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**Master Thesis**

# (COUNTER-)HEGEMONY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

## THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN ANTHROPOCENTRIC AND ECOCENTRIC DISCOURSES IN THE REALM OF THE RIO+20 CONFERENCE

**Schriftliche Arbeit zur Erlangung des akademischen Grads Master of Arts**

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# 1 Introduction

In light of multiple current global crises such as climate change, resource depletion and destruction of biodiversity, global poverty and inequality, and the crisis of the global economic and financial system, one receives the impression that 'things can't go on like this'. Civilization in its current configuration seems to have reached a dead-end. Gabriela Oliveira de Paula and Rachel Negrão Cavalcanti put it like this: "We only have to observe what is happening with the world to notice that the western model of economic growth, founded on efficiency and on unlimited growth, has failed and that it does not provide most of society with even the basic conditions for living" (Oliveira de Paula & Negrão Cavalcanti 2000: 109). Peter Schmuck identifies a growing consensus in society about the fact that humanity causes existential problems for itself and the whole biosphere and that there is a need for fundamental changes (Schmuck 2005: 85). In the last decades a *discourse* evolved and became widely accepted that calls for a revision of the development pattern and that centres around the term '*sustainable development*'. This thesis is concerned with the concept of sustainable development (SD). It argues that it is highly contested, namely that there are two principal competing conceptions of SD. They differ in regard to the fundamentality of the advocated changes of the socio-economic order. One pursues a rather anthropocentric, the other a rather ecocentric discourse.

The Western development paradigm, which still comprehends 'development' as mainly linked with economic growth, and which has had a world *hegemonic* position for quite a time now, seems to be challenged. By the term *hegemony*, based on Antonio Gramsci, I want to convey that this global socio-economic order has been seen as 'normal', as 'just the way it is' and has not been fundamentally called into question on a large scale for most of the time. However, the current multiple crises have caused a widening gap between the 'ideal' that the hegemonic ideology maintains and the experienced reality of the majority of society, which in turn has opened the space for *counter-hegemonic discourses*. Yet, as Bob Jessop asserts, while it is true that crises encourage innovation and promote alternative visions for the future breaking with the current development path, other crises will merely "invoke, repeat, or re-articulate" established ways of thinking (Jessop 2004: 13). One factor in deciding which vision of the future development pattern will become widely accepted is whether the current multiple crises are regarded as crises *of* or merely *within* the existing political and economic order and therefore whether the *moral legitimacy of that order* is challenged or not (see Jessop 2004: 13; Engel 1990: 3).

Andres Edwards argues that the hegemonic development paradigm is not only challenged but that even a *paradigm shift* is taking place, which he calls the 'Sustainability Revolution'. In Edwards' opinion it "presents an alternative that supports economic viability and healthy ecosystems by modifying consumption patterns and implementing a more equitable social framework" (Edwards 2005: 3). It represents a *paradigm shift* because it is "creating a pervasive and permanent shift in consciousness and worldview affecting all facets of society" (Edwards 2005: 2; see also Dunlap 1983). Edwards traces its genesis to the *United Nations Conference on the Human Environment* in Stockholm in 1972 and to the Brundtland Report *Our common Future* in 1987, which coined the term 'sustainable development'. The Brundtland Report explicitly put 'development', a traditional economic and social goal, and 'sustainability', an ecological goal, together to device a new development model. Furthermore, environmental and economic problems were linked with social and political factors. Its definition of SD has become the most cited one: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987: 43). The *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development* in Rio de Janeiro, also known as the Rio Earth Summit, in 1992 which developed frameworks for future actions, was a further key milestone for the Sustainability Revolution (Edwards 2005: 3-4). Since then, the concept of SD has reached broad-based adoption, both at national and international level, among politicians and grassroots activists alike.

Today the terms 'sustainability' and 'green' are indeed omnipresent, in the media as well as in political programmes of political parties and national and international institutions. The idea of SD has been accepted as a vision for the future of human society by the United Nations and numerous states of the world (Stenmark 2003: 3). The evolving *SD discourse* seems to support Edward's assumption of a Sustainability Revolution.

However, by writing about a development paradigm shift, Edwards in my opinion disregards the dimension of power at play and also the way in which power is reflected in public discourses. In contrast, it has to be asked who uses the vocabulary of sustainability for which purpose. How profound are the changes which are called for under the flag of 'sustainability' really? It is not my intention here to object to Edwards' thesis of a Sustainability Revolution. I much rather agree with the fact that we live in a time of crises and upheaval. Yet I would like to point out that such a 'revolution' would not take place uncontested and that we have to be cautious not to forget the *social struggles* that must accompany it. The current development pattern we pursue is deeply intertwined with the structure of the social relations in which it is embedded and social relations in turn are also always power relations. Since there are those who benefit from the current socio-economic order and those who do not, and since SD is in consequence highly normative, it must inevitably be an essentially *'contested concept'* (Jacobs

1999; Connelly 2007; Lafferty 1995). On the one hand there is a conception of SD that rather supports the current socio-economic order and its backing neo-liberal ideology and therefore only strives for an improvement of the current development model. SD here means a *more efficient use of natural resources*. This position shall be referred to as the *weak SD discourse* in this thesis. On the other hand there is a conception of SD which traces the roots of the current multiple crises back to the hegemonic socio-economic order and therefore calls for a radical change of it. SD is viewed here as a development vision that changes fundamentally the *human-nature relationship*. This position shall be referred to as the *strong SD discourse*.

The way the *human-nature relationship* is represented in these two antagonistic discourses will be the focal point of this thesis. I argue that the current development paradigm rests on the *anthropocentric* belief that human beings are distinct from and superior to the non-human world or 'nature'. María Amérigo et al. state that "one of the obstacles in putting an end to the current ecological crisis lies in the deep roots of current Western society's anthropocentric beliefs" (Amérigo et al. 2007: 103). I argue that even if these beliefs are not the only important part constituting the hegemonic development paradigm, it is a very essential one, as it is directly linked to our values and affects our environmental behaviour. Lynn White recognizes that "[w]hat people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them" (White 1967: 1205). If we view humans as separate and superior from nature, then we value it only as long as we can exploit it for our own benefit and act accordingly. In contrast, if we view humans as part of nature and recognize the interconnectedness of everything that exists, then 'environmental protection' is just one part of living 'in harmony with nature' and therefore pursued 'self-interest'. Thus, if we want to do better now and in the future, the Western development paradigm including its anthropocentric representation of the human-nature relationship has to be revisited.

Since anthropocentrism is such an essential part of the hegemonic development paradigm, I argue that a discourse which does not break with the anthropocentric worldview cannot represent a real alternative to the current development model and hence cannot be a real *counter-hegemonic discourse*. Since the weak SD discourse still embraces an anthropocentric worldview it cannot be characterized as promoting a Sustainability Revolution notwithstanding its 'sustainability badge'. The *strong SD discourse*, on the other hand, involves an *ecocentric,* holistic worldview, which ascribes intrinsic value to nature, and in consequence seriously challenges the hegemonic anthropocentric development paradigm. Thus, it constitutes the *counter-hegemonic discourse* in the *discursive struggle on SD*.

In order to figure out how profound this counter-hegemonic challenge through the strong SD discourse really is, we have to turn to the question of the distribution of power

between the two antagonistic SD discourses. It seems as if the weak SD discourse has been prevailing over the strong SD discourse and has absorbed its counter-hegemonic potential. There are many critics who have argued that the current discourse of a 'sustainable' or 'green' development does not promote a real alternative to the current conditions. In fact, it rather suggests only a slight modification than a radical break. Schultz asserts that "the commercial users of the environment hijacked the phrase by interpreting it to mean 'sustained development', which is clearly unsustainable" and that nowadays it means nothing more than "business as usual" (B. Schultz 2001: 110). Timothy Doyle asserts that Agenda 21, which was forged at the Rio Summit in 1992 and which he refers to as the "sustainable development bible", has been "successful in selling a concept of sustainable development which continues to promote the Enlightenment goals of progress through economic growth and industrialisation" (Doyle 1998: 771). In Gramscian terms this can be called a *passive revolution*.

This circumstance does not seem to have changed with the *United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development*, also known as 'Rio+20', the 20 years follow-up Conference of the historic Earth Summit in 1992, held in June 20-22, 2012 again in Rio de Janeiro. It was envisaged as a conference at the highest possible level, including heads of states and government. Over 45,000 people attended the summit, including thousands of chief executive officers (CEOs), parliamentarians, mayors, non-governmental organization (NGO) workers, academics, UN officials and journalists (UNDPI 2012). The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon himself called it "one of the most important conferences in the history of the United Nations" (UNCSD 2012a). The aim of the conference was to break years of deadlock on pressing environmental challenges and to secure renewed political commitment to sustainable development, as well as to assess the progress and implementation gaps in meeting already agreed commitments (AFP 2012; Wanniarachchi 2012).

However, the political Outcome Document *The Future We Want* has been harshly criticized for making too few advances on protecting the environment and except for paying lip service not changing the current pathway radically enough. Kumi Naidoo, Executive Director of Greenpeace, called Rio+20 an "epic failure" and "the last will and testament of a destructive twentieth century development model" (The Zimbabwean 2012). The struggle between weak and strong SD interpretations to dominate the SD discourse continued to be fought out before and during the conference and it seems that the first interpretation managed to prevail again.

In summary, the argument of this thesis can be set out in five sub-arguments:

1) Since SD is about highly normative questions over the future socio-economic development pattern, it must be a socially *contested* concept.

2) The SD discourse shows two principal competing conceptions of SD. *Weak SD* aims to improve the current socio-economic order and calls for a better management of natural resources. *Strong SD*, on the other hand, aims for a radical change of the current socio-economic order and calls for a revision of the human-nature relationship.
3) Therefore, one very important feature which distinguishes a strong from a weak SD conception is an *anthropocentric* or *ecocentric discourse* respectively.
4) Since the weak, anthropocentric SD discourse does not seriously challenge the *hegemonic development paradigm* but instead calls only for its improvement, it therefore does not have a counter-hegemonic potential, that is, it does not constitute a 'Sustainability Revolution'. In contrast, the strong, ecocentric SD discourse represents a *counter-hegemonic discourse* since it challenges the status quo and demands for far-ranging structural changes.
5) However, the hegemonic, weak, anthropocentric SD discourse is prevailing over the counter-hegemonic, strong, ecocentric SD discourse and attempts to incorporate it in order to absorb its counter-hegemonic potential (in Gramscian terms a *passive revolution* is taking place).

In order to carry out this argumentation, the thesis will comprise the following steps: First, since the argument of this thesis is based mainly on the theoretical work of Antonio Gramsci and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's Discourse Theory, I will start by presenting their core concepts respectively in chapter 2. Secondly, in order to illustrate the exact meaning of the terms 'anthropocentrism' and 'ecocentrism', chapter 3 will then outline the roots, values and consequences for action of the anthropocentric and the ecocentric worldview respectively. After having presented the theoretical underpinning of the thesis, I will then finally come to my central argument. The fourth chapter will give an overview over the conception of SD given by the Brundtland Commission on the one hand, and over some other differing conceptions of SD on the other hand, in order to illustrate that SD is an essentially contested concept. Moreover, I will identify traces of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism in the SD discourses and then shift the focus on the distribution of power between the two antagonistic SD discourses. The empirical contribution of this thesis lies in an analysis of discourses on SD in the realm of the Rio+20 Conference. I want to consider both the hegemonic discourse as well as the counter-hegemonic discourse on SD. Therefore, in the fifth chapter I will first analyze and compare the Rio+20 Outcome Document with the Outcome Document of the Rio Conference in 1992 and the one of the Johannesburg Earth Summit in 2002, with the aim to be able to draw conclusions about the discursive change that has occurred in the last 20 years. Afterwards I will focus in particular on the Rio+20 Conference. I will analyze several input documents which have been submitted to the UN in the run-up to the Conference as basis for the debate about the Zero Draft, which in turn

served as a basis for the final Outcome Document. I chose a few documents from member states of the UN as well as from environmental NGOs, industry organizations and international institutions.

