense of 'self-limitation' and 'consumption deprivation' is a way of living and production that sets limits to the over-consumption of goods and substances. It is the question of the right level" (BT 2013, p. 608). And it thus implies greater behavioural change.

Following the frame "politics of making things possible", the voluntary reduction of consumption is a major challenge, and politics has an important function in this respect: "We have to put aside ideology, and we need a discussion about the 'politics of making things possible'. This kind of politics enables a change in lifestyles by creating experimental space for social and cultural innovations to be developed and put into practice" (BT 2013, p. 790). "It has to be recognized that politics have an impact on lifestyles; this is nothing new. The state cannot stay out of the individual lifestyle decisions" (BT 2013, p. 668). The basic argument of the frame is that the reduction of consumption levels is not just the responsibility of consumers. Social innovations for collaborative production and consumption practices require a political framework to prosper.

Discourse 4: *Global Environmental and Social Justice*

The discourse called *Global Environmental and Social Justice* challenges capitalism and markets (figure 5). Following the storyline,

profit making and the systemic outsourcing of environmental and social problems to marginalized groups and the Global South are identified as major obstacles to achieving well-being and prosperity. Strengthening local economies and fostering social innovations are seen as pathbreaking. The discourse consists of the two following frames: "economization of nature and life" and "solidarity-based economy".

The frame "economization of nature and life" can be summarized as follows: "The current climate and biodiversity policies rest on commodification practices and profit making without successfully tackling climate issues and environmental problems. 'Green grabbing' and the financialization of nature are on-going practices, and the protection of nature has to be economically viable – such as mechanisms like REDD⁸ demonstrate" (BT 2013, p. 479). According to the logic of this frame, industrialized and newly industrialized countries are to be blamed for having developed at the cost of less advanced countries. They have exported environmental problems to marginalized segments of the society worldwide: "Authoritarian-hierarchical practices of policy making in industrial and increasingly in emerging countries are just aiming at securing resource access. Ecological externalities – such as climate change, a declining soil productivity or biodiversity losses – are exported to other world regions or socially marginalized groups" (BT 2013, p. 483).

To overcome the problems mentioned, new ways of consistent local production and consumption are being proposed. These can

⁸ United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (editor's note).

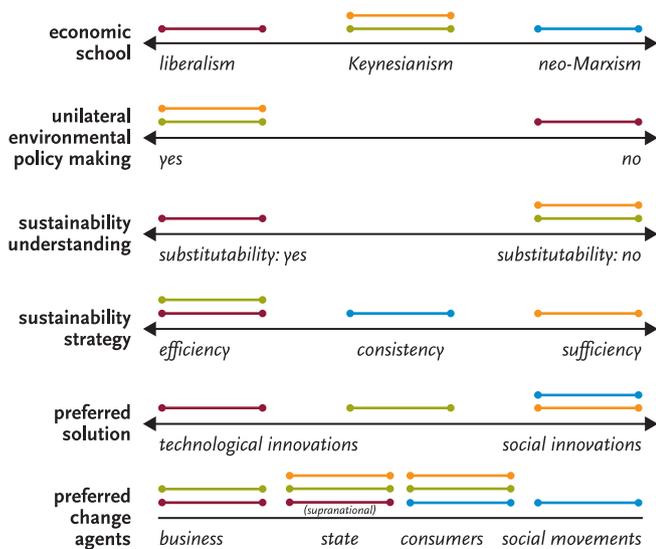


FIGURE 6: Comparative overview of the four discourses: the overview reveals significant differences. But although there are opposing positions (e.g., *Global Pioneering* and *Global Environmental and Social Justice*), the synopsis rather demonstrates the complex set of ideas, concepts and values underlying the “beyond growth” debate. If we focus on discourse similarities rather than differences, a discourse alliance between *Green Germany* and *Good Life* appears to be possible.

be subsumed under the frame “solidarity-based economy”: “The term ‘solidarity-based economy’ applies to diverse social interactions, such as repairing and sharing initiatives, urban gardening,

tainability ranges from weak sustainability (yes, natural capital and man-made capital are substitutable) to strong sustainability (no, they are not substitutable). To achieve sustainability, some name efficiency, some consistency, some sufficiency as strategy. A major line of conflict is the preferred solution scenario: technical or social innovations. Finally, there are different answers to the question, which actor should lead the transition towards well-being and prosperity (business, state, consumers, social movements).