# 2 Theoretical Framework of Hegemony and Discourse

I argue that the Gramscian theoretical concepts of *hegemony*, *war of positions* and *passive revolution* are very valuable instruments to come to terms with the discursive struggle between the hegemonic, weak, anthropocentric SD discourse and the counter-hegemonic, strong, ecocentric SD contesting the meaning of SD. Therefore, the first subchapter will focuses on these concepts and illuminates them in more detail. Moreover, I argue that they need to be complemented by an adequate consideration of their discursive nature. I reject an ontological separation between 'material' and 'ideal' social factors, but instead claim that 'linguistic' discourses and 'social reality' are reciprocally constitutive and ontologically not separable (even though they can be distinguished analytically). Thus, while I adopt Gramscian concepts, at the same time I try to reconcile them with Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory, which I will present in the subsequent sub-chapter. I claim that the different approaches are useful in their own right depending on what aspect of social 'reality' the focus is shifted on and they should be rather seen as complementing each other. They have their own strengths and weaknesses and are useful in different degrees depending on the respective research object. Although Discourse Theory claims to be able to grasp the whole of social 'reality', I argue that the Gramscian concepts are more appropriate to accentuate aspects of social power imbalances. While the Gramscian concepts rather provide the theoretical background of this thesis, Discourse Theory offers theoretical and methodological tools to analyse the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses in detail. Thus, when I want to highlight power relationships I will refer to Gramscian concepts, whereas I will refer to Discourse Theoretical concepts in order to address a particular discursive struggle.

## 2.1 The Political Theory of Antonio Gramsci

The theoretical work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), who was imprisoned by the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini from 1926 to 1934, a period during which he wrote what later would be called his *Prison Notebooks*, has been an important source of inspiration for

Marxists, Neo-Marxists and Post-Marxists as well as for Post-structuralists, proponents of Discourse Analysis, and many more scholars (as well as political activists) from other disciplines up until today. The fact that his piece of work found resonance in such different approaches is also due to its fragmentation and openness, which allows for a great variety of interpretation (Bieling 2002: 461). Gramsci broke with the orthodox Marxist argument that the material base determines the cultural superstructure and instead stressed the totality of social systems. In his framework he treated ideas, culture, politics, and economics as overlapping and reciprocally related (Abrahamsen 1997: 147). For Gramsci political power always encompasses both coercion and consent. He was interested in the consensual dimension of political domination and conceptualized it with his theory of *hegemony* (Gramsci 1971: 12-13), which he understood as "the indissoluble union of political leadership and intellectual and moral leadership (Mouffe 1979a: 179). Simply put, hegemony is when you do not recognize that dominance is exercised, or as Brown (2003: 96, drawing on Clegg 1989: 160) describes it, "[h]egemony is a form of cleverly masked, taken-for-granted domination, most often articulated as what is 'common sense' or 'natural', and which thus involves the successful mobilisation and reproduction of the active consent of those subject to it". Thus, in contrast to a Neo-Realist understanding of hegemony, here it is defined as a broad consent which rests likewise on the acceptance of 'ideas' as on 'material' resources and institutions (Bieler & Morton 2004: 87). Power is here not so much understood in the Weberian sense as power to coerce, but as the power to shape values and norms, interests and identities that are in line with one's own interests. One way of creating this consent to a hegemonic project is to portray the own particular worldview and interests as being universal, general and progressive (Bieling 2002: 455).

In order to grasp the totality of social systems, Gramsci conceptualized the state itself in a wider context – as the *state-civil society complex*. The idea of a clear confrontation between an elite and the masses in which the former rules the latter by occupying the state institutions as well as the idea of a clear distinction between public and private is rejected. At the same time Gramsci's understanding of civil society rejects the liberal conception of it, which presents it as a sphere autonomous from the state (Mouffe 1979b: 10). Instead the concept of the *integral state* understands the state "not just as the apparatus of government operating within the 'public' sphere (government, political parties, military) but also as part of the 'private' sphere of civil society (church, media, education) through which hegemony functions" (Bieler & Morton 2004: 92). In line with this, it can be argued that NGOs and civil movements in today's world should not be seen as standing in opposition to the state, but as also involved in reproducing hegemonic discourses (Brand et al. 2001; Methmann 2011).

Gramsci's theory emphasizes that "[h]egemony, on the national and/or international level, is not won once and for all but requires constant defending and reorganisation" (Cox 1981: 150). According to Gramsci *passive revolution* refers to the way the dominant social groups are

making concessions to the subaltern groups, which they are ready to accept in order not to lose their hegemonic position (Gramsci 1971: 59). By doing this, a gradual change of the order takes place whereas the subaltern groups become integrated and hence give up potential opposition to it. This means *transformismo*, "whereby the actual or potential leaders of hostile groups or subordinate classes are incorporated into elite networks, a practice that can be regarded as a political tool to prevent the formation of counter-hegemony" (Cox 1981: 139). One example of a passive revolution is the establishment of the Western welfare state, "which preserves the capitalist social order by making it more acceptable to the subordinate classes" (Abrahamsen 1997: 150). While Gramsci turned against economism and class reductionism of orthodox Marxism in many ways, he still treated the 'working class' in a privileged and essentialist way (Bieling 2002: 443; 462-63). I reject this view and argue – in line with Laclau and Mouffe, whose Discourse Theory I will present in the next subchapter – that while economic conditions are a very important determinant for social identity, nonetheless identity is always discursively constructed and other identity constructions are equally imaginable and existent.

Rita Abrahamsen (1997: 150) points out that a hegemonic ideology always contains a glorified version of the existing socio-economic order and that space for counter-hegemonic ideas is opened when the gap between that hegemonic ideal and the experienced reality of the majority becomes too wide. Then the hegemonic ideology has to "absorb such ideas and prevent them from turning into a general availability of radical thought, a counter-hegemonic alternative" (Abrahamsen 1997: 150). I argue that the current crises including the widening inequality between rich and poor on the national and international level and the rapid anthropic environmental changes, have caused such a widening gap between the *hegemonic* ideal and the experienced reality of the majority, that space is opened for counter-hegemonic discourses. The inflationary use of the terms 'green' and 'sustainability' – which has been called 'greenwashing' – is then the attempt of the *hegemonic ideology* to absorb ecocentric ideas and prevent them from turning into a *counter-hegemonic* alternative. Timothy Doyle states that the "commandments of sustainable development have successfully managed to co-opt, weaken and almost completely dismantle active environmental critiques of existing political and market systems" (Doyle 1998: 771). Michael Jacobs suggests that "[a]s the welfare state was a 'restructuring for labour' which changed but also rejuvenated the industrial interest, so sustainable development can be seen as a 'restructuring for the environment' which will transform but also recharge modern capitalism" (Jacobs 1995: 1484). However, from a Neo-Gramscian perspective, this represents nothing else than a *passive revolution* (Abrahamsen 1997).

This type of hegemony through absorption is opposed to the type of 'successful' *expansive hegemony*. An expansive hegemony is achieved through the genuine adoption of the interests of the subaltern groups, which leads to an *active* consent (Mouffe 1979a: 182). Thus, Gramsci differentiated between a 'negative' and a 'positive' form of hegemony: "the interests of

these [other social] groups can either be articulated so as to neutralise them and hence to prevent the development of their own specific demands, or else they can be articulated in such a way as to promote their full development leading to the final resolution of the contradictions which they express" (Mouffe 1979a: 183). If we wish for a real 'Sustainability Revolution' (Edwards 2005) - a *successful hegemony* - then we have to be very aware of the risk of a *passive revolution*.

To understand Gramsci's concepts of *war of manoevre* and *war of position* it is helpful to know the historical context of their development. Gramsci's starting point was the observation that while there had been a number of uprisings in Europe between 1917 and 1921, only in Russia did the Bolshevik revolution succeed in forming a workers' state (Jones 2006: 30). Gramsci explained this fact with the different levels of industrialization and democratic development. In the Western more mature democracies, with their institutional stabilization of the socio-economic order, the Russian strategy – a direct assault on the state – would not have been successful. In Russia there was no state backing structure with trade unions, social democratic parties or a well paid labor stratum, and therefore there were no intermediaries between the Tsarist regime and its revolutionary opponents to win over (Jones 2006: 31). In contrast, given the deep-rootedness of the capitalist regimes in the West, here such a revolution would be a political and psychological impossibility (Jones 2006: 31). According to Gramsci, this is why it is important to differentiate between *wars of manoevre* and *wars of position* (Gramsci 1971: 229-35). In Western democracies a *war of positions* would have to be conducted. This term refers to a long-term strategy to win over the intermediary structures which back the hegemony of the state. Thus, a war of positions is an *ideological conflict* where "meanings and values become the object of struggle" (Jones 2006: 31) .

Thus, the discursive struggle between a weak, anthropocentric SD discourse and a strong, ecocentric SD discourse in the realm of Rio+20 can be described with Gramsci's *war of positions*.

Robert Cox has made Gramsci's theory available for the analysis of international relations. He argues that a 'pax Americana' prevailed until the 1970s, a US-led hegemonic world order, that was characterized by a Fordist accumulation regime, the principle of 'embedded liberalism', the Keynesian welfare state with a corporatism involving government-business-labour coalitions, international free trade and fixed exchange rates and that was stabilized by institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Cox 1987: 219-39). Since then there has been an increasing internalisation of production and finance, which has given rise to new social forces of capital and labour and is according to Cox, beside other elements of productive and financial capital, mainly driven by a 'transnational managerial class' (Bieler & Morton 2004: 94-95). In addition to Cox, many Neo-Gramscianists have gone beyond

Gramsci's focus on the nation state. Taking a 'materialist' perspective, Andreas Bieler and Adam Morton (2004: 92) argue that hegemony is established at the international level through a mode of production operating internationally and through a certain world order. The state has become a transmission belt for neo-liberalism and the logic of capitalist competition from global to local spheres (Cox 1992: 31). Stephen Gill describes a transition from an *international historic bloc* of social forces towards a *transnational historical bloc*, which created the conditions for the hegemony of transnational capital in the 1970s (Gill 1990). He describes a current situation of supremacy which is organized through the processes of a constitutionalism of disciplinary neo-liberalism and the spread of market civilisation: "New constitutionalism results in an attempt to make neo-liberalism the sole model of development by disseminating the notion of market civilisation based on an ideology of capitalist progress and exclusionary or hierarchical patterns of social relations" (Gill 1995: 399).

In this thesis I argue that the Western development model, which still comprehends 'development' as mainly linked with economic growth, has a world *hegemonic* position. Its hegemony is based on a neo-liberal capitalist production system, financial and trade globalization, a collective image of the world order as an order of capitalist nation-states, shared underlying values such as individualism, ownership, rationality, profit maximization and competitiveness and international political, trade and financial institutions which back this neo-liberal ideology. It is hegemonic since - although resistance to it has always existed and may be rising - this global order is not fundamentally called into question on a large scale. As Norman Fairclough puts it: "The oligarchic system is being combined with a 'consensual vision' on the claim that contemporary reality, the global economy and the prospect of endless 'growth' which it promises, do not leave us with a choice" (Fairclough 2009: 173). Since the strong, ecocentric SD discourse puts this development model into question it constitutes a *counter-hegemony*.

Several critical voices concerning Neo-Gramscian Theory have been raised: Some indicated that Neo-Gramscian analyses of hegemonic conditions underestimate the possibility of transformation and overstate the coherence of neo-liberalism (Drainville 1995; Cammack 1999). In my view it is certainly equally important for an emancipatory approach to reveal hegemonic situations as well as to identify space for its transformation. Peter Burnham on the other hand criticises Neo-Gramscian theory for failing to recognize the central importance of capital relations and for being preoccupied with the articulation of ideology (Burnham 1991). This would result in "a slide towards an idealist account of the determination of economic policy" (Burnham 1991: 81). Bieler and Morton argue against this accusation that only those ideas which are relevant to the social power relation, hence the "material structure of ideology", are taken into account (Bieler & Morton 2004: 100-101). From a Post-structuralist approach this criticism and even Bieler and Morton's answer to it have to be rejected because it is assumed a

distinction can be drawn between 'objective materiality' and 'subjective ideas'. Moreover, from a Post-structuralist perspective, the terms 'ideas' and 'ideology' are problematic because they seem to imply a notion of 'false consciousness', which is – given that nobody can stand outside the social discourse – impossible to identify. Here the deep faultline between materialist and Post-structuralist interpretations of Gramsci's theory becomes evident. We will come back to this point in the following subchapter.