The discourses may have different effects on the environment if they were to become manifest in policies. Discourses characterized by a weak sustainability understanding, like the *Global Pioneering* discourse, might get manifest in policies that support the use of nature instead of its conservation, possibly increasing the sealing of surfaces. Depending on the respective attitude towards technology, the degree of interference with nature would also differ: the *Global Pioneering* discourse would support policies allowing the use of risk technologies, such as fracking, whereas the discourses with an emphasis on the precautionary application of technology (e.g., *Green Germany*) might get manifest in policies that prevent the use of risk technologies, with possibly different effects on the environment. The discourses advocating for unilateral environmental policy making (e.g., *Green Germany*, *Good Life*) would get manifest in policies that probably contribute to the achievement of global environmental agreements (such as the two-degree goal) more quickly than those discourses that only advocate for environmental policy making at a supranational level (e.g., *Global Pioneering*).

Despite all the differences, the comparative overview of the four discourses also reveals similarities, namely between the discourses Green Germany and Good Life. It makes sense to think these two discourses more strongly together, as a so-called progressive environmental alliance.

and neighbourly help. By their nature, they foster local community building and the local economy. These kinds of initiatives require political support since they foster sustainable lifestyles” (BT 2013, p. 670). Social movements are regarded as key transition actors that can help to achieve prosperity and well-being: “Groups that are critical about technology and capitalism are essential, such as practitioners of agroecology, critical mass initiatives, citizens’ initiatives against fracking, highways and major projects that lack democratic support. To blame these actors as ‘spoilers preventing possible change’ is incorrect” (BT 2013, p. 758).

As the analysis shows, the discourses differ in a range of aspects (figure 6). Looking at the economic philosophy, we find adherents of liberalism, Keynesianism or neo-Marxism. Some discourses regard unilateral environmental policy-making as contributing to prosperity and well-being, others regard it as comparative disadvantage for the domestic economy. The understanding of sus-

Potential Discourse Alliances and Institutionalization

So far, there has been no direct parliamentary response to the results of the work of the *Enquete Commission*, with the exception of some individual parliamentarians promoting parts of the results. Given the lack of parliamentary response in terms of concrete policies, I want to reflect on the potential of the discourses to become manifest in policies. As I would argue, their potential of becoming hegemonic and institutionalized depends on a variety of factors and circumstances. To name just a few, these are the proximity of the discourse to other major public debates, the comprehensiveness of the discourses in terms of providing plausible future solution scenarios and the support of relevant actors and resources.

As the discourse analysis shows, it would be an undue simplification to reduce the “beyond growth” debate ex ante to green

growth and degrowth. The four discourses represent a more complex picture. Despite all the differences, discourse similarities can be observed, namely between the discourses *Green Germany* and *Good Life*. They concur with regard to the economic philosophy (Keynesianism), the promotion of unilateral environmental policy making and their strong sustainability understanding. It makes sense to think these discourses more strongly together, as a so-called progressive environmental alliance, to increase the likelihood for majoritarian parliamentary support. As transitions are coevolutionary processes of change occurring at multiple levels and including a variety of different actors and innovations (Martens and Rotmans 2005), aligning the discourses provides a more plausible solution scenario based on both, social and technological innovations.

The alliance might gain majoritarian parliamentary support, attracting environmentalists (Greens), conservatives (CDU) and social democrats (SPD). Interestingly, the idea of sufficient and modest lifestyles appeals to different schools of thought: on the one hand, it can be traced back to Catholic social teaching and the belief in moderation as a virtue per se, a tradition the CDU appeals to. On the other hand, it is also based on the idea of strong sustainability and conservation, an idea many environmentalists affiliated with the Green party would agree with. The fact that the liberal party, FDP, has been voted out of parliament in October 2013 might be a window of opportunity for further institutionalization of the above-mentioned alliance.

Finally, the institutionalization of any of the discourses would, however, be toothless without more strongly taking into consideration the dynamics of rebound effects. Since it has been a German case study, it would be still very interesting to conduct cross-country comparisons to analyse the relevance of these discourses in different cultural and political arenas.

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