In summary, I will use the Gramscian term *hegemony* to describe the situation of a prevailing and 'naturalized' Western development model, which still comprehends 'development' as mainly linked with economic growth and which is based on an anthropocentric worldview. Secondly, the term *counter-hegemony* is referred to in order to characterize the circumstance that the strong, ecocentric SD discourse challenges the taken-for-granted nature of this development model. Thirdly, this resulting discursive struggle between a weak, anthropocentric development discourse and a strong, ecocentric development discourse is described with the Gramscian term *war of positions*. Lastly, the observed and lamented 'greenwashing', that is the incorporation of Green ideas into the hegemonic neo-liberal ideology making them consistent with the current socio-economic order, will be described as a *passive revolution*.

## 2.2 Discourse Theory

Sow a thought, and you reap an act;
Sow an act, and you reap a habit;
Sow a habit, and you reap a character;
Sow a character, and you reap a destiny.

(Saying, supposedly by Charles Reade, 1814-1884)

While Antonio Gramsci's theory can be interpreted in an either rather 'materialist' or a rather 'idealist' manner, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) have built on Gramsci's theory on hegemony from a Post-structuralist perspective and combined it with discourse analysis. Post-structuralism rejects a division of the world into two realms of the mental and the material, the notion of an 'objective science' and the rigid fact/value dichotomy of positivism. Therefore Post-structuralism "facilitates the escape from the pervasive influence of the thought/being opposition in the grand trinity of oppositions that has formed the philosophical background for the project of the social sciences: nature/culture, individual/society and mind/body" (Purvis & Hunt 1993: 484). We see that the human/nature dichotomisation of anthropocentrism affiliates with this thinking. Although it is acknowledged that there are 'brute facts' out there, Post-

structuralists stress that they are not self-interpreting (Langlois 2007: 151). Thus, any notion that we could grasp 'reality' objectively 'as it is', is an illusion. In consequence, from a Post-structuralist perspective inspired by Michel Foucault, "there cannot be a materialist analysis which is not at the same time a discursive analysis" (Escobar 1996: 326). The study of language becomes crucial here since language is constitutive of 'reality' instead of being an 'objective' reflection of it (Ibid.).

'Knowledge' is thus far from being neutral, as Foucault (1980) made clear with his concept about the interrelationship of knowledge and power. Arturo Escobar (1984-85: 392) stresses that "[s]ince one of the major foundations of power is truth, the knowledge of that truth – i.e. its invention and confirmation – becomes a major mechanism for the legitimation of the hegemonic forms of power within a given system". Since discourse can be understood as "the process through which social reality inevitably comes into being", ideas, matter, discourse and power are not separable from each other (Escobar 1996: 326). Thus, discourse is "the articulation of knowledge and power, of statements and visibilities, of the visible and the expressible" (Escobar 1996: 326).

Many have criticised this viewpoint and have accused Post-structuralists of denying the existence of any 'reality' at all and argued that hence their research would be unable to make any valuable statements. Laclau and Mouffe solve the 'objective/subjective problem' by differing between 'existence' and 'being', or the 'ontic' and the 'ontological' (Tregidga, Milne & Kearins 2011: 3). They acknowledge that there is 'material' existence 'out there', but at the same time stick to the argument of the discursive construction of meaning (Tregidge, Milne & Kearins 2011: 3-4). They (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 108) illustrate this relationship like this:

> The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God' depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence.

Thus, their theory embraces an anti-essentialist epistemology as well as an anti-essentialist ontology (Methmann 2010: 351). The social world is understood as discursively constructed, which implies "that its character is not pre-given or determined by external conditions, and that people do not possess a set of fixed and authentic characteristics or essences" (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 5).

According to Laclau and Mouffe it is not possible to distinguish between a 'discursive' and a 'non-discursive' realm, and hence all social and political processes have to be understood as discourses (Methmann 2010: 351). This does not mean that there is nothing else than text but that discourse itself is material and that entities such as institutions or the economy are part of discourse (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 19). This view differs drastically from other discourse analytical approaches, such as the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Norman Fairclough (1989; 1992; 1995), which understands discourse as a form of social practice that is distinct from, shaped by and itself shapes the institutions and social structures which frame it (Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 258).

Laclau and Mouffe draw on the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who stated that *signs* consist of two sides, their form (*signifiant*) and their content (*signifié*), and that the relation between them is arbitrary and only established in relation to all other signs in the system of language (Saussure 1960). For example, calling a man a 'father' makes only sense because this sign is different from 'mother' or 'child' and not because there is something 'fatherly' about the sound-image 'father' (Methmann 2010: 351). In consequence, there is a structure of language, which gives the signs its meaning, what Saussure called *langue*, in opposition to *parole*, which is the language use in specific situations. However, while Post-structuralists adopt Saussure's insight that the meaning of a sign comes into existence only when it is positioned in relation to other signs in a network of signs and not through a given relation to an objective 'reality', they reject on the other hand the Structuralist concept of *langue* as a stable and unchangeable structure (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 10). Structures do exist, but always only in a contingent and temporary manner. Due to the fundamental instability of language, meaning can never be permanently fixed and hence there are constant social struggles about definitions of society and identity (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 6; 24). Thus language use is not only a 'channel' through which information is passed on, but it is a social phenomenon which is in a constant process of coming into being; therefore "it is through conventions, negotiations and conflicts in social contexts that structures of meaning are fixed and challenged" (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 25). However, the mere fact that meaning is contingent does not mean that it is easy to change. It is neither completely fixed nor completely fluid. Even if any structure is only temporary, for the moment it is there, and it can impose heavy restrictions for changing a discourse (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 38).

To understand Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory it is crucial to be willing to accept apparent paradoxes: Although meaning can never be fixed persistently, the creation of meaning as a social process is about exactly this, about the constant attempts to fix meaning (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 25). This in no way changes the fact that these attempts have to remain

'missions impossible'. Every concrete fixation of meaning remains always *contingent*. In view of this, we can understand Laclau and Mouffe's (1985: 105) concept of how a specific *articulation* within a *discourse* turns *elements* into *moments*:

> [W]e will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call *moments*. By contrast, we will call *element* any difference that is not discursively articulated.

Thus, any discourse can only make sense because it is structured around *nodal points*, which partially fix the meaning of the signs that are ordered around it (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 112). In short, "[a] discourse is established as a totality in which each sign is fixed as a moment through its relation to other signs" (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 26). In each discourse two logics are in interplay with each other: the *logic of equivalence* and the *logic of difference* (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 127 ff.). The first equates several moments with each other and puts them in a *chain of equivalence* and demarcates them from an 'outside', which constitutes the discourse in the first place; and the latter makes it possible to still differentiate between the different *moments* within a discourse. *Antagonistic* discourses or identities constitute each other by providing the 'outside' of the 'other' (Stäheli 2006: 263-64). Depending on the respective scope of the discourse you are looking at, it is therefore possible to speak about a 'discourse of development', a 'discourse of sustainable development', a 'discourse of nature', a 'discourse of environment protection', a 'discourse of climate protection', and so on. The partial fixation of meaning – a *closure* - is only possible through the exclusion of all other possible meanings, creating in this process a *field of discursivity*, an array of all other possible, but not articulated meanings (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 110-11). Since a discourse is never completely fixed, there is always the danger that it gets challenged and undermined by the field of discursivity. Then *disclocation* occurs, that is "the disruption of the structure by forces from the constitutive outside" (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 59). This gives space for a struggle over the fixation of meaning – which means that different discourses struggle with each other over the 'right' meaning of *floating signifiers* (Laclau 1990: 28). While *nodal points* are always also *floating signifiers*, the difference between the two terms is that "the term 'nodal point' refers to a point of crystallization within a specific discourse, the term 'floating signifier' belongs to the ongoing struggle between different discourses to fix the meaning of important signs" (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 28). Thus, the signifier 'sustainable development' is a *nodal point* in the developmental discourse, but at the same time a *floating signifier* between a weak SD discourse and a strong SD discourse. In contrast to a Structuralist viewpoint, which gives the impression

that the status quo is rigid and which cannot explain social change, Post-structuralist Discourse Theory has an immanent emancipatory character: Having accepted that hegemonic structures of meaning are never fixed forever, your focus is shifted towards the opened space for counter-hegemonic discourses.

For a better analytical separation, Louise Phillips and Marianne Jørgensen differentiate between a *field of discurivity*, which they reserve for the rather unstructured mass of all possible, excluded constructions of meaning, and an *order of discourse*, a concept which they adopt from Fairclough's CDA (see above) and which refers to a limited range of discourses which struggle in the same terrain (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 27). Thus, "[t]he discourses in play and their relations with one another are what (…) constitute the order of discourse" (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 148). I find this analytical separation useful and will adopt this term of an *order of discourse* beside the concepts of Laclau and Mouffe that I use for my argument. I argue that within the SD *order of discourse* there are two antagonistic discourses struggling with each other.

According to Laclau and Mouffe the benefit of Gramscian theory is that "it establishes the principle that politics involves articulation, or, in their term, a 'logic of the social', within which discrete subject positions and social groups in a particular historical conjuncture will be bound together into a historical bloc" (Jones 2006: 130). However, they break radically with Gramsci's residual essentialism. They reject the Marxian dichotomization between one capitalist and one subaltern class in line with their rejection of the Marxist claim that the material base determines the ideological superstructure. Societal groups (just as the identity of individual subjects) do not exist because of any objective laws that divide society into particular groups, but they are always created in political, discursive processes (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 33). When people define themselves as part of a class, for example, then this is so because there has been a temporary *closure* that has marginalised other possibilities for identification (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 39). Thus, discourses do organize identity in a certain way. Laclau and Mouffe here refer to Louis Althussers' concept of *interpellation*, which means that people receive their identity for a specific moment in time through discourse (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 40-41). When a child says 'Mummy' to a woman, this woman is interpellated as a 'mother', when a head of a state refers to the 'nation' people are interpellated as members of that nation, when someone has to apply for asylum to stay in a country she is interpellated as an asylum seeker, and so on. Drawing on Jaques Lacan's (1977) theory of the subject, Laclau and Mouffe understand the relationship between discourse and identity in a way that discourses represent subjects and groups by a cluster of signifiers in a *chain of equivalence* with a *master signifier* at its centre (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 42-45). However, for Laclau and Mouffe there are not atomistic subjects with only one identity, but the subject is fragmented and is ascribed to many different (sometimes

conflicting) identities by different discourses (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 41). Since there is no objective logic pointing to a single subject position, it only makes sense to abolish the idea of class antagonism. Thus, when I refer to specific states, NGOs, business representatives and so on in this thesis, it is important to bear in mind that the identities of these 'groups' are not given but discursively constructed and theoretically able to change. Thus, Laclau and Mouffe emphasize that new social movements such as the green movement are not necessarily progressive. They state that "new social movements exist in multiple forms which may be shaped through hegemonic struggle to progressive or reactionary ends" (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 169; see also Methmann 2011). Nevertheless, while it is right that discourses and identities are in constant flux, they can seem very rigid at a certain time, and the analysis of this thesis has to be seen as looking only at a specific moment in history and representing only a tiny fraction of 'reality' similar to a photo capturing a specific moment and showing only a section of the whole 'picture'. Thus, for the particular historic moment my analysis deals with I will treat these identities *as if* they were given.

In consequence, since identities are discursively constructed, in Disourse Theory *ideology* is not understood as a deformation of an objective 'truth' or 'false consciousness' as in orthodox Marxism, but must be inherently present in all discourses. Since Fairclough differentiates between a 'discursive' and a 'non-discursive' field of the social, in CDA the term 'ideology' is still understood in a rather Marxist view of 'false consciousness' and for Fairclough there are more and less ideological discourses, that is discourses can help to (re)-produce unequal power relations between social groups (Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 258). Post-structuralists hold against this view that there is no 'outsider position' from which it would be possible to judge what is more ideological and what less. While I agree, I still claim that there are discourses that leave the current status quo of the socio-economic order unchallenged and which hence can be accused of implicit support of the current unjust distribution of power; and those discourses on the other hand, which rather call the status quo into question and which therefore can be seen as having an emancipatory character. In order to demarcate their theory from other approaches such as CDA, Laclau and Mouffe prefer to use the term *objectivity* instead of 'ideology' (Laclau 1990: 89). *Objective* discourses are those discourses, which appear so natural that we can hardly even think about any alternative to them (Laclau 1990: 34). This means that objective discourses are logically the hardest to change, since it is so difficult to think beyond them. The discourse which has established an dichotomous relationship between humans and nature in Western culture can be understood as such an *objective*, naturalised discourse since most people take it for granted and usually do not call it into question. One way to raise awareness about such objective discourses, is to compare them with discourses of other times and spaces, which helps to create a distance between yourself and the taken-for-granted

assumptions (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 149). This is the why I will compare the Western anthropocentric discourse with non-Western rather ecocentric ones in chapter 3.

Yannis Stavrakakis, a former student of Laclau, however, does not refrain from the term of *ideology* and defines it as "encompassing all meaningful constructions (belief structures, constructions of reality, discursive practices) through which social reality is produced and our action within it – especially our *political action* – acquires cause and direction" (Stavrakakis 2000: 101; my emphasis). Thus, what differentiates an *ideology* from a *discourse* is simply its political relevance. Citing Laclau he goes on to explain that "[i]deological constructions of reality attempt to provide a final symbolization of the world around us and thus articulate themselves 'on the basis of closure, of the fixation of meaning', by repressing any recognition of 'the precarious character of any positivity, [and] of the impossibility of any ultimate suture'" (Stavrakakis 2000: 101; citing Laclau 1990: 92). Put very simple, in political discourses different ideologies struggle to gain hegemonic status. On the basis of Stavrakakis (1997; 2000) I argue that a new relationship to nature forms the core of a new developing *Green ideology,* which developed as a new *articulation* of 'old' ideological elements around a new, distinct *nodal point* – the *signifier* 'nature'. I will outline Stavrakakis' argument in more detail in chapter 3.2.

Since Laclau and Mouffe see ideology or objectivity as present in all discourses, hence, *power* is present in all discourses as well. This brings their understanding of power close to that of Foucault (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 37). Power produces the social in particular ways and is therefore a 'positive' force, but at the same time, it precludes other possibilities of the social. In Discourse Theory *hegemony* is understood as a practice of discursive articulation that displaces other possibilities of the social and therefore is highly political. James Martin (2002: 25) explains this matter clearly:

> It is this limitation that underscores the political aspects of discourse: by constructing and constraining common meanings, power and exclusion are an essential feature of hegemony. Dominant discourses succeed by displacing alternative modes of argument and forms of activity; by marginalising radically different discourses; by naturalising their hierarchies and exclusions presenting them in the form of 'common sense'; and by effacing the traces of their own contingency. A successful hegemony will seek to render itself incontestable.

I maintain that this aspect of Discourse Theory has often been neglected. From rather Marxist or Critical perspectives it is often accused of being too dismissive of economic issues and implicitly also for not being critical enough towards the unequal power relations in (national or global) society and towards the existent hegemonic socio-economic order (Jones 2006: 131 e.g. refers to Clarke 1991 and Bocock 1986). However, these are two different points of criticism. While I

share the first, I argue that the latter is unjustified. Concerning the latter, I claim that it is important not to underestimate the role of the process of deconstructing and denaturalizing hegemonic discourses, which is in itself a way of opening it for criticism and displaying space for counter-discourses. As Helen Tregidga, Markus Milne and Kate Kearins (2011: 6) put it:

> In recognising space for resistance and antagonism within discursive struggles, we see value in considering that which has been taken-for-granted within the discourse and that which has been marginalised or masked, and in doing so challenging the taken-for-granted and re-introducing into the debate that which has been hidden.

While hegemony is a specific articulation of elements, deconstruction shows that this articulation is contingent and could have been different (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 48). Thus, "[d]iscourse analysis aims at the deconstruction of the structures that we take for granted; it tries to show that the given organisation of the world is the result of political processes with social consequences" (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 48).

However, the first point of criticism about Discourse Theory, the accusation of being too dismissive of economic issues is more reasonable to me. While in theory it should not be problematic for Discourse Theory to take economic issues into account since it makes no distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive, in academic practice proponents of Discourse Theory tend to not fulfill their claim to take into consideration the whole of the social (Stäheli 2006: 277-78). Hans-Jürgen Bieling (2002: 463), for example, points out that while the approach of 'radical contingency' may have the advantage of redefining the structure/action relationship, this however happens at the expense of taking the conditions of reproduction adequately into account.

To develop the argument of this thesis I refer to concepts by Gramsci in order to highlight the aspect of *power relations* concerning the struggle on the meaning of SD and therefore on the right development trajectory and socio-economic order for the future of our societies. In addition, I refer to concepts by Laclau and Mouffe, and Stavrakakis in order to underline the discursive nature of this struggle and to analyze the discursive struggle on SD in the realm of Rio+20. The ontological tension between the rather 'Materialists' Gramsci and Fairclough on the one hand and the Post-structuralists Laclau, Mouffe and Stavrakakis on the other hand, is no issue for this thesis since it focuses solely on the 'linguistic' aspects of the SD order of discourse.

In summary, in this thesis I argue that the concept of sustainable development is an essentially contested one. There is taking place a *discursive struggle* within the SD *order of*

*discourse* (which is in turn part of a broader *field of discursivity* of development) around the *floating signifier* SD. Each of the two antagonistic discourses consists of several *moments* in a specific *chain of equivalence.* In the weak SD discourse 'anthropocentrism' is a central *moment* in a *chain of equivalence* besides *moments* such as 'economic growth', 'environmental management', 'resource efficiency' or 'technological innovation'. In parallel, in the strong SD discourse 'ecocentrism' is a *nodal point* organizing a *chain of equivalence* besides to other moments such as 'equity', 'spirituality', 'harmony' or a 'bottom-up approach' (for illustration see Figure 1). The specific content of the terms 'anthropocentrism' and 'ecocentrism' will be outlined in the next chapter, while chapter 4.3 will trace back anthropocentric and ecocentric *moments* in the two SD discourses.

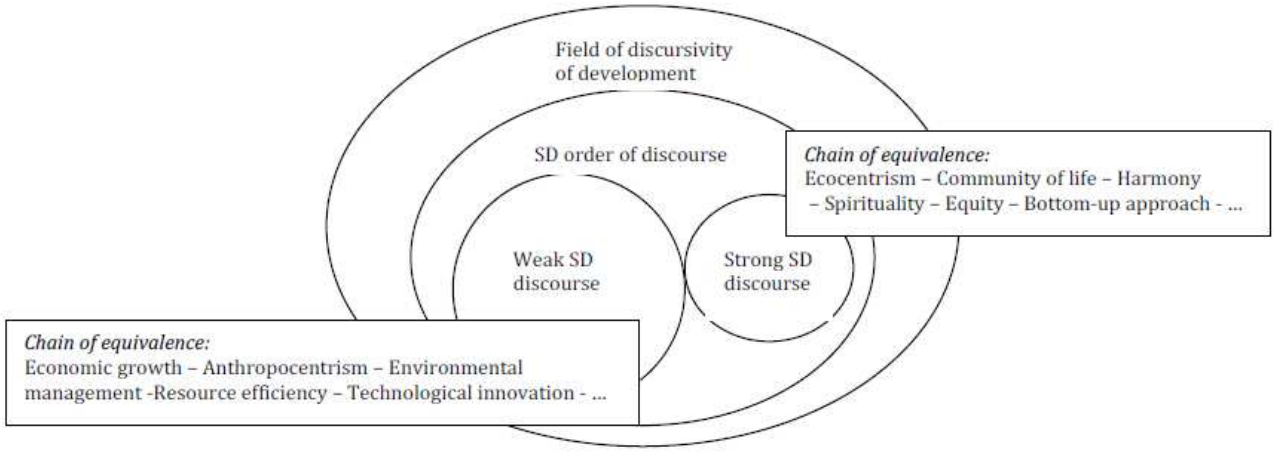


Figure 1: The discursive struggle between the hegemonic and the counter-hegemonic SD discourses embedded in further levels of development discourses. Own source.

# 3 The Anthropocentric/Ecocentric Distinction

How can you buy or sell the
sky, the warmth of the land?
The idea is strange to us.

If we do not own the freshness
of the air and the sparkle of
the water, how can you buy them?

Every part of this earth is
sacred to my people. Every
shining pine needle, every
sandy shore, every mist in
the dark woods, every clearing
and humming insect is holy in
the memory and experience of
my people. The sap which courses

through the trees carries the
memories of the red man.

The white man's dead forget
the country of their birth
when they go to walk among
the stars. Our dead never forget
this beautiful earth, for
it is the mother of the red man.
We are part of the earth and it
is part of us.

> Part of the *Testimony of Cief Seath* to white settlers arriving in Duwanish (now Washington State), 1854 (reproduced from R. Moody (ed.) (1988), *The Indigenous Voice*, vol. 1, Zed Books: London and New Jersey). Cited in Dickens 1992: v.

In our daily lives we may not be aware of the concept we have about nature, or that we even have a specific concept of it. However, we all certainly carry a specific view of it in different variations. Nature has for a long time been the subject of a discursive struggle between different representations of the human-nature relationship, representing different beliefs about the 'right' relationship towards it (Tregidga, Milne & Kearins 2011: 6). In this thesis I will distinguish between an *anthropocentric* and an *ecocentric* worldview. Anthropocentrism is thereby defined "as a doctrine which posits humanity as the centerpiece of the universe and sees their well-being as the ultimate purpose of things" (Chandler & Dreger 1993: 169). It "is an extension of ethnocentric thinking, involving high valuation of humanity in relation to the relevant outgroup - the nonhuman environment" (Ibid.). This thesis is based on the assumption that anthropocentrism is one important *moment* of a *chain of equivalence* constituting the *hegemonic* development paradigm. This development paradigm has originated in the West and is reaching out to other non-Western societies. I argue that even if anthropocentrism is not the only important part composing the hegemonic development paradigm, it is a very essential one because it is directly linked to the values we pursue and affects our environmental behaviour and arguably, even though in a more ambiguous causal chain, the way we organize our lives, with regard to the environment as well with regard to other human beings. In contrast, "[e]cocentric individuals value nature for its own sake and, therefore, judge that it deserves protection because of its intrinsic value" (Gagnon Thompson & Barton 1994: 149).

Many scholars argue that "we are in the midst of a fundamental reevaluation of the underlying worldview that has guided our relationship to the physical environment" (Dunlap et al. 2000: 426; see also Milbrath 1984; Olsen et al. 1992). Riley Dunlap (1980; 1983) distinguishes between a 'human exemptionalism paradigm' and an 'ecological paradigm'. The former "views the 'exceptional' characteristics of Homo sapiens, particularly our knowledge and technology, as largely exempting us from the ecological limits which constrain other species and

as insuring our continued biological survival" (Dunlap 1983: 200). However, Dunlap argues that this paradigm is increasingly challenged at both scientific and societal levels by an 'ecological paradigm' (Dunlap 1983: 201). The latter views human beings "as *members of a finite global ecosystem*" and realizes that "their existence [is] ultimately dependent upon the continued stability of that system" (Dunlap 1980: 8; my emphasis). Dunlap here sees a real *paradigm shift* taking place because "the ecological paradigm - like the Copernican and Darwinian paradigms before it - challenges humanity's view of its place and role in the universe" (Dunlap 1983: 202).

In the following two subchapters I will first present the historic roots of anthropocentrism, its criticism by non-Western philosophies and the reflective critical response; and secondly I will present the philosophy of ecocentrism - 'ecosophy' - and empirical data that show the consequences for action of an ecocentric worldview.

## 3.1 The Anthropocentric Worldview

This subchapter will first discuss the terms ‚nature' and ‚environment' very briefly, then it will present the argument that our concept of nature is always socially constructed, but that nonetheless it is justifiable to adopt the position that we need to change our relationship to nature. Afterwards I will outline what anthropocentrism means, the argument that its sources are found in Judeo-Christian tradition and the various criticism this argument has provoked. Here I will clarify that the term 'anthropocentrism' refers to a superior attitude of humans towards nature and that it does not indicate a misanthropic point of view. In order to de-naturalize the Western anthropocentric worldview, I then present illustrations of non-Western concepts of nature. In order to counter the danger that the Western dichotomous view of a human-nature relationship is replaced with the dichotomous distinction between 'bad' Western and 'good' non-Western conceptions of nature and by doing this creating another negative other, I will at last refer to Ugo Dessì's reflective criticism of supposed Asian value superiority.

John Barry states that „thinking about the environment, its meaning, significance and value is as old as human society itself" (Barry 2009: 1). He differentiates between the terms 'environment' and 'nature' and does not just equate one with the other. 'Environment' means not just 'nonhuman', but refers to something that surrounds something different and thus is a relational concept. 'Nature', on the other hand, is a highly complex term, because it can refer to both non-human as well as to human nature. In discussing these terms it becomes obvious that 'nature' and 'environment' are generally viewed in opposition to human society and culture, which "resonates with the idea of the environment as something non-human, the external and

eternal natural and naturally occurring surroundings which envelopes both humans and nonhuman entities" (Barry 2009: 18). Hence, the very term 'environment' implies a division between humans and their surrounding (Mühlhäusler 2001: 163-64). This is why Andrew Goatly suggests substituting the term 'environment' with the terms 'ecology' or 'nature' (Goatly 2000: 278-79). He maintains that 'environment' is linked to the metaphor of 'central' being important/powerful versus 'non-central' being less important/powerful and that "[i]f we use the word *environment*, presumably we suggest that humans are central and thus more important than nature" (Goatly 2000: 278).

Barry stresses that there are no value-neutral readings of the environment. There is the position that sees what is 'natural' as superior on the one hand, and on the other hand there is the 'technocentric' position, which holds that human creations are superior to natural ones (Barry 2009: 18-19). Here it is important to understand that 'nature' is always to a certain degree socially constructed "by noting how different societies, different ways of thinking and social theorising display distinct ways of thinking about and perceiving the environment" (Barry 2009: 19). Because nature is always socially constructed, in different cultures and at different times different conceptions about it exist.

However, the fact, that the concept of nature is itself arguably socially constructed, does not hinder the argument that in order to achieve a real sustainable development pattern we ought to strengthen ecocentric values. In "using postmodern cultural criticism against itself", Paul Wapner states that even though our concept of nature must always be socially constructed, it is still justifiable to plead for environmental protection (Wapner 2002: 183). He brings to mind that "[p]ostmodernists value the so-called 'other'; they aim to give voice to the poor, oppressed, and otherwise disadvantaged in an attempt to limit hegemonic tendencies of the powerful" (Wapner 2002: 167). Since the non-human realm represents "the most radical 'other'" (Wapner 2002: 183) he calls on postmodern IR scholars to incorporate the natural world including animals, plants etc. in their concern for the other (Wapner 2002: 167).

I now turn to the presentation of the argument that the Western culture has predominantly pursued an anthropocentric worldview. Barry states that the conceptualisation and thinking about nature has historically been mainly *anthropocentric*, being largely concerned with humans (Barry 2009: 31). Nature is first and foremost regarded as a collection of resources (Barry 2009: 32). In an effort to uncover the deeper cultural sources of today's environmental problems Lynn White blames the Judeo-Christian tradition for having profound anti-environmental implications. He interprets the story of Genesis in such a way that God created everything explicitly for man's benefit and rule and man gave everything its name and thus established his dominance. Man, on the other hand, is something different from the rest: he is

made in God's image (White 1967: 1205). So, Christianity "not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends" (Ibid.). According to White, this worldview developed its fatal destructive force for the environment when it was harnessed to modern science and technology in the West (White 1967: 1205-06).

Since its publication in 1967, White's article has received much attention, both appraisal and criticism. Lewis Moncrief (1970), for example, argues that the role religion played for the degradation of the environment has been at best indirect and that instead a complex web of factors has to be taken into account, such as market capitalism and democratization. The fact that there have been also non-Christian cultures that misused their environment would prove this argument. However, it has to be stated that White did not argue that only Christians would cause environmental damage, but that the Christian heritage played a significant role in making the environmental damage possible which the Western culture is responsible for. Ben Minteer and Robert Manning (2005) point to further shortcomings of White's reasoning. First, they argue that White overstates the impact humans have on the natural environment compared with that of other species. On the one hand human engagement in nature should not be seen as inherently negative, and on the other hand environmental systems themselves are constantly changing (Minteer and Manning 2005: 167). Secondly, they challenge White's one-sided negative assessment of the consequences of agriculture and human productive work in nature, which are not imperatively destructive, but can also advance a proto-conservation agrarian ethic of sustainability (Minteer and Manning 2005: 168-69). Thirdly, they point to several studies which dissent from White's notion that modern democratic society has an inherent tendency to ecologically self-destruct, which, for example, highlight the popular and social roots of environmental concern and activism (Minteer and Manning 2005: 170-71). Lastly, they summarize criticism of White's main conceptual breakthrough, his ethical assault on anthropocentrism. They refer to, amongst others, Bryan Norton who argues that "there is no necessary or inevitable linkage between humanism and ecological destruction", but "it is unwarranted human arrogance toward nature, not human values per se, of which we must be most wary" (Minteer and Manning 2005: 172, referring to Norton 2003). However, despite all their criticism, Minteer and Manning conclude their paper by stating that White's "larger point – that is, that we need to examine the underlying values and philosophical worldviews that motivate human activity in nature as revealed in our cultural and environmental history – remains as significant now as it was in 1967" (Minteer and Manning 2005: 172).

This point of criticism, the argument that there is no inevitable linkage between 'humanism' and ecological destruction, is of high importance for this thesis. After all, it rests on the assumption that the anthropocentric Western worldview plays an important role in

sustaining the exploitative state of our social-economic order. Robyn Penman makes a similar point when she states that 'environmental discourse', or 'greenspeak', closes off more than it opens up (Penman 2001). It seems that within greenspeak the human being is totally excluded. Taking the example of the discourse on biodiversity, Penman states that in greenspeak human beings are seen as being part of it and as relying on it, but that the ideal would be that we have as little, at best no effect at all on it (Penman 2001: 150). Indeed, some radical Ecocentrics seem to be almost misanthropic. Penman points out that as a consequence "we have a constructed reality that differentiates between 'the environment' and the 'cattle industry' and opposes them – you can only have one or the other" (Ibid.). She maintains that this dichotomous view closes off the space for debate about reconciling these realms. With seven billion people to feed on earth, the wish that the environment should be left untouched is unrealisable. Thus, we have to find a *sustainable* way of interference. But to achieve this goal we need a common language to discuss the appropriate way (Ibid.). I agree with Penman's point that the neglect of the human being cannot be the answer to the environmental crisis. However, I would like to stress that this is not the argument of this thesis. As Minteer and Manning have made clear, it is the attitude of human arrogance towards nature, viewing humans as superior, which creates the problem, not the existence of the human race per se. This is what I mean when I refer to 'anthropocentrism'.

In contrast to this Western way of seeing nature, indigenous cultures have been in general "less anthropocentric and more inclined to emphasise the continuity rather than the separation between the human and the nonhuman worlds" (Barry 2009: 33). This more holistic and appreciative approach is for example expressed in an extract of a speech a Native American Chief held in 1854, which marks the beginning of this chapter. This way of understanding the unity of human beings and the nonhuman world and the appreciation of invaluable natural phenomena contrasts sharply with the Western thinking, which differentiates clearly between humans and nature and tends to value nature only insofar it is economically exploitable. Saroj Chawla states that "[t]he modern technological world view does not adequately take into account the idea that all life on Earth is fundamentally the same, that most differences which seem important to us are superficial" and compares this worldview with the one of native American tribes, for example, the Dene, the Ojibway, and the Cree, who view human beings and other forms of organic life as one (Chawla 2001: 117). Humans and animals are seen as being in a reciprocal relationship with each other (Chawla 2001: 118). The Cherokee Indians, for example view natural entities as being akin to them: the moon is seen as grandfather and the sun as sister. While worldviews like this are judged by a Western scientific discourse as 'superstitious', Chawla argues that this very worldview has contributed to the fact that indigenous people have traditionally treated their environment with respect and concern (Ibid.). From an ecolinguistic perspective, Peter Mühlhäusler (2001: 164) points to the fact that the

Western conceptual division between humans and what is around them is reflected in the very term 'environment', which is not found in the same way in non-Western languages. In Barai, a language of Papua New Guinea, for example, "to express the notion of 'my land' (…), one uses the pronoun for mutual control suggesting *interdependence*, the need for balance and co-operation between people and the land" (Mühlhäusler 2001: 164; my emphasis). From a psychological perspective on the other hand, Elizabeth Bragg (1996: 100) points out that in many Asian cultures an "*interdependent* view of the self" is very common, in contrast to the Western "*independent* view of the self". Buddhism, for example, states that all forms of life are interdependent and that no harm shall be done to other living beings (*ahimsa*) (Barry 2009: 33). Buddhist thinkers have repeatedly criticised the European concept of humanism, understood as a subject-centred way of thinking exclusively concerned with the welfare of human beings (Dessì 2008: 112).

The *Joint Declaration for the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Foundation of the Shin Buddhist Federation*, issued by the Shin Buddhist Federation in 2000, specifically addresses 'humanism' and indentifies in it the cause for "the pitfalls of modern mass production society, the dangers for the environment, competition as a key feature of the modern economy, and the consequent loss of common trust, the collapse of the family as an institution, and related problems in the educational field" (Dessì 2006: 119). The Declaration dichotomises between 'the spirit of humanism' and 'a spiritual approach to life' (Dessì 2006: 121). Ugo Dessì takes a critical look at this dichotomisation and argues that it represents just another construction of a negative 'other' (Dessì 2006: 120). However, as much as I appreciate this reflective and critical approach, I think the West would do well to listen to critical voices stemming from other cultures. It is not about condemning your own culture or romanticizing other cultures, but about the effort to take a step back and to critically reflect any claims to universal validity.

In this subchapter we have seen that in Western culture an anthropocentric worldview has prevailed for a long time and that it has deep historical roots. In order to *de-naturalize* this worldview I referred to examples of non-Western concepts of nature. In the next subchapter, I will continue with this point and illustrate in more detail the eco-centric worldview. Although there have been critics who have argued that there is no clear causal relationship between a rather human-centred worldview and environmental deterioration and that those who criticize this worldview often tend towards a misanthropic neglect of any human impact on 'nature, I still defend my argument that an anthropocentric worldview represents one *moment* in a *chain of equivalence* constituting a *hegemonic* development paradigm that played a major role in causing various global crises. The point of criticism referring to the causal linkage between anthropocentrism and environmental behaviour will be picked up again in the next subchapter. Furthermore, I claim that there is an important difference between a misanthropic

condemnation of humans and the self-reflective criticism of human arrogance towards non-human life and life systems.

## 3.2 The Ecocentric Worldview

In the following section, I will introduce the ecocentric worldview. In doing so, I will first explain that it comprises a holistic ethic. Secondly, I will outline the central characteristics of such an approach drawing on Arne Naess and Richard Welford. Afterwards, I will argue, drawing on Yannis Stavrakakis, that ecocentrism constitutes the core of a new emerging 'Green ideology'. This fact is relevant as we understand that the discursive struggle between anthropocentric and ecocentric SD discourses is embedded in a wider ideological struggle. Then, I will present empirical evidence for the central ecocentric argument that our concept of nature affects our values and action towards it. Finally, I will briefly reflect upon the concept's relevance for my analysis.

In contrast to 'anthropocentrics', 'ecocentrics' stress an interconnectedness between humans and everything that exists (animals, plants, ecosystems) (Gagnon Thompson & Barton 1994: 150). Martin Gorke (2000) differentiates between three positions, all three of which are opposed to an anthropocentric ethic. The *pathocentric* position assigns intrinsic value to higher vertebrates (Singer 1975), the *biocentric* position on the other hand assigns intrinsic value to all living beings. Finally, the *holistic* position ascribes intrinsic value to all natural things and whole systems. Gorke argues that the moral standpoint must not have a dual standard and its ambition must be to comply with the whole of reality (Gorke 2000: 101). When I refer to *ecocentric* values I mean ethical holism.

Arne Naess has been a central figure in formulating the 'philosophy of ecocentrism' and called it 'Deep Ecology'. He (Naess 1973) distinguishes it from a 'Shallow Ecology Movement', which, according to him, deals only superficially with the symptoms of the ecological crisis and thus offers only technical solutions to it. In contrast, Deep Ecology challenges the underlying values that have led to the environmental crisis in the first place (Bragg 1996: 95). Thus, it is a "philosophy of ecological harmony and equilibrium" (Naess 1973: 99). He (Naess 1973: 95-98) delineates seven main characteristic features of Deep Ecology:

1) Rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of *the relational, total-field image;*
2) *Biospherical egalitarianism* - in principle;
3) *Principles of diversity and of symbiosis*;

4) *Anti-class posture*
5) Fight against *pollution and resource depletion*;
6) *Complexity, not complication*; and
7) *Local autonomy and decentralization*.

Richard Welford outlines six principles, which are central to restore spirituality within environmentalism: the living Earth; interconnectedness; a sense of place; compassion and humility; change and impermanence; and reawakening (Welford 1997a: 214-22). These principles are consistent with the Deep Ecology principles and they sum up very nicely the different ideas the radical ecocentrist worldview stems from. As I have already stated in the last subchapter, the Western anthropocentric ideology can learn much from cultures, which have traditionally been more respectful towards nature. Welford (1997a) argues that it is necessary that we rediscover that ecology and spirituality are inextricably linked and he draws much from Buddhism, Shamanism and indigenous cultures to depict his vision of the spirituality of environmentalism. While all action to protect the environment is of high importance, he points out that "[t]he most critical change which must take place is *a transformation of our very relationship with the Earth*" (Welford 1997a: 211; my emphasis). I will now outline the six principles in more detail:

The principle of 'the living Earth' refers to the idea of the Earth as a living system itself. The 'Gaia Hypotheses', developed by the chemist James Lovelock (1979), has reached prominence and wide recognition. It postulates that the Earth is not the dead habitat of living creatures, but that the biosphere itself is much more than just the complete range of all living things. Earth is rather seen as a living organism itself, which is self-preserving and self-regulating. All organisms and their surroundings on Earth form together one complex system, which maintains the conditions for life on the planet. The hypothesis rests on the observation that the biosphere and the different life forms contribute inter alia to the stability of global temperature, ocean salinity, oxygen in the atmosphere and other factors. To embrace the principle of 'the living Earth' means to recognize "that nothing can be entirely separate from all other things and that the interconnectedness of the whole world is part of us as well as us being a part of it" (Welford 1997a: 215). Understanding ourselves as part of a very complex metabolism makes us seeing that destroying any part of it means we are harming ourselves (Ibid.).

The principle of 'interconnectedness' is very closely related to the idea of the Earth as a living system. It is the very principle that is central for this thesis. Welford refers to the Buddhist philosophy, which states that all that exists has no identity that is self-reliant and separate, but that everything is connected.. In addition, he refers to the tradition of many tribal peoples to include in their concept of community other species as well as environmental features such as

rivers and mountains and unseen ancestors and spirits (Ibid.). 'Interconnectedness' means to widen one's own identity, the own 'ego', and to understand that what is around us is not removed, separate and disposable, but intrinsic to our vitality (Welford 1997a: 216). The principle of 'interconnectedness' is totally in line with the arguments of Deep Ecologists, who embrace an expansive sense of self – the 'ecological self' (Bragg 1996), as well as with the psychological argument that things are valued because of the degree to which they are included within an individual's cognitive representation of self (P. Schultz 2001), and with a biospheric value orientation (Stern & Dietz 1994), which I will outline below.

In respect to the principle of 'compassion and humility' Welford argues that the philosophical core of Deep Ecology – biospecies equality, harmony with nature and a recognition that the Earth's physical resources are limited – are also realized through direct experience and that both Buddhism and Shamanism emphasize the role communion, understanding through experience and seeing through the eyes of compassion are playing in this process (Welford 1997a: 219).

'A sense of place' refers to an identification with where you live and the idea of a life that is congruent with the local ecology (Welford 1997a: 218). Bioregionalists in particular are concerned with the practical dimension of environmental responsibility and have described innovative ways of living, working, building homes and growing food (Ibid.).

The principle of 'change and impermanence' is to remind us that if we recognize that there is a cycle of life, and that change and death are inevitable, then we will see our lives in a wider context (Welford 1997a: 220).

Lastly, the principle of 'reawakening' means being aware that our way of seeing the human-non-human-relationship is just one way among many and to be open for alternatives, to new experiences and new ideas (Welford 1997a: 221-22).

The ecocentric concept of nature has become the centre of a 'Green ideology' (Eckersley 1992). From a Discourse Theoretical perspective, Yannis Stavrakakis (2000) traces the emergence of such a 'Green ideology' back to two historical *dislocations*, which were triggered by the environmental crisis and a crisis of the 'radical' political tradition. He refers to the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) by Riley Dunlap and Kent Van Liere and supports the assumption that we are witnessing a paradigm shift right now, from a Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) towards a NEP (Stavrakakis 2000: 108). Green ideology, although connected to conservationism and environmentalism, is of much greater significance, because it differs from them by "its universal, 'holistic' and deeply political claims about nature, environmental crisis and its relation to the human world" (Stavrakakis 1997: 260). Stavrakakis (1997) argues that the Green ideology is a new articulation of 'old' ideological elements around a new, distinct *nodal point*. He describes that the signifiers 'Green', 'nature', 'eco' etc., serve as *nodal points*, which bind

together several pre-existing *floating signifiers*, which had no specific 'green' connotation before this *articulation* (Stavrakakis 1997: 270-71). Such pre-existing ideological elements have been for example direct democracy, decentralization, the revival of community life, the advocacy of post-patriarchal relations and non-violence. Stavrakakis points out that ecological radicalism rejects the dominant structures of industrial society and advocates a new order, which, on the basis of a Green conception of nature, promises to restore the lost harmony between human beings and nature, and which at the same time also solves 'social' problems such as exploitation of humans (Stavrakakis 1997: 260). However, in line with Post-structuralist Discourse Theory, he emphasizes that, as it is with all *nodal points* and all *ideological* discourses, Green ideology at the same time makes visible a lack and compensates for it by attempting to cover it with, in this case, an omnipotent conception of nature (Stavrakakis 1997: 274). In a paradoxical manner, the *nodal point* of Green ideology is at the same time "a point of supreme density of meaning (intrinsic value, ethical priority etc.) while, in reality, it only masks an underlying constitutive lack, thus making visible the split and unstable character of Green ideology" (Ibid.).

Having presented in detail the ideas of an ecocentric philosophy, I will now turn to empirical data, which support the central ecocentric argument that our concept of nature affects our values and action towards it. While expressed "strong commitment to the environment and conservation does not always seem to be effectively translated into action to conserve resources" (Gagnon Thompson & Barton 1994: 149), several studies have shown that the distinction between anthropocentric and ecocentric values can better predict "when environmental attitudes will be translated into behaviors to support conservation" (Gagnon Thompson & Barton 1994: 150; see also Stern et al. 1993). Together with Van Liere, Dunlap conceptualized the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP), which focuses on beliefs about humanity's ability to upset the balance of nature, the existence of limits to growth for human societies, and humanity's right to rule over the rest of nature. Therefore the NEP can be considered as measuring the degree of an ecocentric worldview. Dunlap and Van Liere (1978) found a relatively strong endorsement of NEP beliefs across their samples, a result which has been confirmed by several studies (see Albrecht et al. 1982; Bechtel et al. 1999; Caron 1989; Edgell & Nowell 1989; Furman 1998; Gooch 1995; Noe & Snow 1990; Pierce et al. 1987; Pierce et al. 1992; Schultz & Zelezny 1998; Widegren 1998;). In 2000, Dunlap and Van Liere, together with Angela Mertig and Robert Jones, revised the NEP scale, which now involves even a wider range of facets of an ecological worldview (Dunlap et al. 2000). Dunlap et al. summarize that "despite the difficulty of predicting behaviors from general attitudes and beliefs, numerous studies have found significant relationships between the NEP Scale and various types of behavioral intentions as well as both self-reported and observed behaviors" (Dunlap et al. 2000: 429; see also Blake et al. 1997; Ebreo et al. 1999; O'Connor et al. 1999; Roberts & Bacon 1997;

Schultz & Oskamp 1996; Scott & Willits 1994; Stern et al. 1995a; Tarrant & Cordell 1997; Vining & Ebreo 1992). Suzanne Gagnon Thompson and Michelle Barton found that those recognizing the intrinsic value of nature "expressed less overall environmental apathy, were more likely to conserve, and joined more environmental organizations" (Gagnon Thompson & Barton 1994: 153).

The anthropocentric/ecocentric classification has been further differentiated and divided into egoistic, social-altruistic, and biospheric value orientations (Stern & Dietz 1994; P. Schultz 2001). Psychologist P. Wesley Schultz argues that "objects (e.g. plants, animals, other people) are valued because of the degree to which they are included within an individual's cognitive representation of self" (P. Schultz 2001: 336). In consequence, "environmental concern is tied to a person's notion of self and the degree to which people define themselves as independent, interdependent with other people, or interdependent with all living things" (P. Schultz 2000: 394). In this way, Schultz presents a psychological variation on the rather sociological-oriented NEP. He conducted several studies that provided empirical evidence for this tripartite classification of environmental concerns (P. Schultz 2001: 335). He used a modified version of the Inclusion of Other in Self (IOS) scale and found a positive relationship between ratings of the interconnectedness of self and nature and biospheric environmental concerns (P. Schultz 2001: 336). Another of his studies showed a positive correlation between the perspective taking and empathic concern subscales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) and both biospheric and altruistic environmental concerns (Ibid.). He explains that egoistic concerns are rather related to attitudes and actions concerning local issues and affecting directly oneself, and that biospheric values are rather related to attitudes concerning issues broader in space and scope (P. Schultz 2000: 394). Schultz suggests that altruistic values reflect rather an intermediate level of inclusion since their value-basis seems to be similar to those of biospheric concerns and at the same time they do not correlate as strongly with self-transcendence or self-enhancement as do biospheric concerns (P. Schultz 2001: 335-36). This tripartition can also be justified with evolutionary theory. Each community has to meet at least three requirements: at an individual level, the own survival has to be secured; at a societal level, a minimum standard of social cohesion has to be sustained; and lastly, each species has to care for its habitat so that its viability is maintained (Schmuck 2005: 92). Peter Schmuck argues that in order to achieve sustainable development it is essential to encourage altruistic and biospheric values (Schmuck 2005: 93). He concludes that "as long as nature is not assigned to intrinsic value and non-human life is denied any respect, it seems to be little promising to expect a turn to sustainable development" (Schmuck 2005: 95; my translation).

In this chapter I introduced the two concepts of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism and outlined their respective historical and philosophical roots. I came to the conclusion, that while our concept of 'nature' must inevitably always be socially constructed, it is still justifiable to argue in favor of a specific concept of it. The argument that the way we construct nature affects our relationship to it, our values and environmental behaviour has been backed up by empirical data. Since ecocentrism forms the core of a Green ideology, the discursive struggle between anthropocentric and ecocentric SD discourses is embedded in a wider ideological struggle. I will focus on this ideological struggle in the next chapter which will bring together the concepts of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism with the focus of this thesis – the SD order of discourse.

# 4 The Order of Discourse of Sustainable Development

After having outlined the specific meaning of the terms 'anthropocentrism' and 'ecocentrism' in the last chapter, I will now trace back anthropocentric and ecocentric *moments* in the SD discourses. I will resume the central arguments already made up to this point and explain them in more detail. Based on secondary literature, I will verify three arguments: First, that the SD discourse is a highly contested concept. Depending on the *ideological* starting point, SD is interpreted in different ways. Secondly, that indeed the weak SD discourse corresponds with an anthropocentric worldview, while the strong SD discourse corresponds with an ecocentric worldview. And thirdly, that the weak, anthropocentric SD discourse prevails over the strong SD discourse and that it is 'hijacking' environmentalism (that is, a *passive revolution* is taking place). In the subsequent chapter I will then finally empirically test these two arguments with respect to the SD discourse in the realm of Rio+20.

First of all I will give a very short review of the history of the concept of SD with special emphasis on the Brundtland Commission had in mind when it formulated its idea of SD. Furthermore, I will outline the rather anthropocentric character of this 'official' SD conception. Afterwards I will demonstrate that this SD definition is by far not the only existent interpretation of SD, but that instead SD has to be understood as an essentially *contested concept*. There are contesting interpretations of the meaning of SD which are respectively based in ideological presumptions and interests. I will present dualistic and non-dualistic ways to classify these different SD approaches. Instead of meaningful criticism of a dualistic typology of the SD conceptions, I argue that the dualistic differentiation between a weak, anthropocentric discourse on the one hand and a strong, ecocentric SD discourse on the other hand, is appropriate for the purpose of this thesis.

In the subsequent section I will then point out that one central difference between the weak and the strong SD discourse is their respective evaluation of the sources of unsustainability. I will then turn to the question of the power relationship between the two antagonistic SD discourses. Concerning this aspect, I argue by drawing on literature of Maarten Hajer, Delyse Springett and Richard Welford that the weak SD discourse prevails over the strong SD discourse and that the former strives for a *passive revolution* by 'hijacking' the central ideas of the strong SD interpretation.

## 4.1 The Brundtland Conception of Sustainable Development

Despite having been discussed in the 18th and 19th century, sustainability gained wide public consideration only during the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, a general concern about environmental damage and health consequences evolved, leading to a critique of the growth-oriented development paradigm and bringing about zero-growth ideas in its most extreme. The report *The Limits to Growth*, published in 1972 by the Club of Rome, which foresaw the collapse of the global ecosystem within a century if current trends of population growth, resource use and pollution continued (Meadows et al. 1972), launched concepts such as Herman Daly's 'steady-state economics' (Daly 1977). However, this 'limits to growth'-argument met much criticism, which stressed the adjusting potential of technological innovation, and which showed that it is not growth in general which has to be abandoned, but that the type of growth is decisive (Baker 2006: 18). In 1980 the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources published the *World Conservation Strategy* (IUCN 1980), which featured the term SD prominently in its subtitle. While its focus lay one-dimensionally on the environmental aspect, the report *Our Common Future* of the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Commission (named after its Chairman Gro Harlem Brundtland, then Norwegian Prime Minister), explicitly addressed the social, economic and ecological dimensions of a sustainable development (WCED 1987). Susan Baker (2006: 19-20, adapted from WCED 1987: 37-40) summarizes four key links that are made by the Commission in the economy-society-environment chain:

- Environmental stresses are linked with one another.
- Environmental stresses and patterns of economic development are linked with one another.
- Environmental and economic problems are linked with social and political factors.
- These influences operate not only within but also between nations.

In contrast to the IUCN approach, "the Brundtland Report puts 'development', a traditional economic and social goal, and 'sustainability', an ecological goal, together to device a new development model" (Baker 2006: 20). The Brundtland Commission's (WCED 1987: 43) definition of SD has become the most cited one:

> Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

According to Baker this definition has reached authoritative status (Baker 2006). And it is certainly not exaggerated to state that the Brundtland Report "represents a key moment in the contemporary discourse of sustainable development" (Tregidga, Milne & Kearins 2011: 12).

Despite being the most widely cited definition, the Brundtlandt definition has also been critized: Redclift for example stated that there is a lack of conceptual analysis of what is to be sustained, for whom, and by whom (Redclift 1987: 3; see also Luke 2005: 228-29). However, Baker counters that the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987: 43) addresses these questions:

> [Sustainable development] contains within it two key concepts: the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

Baker acknowledges that in 'reality' it is difficult to differentiate between 'needs' and 'wants' as they are socially and culturally determined. However, she claims that "in most cultures fundamental needs are similar, and include subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, creation, leisure, identity and freedom", and that therefore it can be said that the 'industrialized world' goes far beyond these basic needs "because it understands development primarily in terms of ever increasing material consumption" (Baker 2006: 20). The Brundtland definition of SD has gained wide spread acceptance since its release both at national and international level, among politicians and grassroots activists alike. Baker refers to three factors which, as she claims, made the Brundtland conception of SD dominant in international discussions on environment and development (Baker 2006: 24): First, the concept reconciled economic growth and environmental protection, which used to be seen as conflicting goals before. Second, it coincided with the topic of environmental deterioration being high on the international agenda. And third, the Brundtland SD conception supported developing countries in their pursuit of economic development.

While the above cited excerpt implies that the Brundtland Commission holds an optimistic view of the future because it seems that only "the state of technology" and "social organization" would have to be improved in order to solve our problems, the report also refers to limits imposed "by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities" (WCED 1987: 8) and to the need to "adopt life-styles within the planet's ecological means" (WCED 1987: 9). Thus, the Brundtland conception of SD does not postulate that economic growth is unconditionally desirable and possible (Baker 2006: 21). However, growth is explicitly desired to take place in 'developing countries' (WCED 1987: 51). In summary, "Brundtland envisages building a common future on (…) fundamental processes of change, which involve not just technological and institutional but also social and economic, as well as cultural and lifestyle changes" (Baker 2006: 22).

Concerning the question whether the 'official' SD concept (that is, the way SD is broadly agreed to in international documents) is rather anthropocentric or ecocentric in character, I argue that the Brundtland conception of SD is a basically *anthropocentric* concept since it views the environment as a form of 'natural capital' which should be used by humans (Baker 2006: 21). However, it not just purely anthropocentric, as Mikael Stenmark makes clear by analyzing the central documents concerning the concept of SD, namely *Our Common Future* from 1987, and *Agenda 21*, the *Rio Declaration*, The *Convention on Biological Diversity*, all from 1992. Stenmark examines the content of the "'ethic of sustainable development' that the UN and the world's governments want us to embrace" and compares it to different environmental ethics including ecocentrism (Stenmark 2003: 3). He (Stenmark 2003: 5-16, my translation) describes the basic values of an ethic of SD as follows:

1) Principle of the primacy of the human race, which means that the needs of human beings have the highest priority;
2) Principle of nature as a resource;
3) Principle of inter-generational justice;
4) Principle of intra-generational justice;
5) Principle of economic growth, as long as it a) contributes to the securing of the basic needs of all human beings and b) happens in an economically sustainable way;
6) Principle of anthropocentrism, which means that intrinsic value is assigned only to human beings;
7) Principle of efficiency and foresight, which refers to the sustainable use of resources;
8) Principle of population growth, which should only happen if it is in balance with changes in the productive potential of the respective ecosystem.

Furthermore, he (Stenmark 2003: 6; my translation) discovers three important "ecological insights" which form, together with the first four basic values, the inner core of the ethic of SD:

a) Assumption of interdependence (or ecological holism), which views humanity as being an integrated part of nature;

b) Assumption of the limitation of natural resources; and
c) Assumption of a vulnerability of nature, which recognizes that the capacity of the ecosystems to absorb our waste products is limited.

Stenmark claims that the anthropocentrism of the ethic of sustainable development differs from earlier forms of anthropocentrism. According to him, the 'traditional' anthropocentric view was characterized by the following assumptions (Stenmark 2003: 31; my translation):

d) Assumption of a separation of humans from nature, which claims that human beings are that different from other life forms on earth, that they cannot be seen as being part of nature;
e) Assumption of an infinity of natural resources; and
f) Assumption of a robustness of nature, which regards the absorption capacity of nature as being infinite.

He concludes that the ethic of SD is a form of an *inter-generational anthropocentrism* (Stenmark 2003: 31). Though Stenmark argues that the concept of SD embraces an ecological holism and views humanity as being an integrated part of nature, it still does not break with the deeply rooted *anthropocentric worldview*, since it assigns intrinsic value only to human beings. However, the strict cognitive separation between the human and the non-human realm, which used to be an integral part of Western worldview for such a long time, seems to be weakened. This seems to support Dunlap's assumption that "the exemptionalist-ecological debate will likely endure well into the future" (Dunlap 1983: 202). I argue that this hybrid situation, in which a strict human-nature dichotomy is abandoned, but at the same time humans are still viewed as superior to that effect that only they are assigned intrinsic value and their needs are clearly prioritized, points to the current ongoing discursive struggle between the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic development discourses.

Having presented the 'official' definition of SD and the values it pursues, in the next section I will demonstrate that this interpretation of the meaning of SD is by far not the only existent definition, but that there is indeed a variety of contesting SD interpretations.

## 4.2 Sustainable Development as a Contested Concept

While there are those who simply ignore the vagueness and ambiguity of the concept of SD (Agyeman & Tuxworth 1996), those who strive for a consistent definition of their respective choice (Elliott 1999; Carley & Christie 2000), and those who reject the concept altogether, others see the conceptual ambiguity as inevitable and portray SD as an 'essentially contested concept' (Jacobs 1999; Connelly 2007; Lafferty 1995). I agree with the latter approach and argue that SD

is discursively contested. Michael Jacobs (1999: 25) points out that a "search for a unitary and precise meaning is misguided" because it misconceives that SD like all other central political concepts such as 'democracy' or 'liberty' is complex and normative and must inevitably be contested. According to him, political concepts have two levels of meaning: at the first level their broad and general meaning is captured in a vague but unitary way. Here the concept is defined by a number of core ideas, which meet broad based acceptance. At the second level however, common political concepts are essentially contested in the sense that here the "political argument over how the concept should be interpreted in practice" and about "alternative *conceptions* of the concept" take place (Ibid.). SD must be understood as a 'contestable concept' much like the idea of 'liberty', which is favoured by almost everybody, but at the same time there are still arguments about its exact realization. Baker asserts that "[i]n liberal democracies the debates around these contested concepts form an essential component of the political struggle over the direction of social and economic development – that is, of change" (Baker 2006: 27).

As a result of a political evolution, a general meaning of SD at the first level has emerged (Jacobs 1999: 23-27). Besides the aforementioned well-known 'Brundtland definition', stands the '*Caring for the Earth* definition', which says that SD is about "improving the quality of life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems" (WCU, UNEP & WWF 1991). Referring to the 'core ideas' of a political concept, Jacobs (1999: 26-27) sums up six ideas for SD:

1) Environment-economy integration: ensuring that economic development and environmental protection are integrated in planning and implementation.
2) Futurity: an explicit concern about the impact of current activity on future generations.
3) Environmental protection: a commitment to reducing pollution and environmental degradation and to the more efficient use of resources
4) Equity: a commitment to meeting at least the basic needs of the poor of the present generation (as well as equity between generations).
5) Quality of life: a recognition that human well-being is constituted by more than just income growth.
6) Participation: the recognition that sustainable development requires the political involvement of all groups or 'stakeholders' in society.

While the first five of these core ideas are encompassed in the *Brundtland* and the *Caring for the Earth* definitions, the sixths is drawn from *Agenda 21*, the global action plan for sustainable development signed by 173 national governments at the *Rio Earth Summit* in 1992 (Jacobs 1999: 27).

Having outlined the first level of SD – its widely accepted core ideas - I will now, by still drawing on Jacobs (1999), present the contested issues of SD. Jacobs characterizes the SD discourse as showing two principal competing conceptions (with a continuum between them), which he illustrates on the basis of four major faultlines for alternative interpretations,

corresponding to the last four core ideas (Jacobs 1999: 31; for similar typologies see Dobson 1996). The first faultline lies in the degree of environmental protection SD would require, whereby a 'weak' version of SD refers to the idea of environmental conservation and a 'strong' version of SD adopts the more demanding idea of 'environmental limits' (Jacobs 1999: 31). While the weak position essentially targets the protection of resources, the strong position is committed to a life within the limits created by the carrying capacities of the biosphere (Ibid.). The second faultline is related to a North-South divide and concerns the idea of equity. While within the global South the notion of equity is central in the context of SD and it is emphasized that equity refers not only to the redistribution of national but also of global resources, in contrast, in the global North, equity is usually less emphasized or even ignored altogether (Jacobs 1999: 33). The third faultline refers to the sixth core idea of participation. While governments and businesses on the one hand have tended to adopt a rather top-down approach, local governments and NGOs endorse a broader bottom-up approach (Jacobs 1999: 34). Finally, the fourth faultline concerns the scope of subject area covered by the concept of SD. Here a narrow conception of SD which focuses on the subject area of the environment is opposed to a broad conception of SD which embrace the notion of 'quality of life' embodied in the *Caring for the Earth* definition of SD (Jacobs 1999: 35-38). Proponents of the wide conception view SD as comprising more than simply environmental protection, but also economic, social and political issues (Jacobs 1999: 37). Jacobs argues that although the four different faultlines "are logically separate, they are in practice connected", because "[t]he egalitarian, strong, bottom-up, and broad interpretations of sustainable development are frequently held at the same time by the same people" (Jacobs 1999: 38). This position which is mostly held by Greens and environmental activists, Jacobs calls the 'radical' position of SD (Jacobs 1999: 38). In this thesis this position is referred to as the *weak SD discourse* and is contrasted to the *strong SD discourse*.

The fundamental ideological difference between the two sustainability positions can also be depicted graphically (see Figures 2 and 3). The weak SD discourse views the three dimensions of SD – economic development, environmental protection and social development – as related, but largely separate, and as constituting a triangle of possible trade-offs (Tregidga, Milne & Kearins 2011: 8; see Figure 2). In contrast, "[i]n the 'strong' conceptualisation, the three dimensions of the economy, society and the environment, are not separate, but society seen as embedded within the environment, and the economy is a subset of both society and the environment" (Tregidga, Milne & Kearins 2011: 9; see Figure 3). In consequence, the strong SD discourse prioritises environmental and social aspects over economic ones, whereas weak SD claims to attribute equal weight to each of the three dimensions, while in effect usually privileging the economic one.

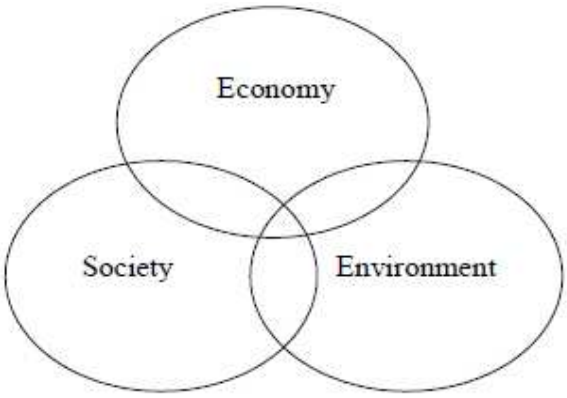


Figure 2: Weak Sustainability.
Source: Tregidga, Milne & Kearins 2011: 9

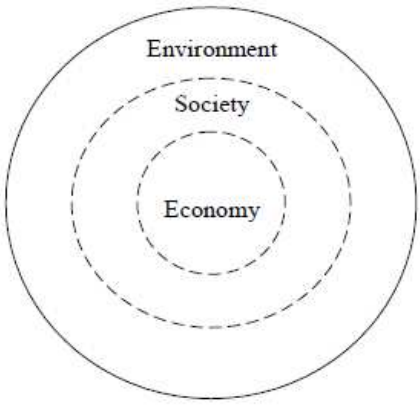


Figure 3: Strong Sustainability.

Steve Connelly (2007) criticizes the sort of typology of SD, which involves a single axis between two opposing poles. He argues that, firstly, it is problematic that these typologies depict strong positions as prioritizing both environmental protection and social justice and as being in opposition to unrestricted economic development (Connelly 2007: 266). According to Connelly, this linkage is far from being necessary, for example ecocentric philosophies such as Deep Ecology prioritized clearly the health of the ecosystem and did not go into issues of social justice (Ibid.). Moreover, Connelly argues that the relationship which is usually drawn between a strong approach on SD and a demand for participatory democratic political structures is flawed, too (Connelly 2007: 266-67). Counter-examples are early ecological formulations which justified authoritarian solutions in the name of humanity's survival (see e.g. Hardin 1968). Thus, he concludes, "[t]he linkage between social justice, environmental protection and public participation is political rather than inherent in the concepts" (Connelly 2007: 267). Therefore, Connelly presents an alternative way of mapping the different conceptions of SD. Connelly proposes a continuous triangular field on which differing approaches on SD as well as those positions which oppose SD can be depicted (Connelly 2007: 268). Based on this, he develops different graphs to illustrate different positions on SD. One shows how different positions might fall along the symmetry axes of the basic triangle, moving in each case away from the centre where SD is located (Figure 4).

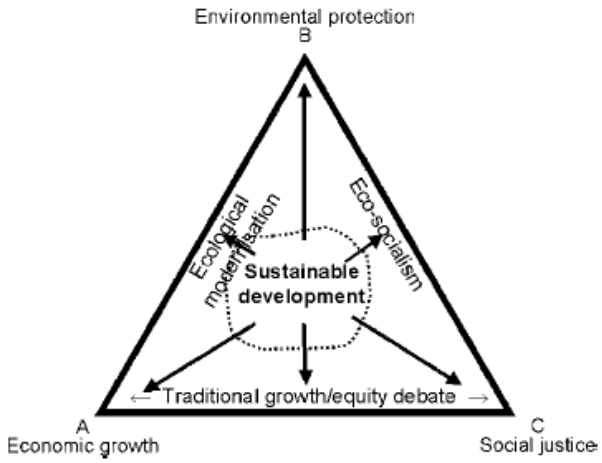


Figure 4: Sustainable development mapped in the field.
Source: Connelly 2007: 270.

Towards corner A positions are found that prioritize economic growth (see e.g. Morris 2002), while closer to the corner are positions outside the boundary of SD, whose proponents would reject SD from an economic point of view (see e.g. Beckerman 1994). Towards corner B are positions prioritizing environmental protection, while still appreciating that economic prosperity is necessary for its achievement (Connelly 2007: 270). Very significantly, Connelly, localizes Deep Green positions beyond the boundary of SD (Ibid.). Zero-Growth or Degrowth approaches would belong in this same corner (see Daly & Cobb 1989; Jackson 2009). Towards corner C in Connelly's graphic lie those positions which prioritize social justice above all else. Towards the A-B axis 'ecological modernization' can be found, which strives for achieving synergies and acceptable trade-offs between economic growth and environmental protection (Connelly 2007: 270; for criticism see Lélé 1991 and Langhelle 2000). Eco-socialist positions, which argue that most of our present ecological problems originate in deep-seated social conflicts in our societies (see Bookchin 1971), are placed towards the B-C axis. Finally, towards the A-C axis we find more traditional political positions, which seek a balance between growth and equity (Connelly 2007: 271).

In another version (Figure 5), the figure of the continuous triangular field illustrates the weak/strong typology. Here it becomes obvious that the strong position on SD goes in the direction of Eco-socialism. Moreover, by dividing the field along an ecocentric/anthropocentric faultline, Figure 5 also illustrates clearly that ecocentric positions fall outside the realm of a mainstream interpretation of SD according to Connelly.

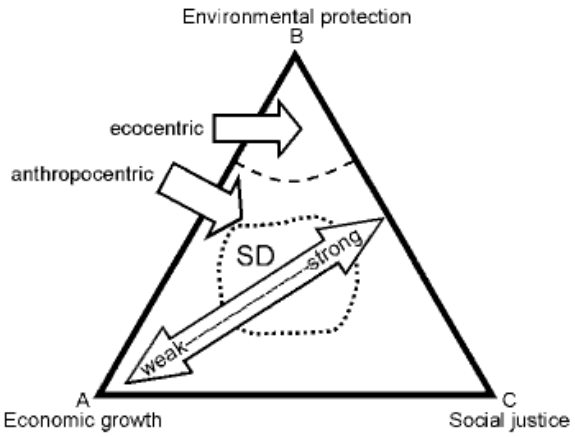


Figure 5: The sustainable development axis and anthropo/eco-centric faultlines.
Source: Connelly 2007: 271.

Connelly's depiction of the different positions of and around SD is akin to William Sunderlin's characterization of the SD debate. Starting from the assumption that SD is based "in firmly grounded ideological suppositions and interests among various segments of society" (Sunderlin 1995: 482), Sunderlin points out that SD has to be understood as a concept of the 'managerialist' ideology and faces strongest opposition from the class and pluralist traditions. Proponents of the 'class paradigm' tradition oppose SD because they see it as an extension of the development model imposed by the global North on the rest of the world and which itself is regarded as the primary source of environmental deterioration (Sunderlin 1995: 485). The 'pluralist' tradition holds the view that as long as individuals are free to act according to their interests, the common good is pursued at the same time and in consequence oppose SD as governmental interference. (Sunderlin 1995: 484).The 'managerialist paradigm' can be subdivided between those who hold a negative view toward the process of rationalization and domination of society, pursued mainly by the state ('political emphasis'), and those who hold a more benign view toward this process ('functional emphasis') (Sunderlin 1995: 483). Thus, while 'mainstream managerialists' focus merely on appropriate policies, sound management decisions, and the development of new technologies (Sunderlin classifies the Brundtland Commission and the World Bank as belonging to this camp), 'progressive managerialists' affirm that political and cultural transformation have to take place in the industrialized countries to avoid environmental catastrophe. Obviously, what Sunderlin calls the 'mainstream managerialist' SD position is here referred to as the weak SD discourse, while what he calls the 'progressive managerialist' position is similar to what is referred to as the strong SD discourse in this thesis. Sunderlin points out that the different conceptions of SD are due to the ideologies, which are not neutral but value-laden and tend to "reflect divergent interests among various strata and sectors of society at large" (Sunderlin 1995: 489).

The proposed visual representation of SD by Connelly as a contested concept is certainly a very useful instrument for the classification of different SD concepts as well as of those concepts which oppose a mainstream interpretation of SD. However, despite meaningful criticism of the dual typology, it still will be used as a basic differentiation in this thesis for the following reasons: First of all, this typology is illustrating rather a continuum with *ideal* opposing ends. Secondly, while Connelly may be right that the characterizing of positions on SD which prioritize both environmental protection and social justice as strong SD positions, might not be logically necessary, however, empirically the most common faultline within the SD discourse is the one between 'economic modernizers' and 'eco-socialist' positions. This fact justifies a dualistic weak/strong typology. The same point is valid for Connelly's second criticism. He may be right that the linkage between a strong SD position and a demand for democratic participation may not be necessary; however, after the early phase of ecological thinking, this has empirically been the case.

In this section I demonstrated that SD should be understood as a contested concept. We have seen that while there are specific core ideas of SD which are relatively uncontested, wider interpretations of SD with all their deeper ideological assumptions and their political implications, are contested. I introduced a classification of this SD debate, which characterizes it as a contest between two camps. Jacobs (1999) illustrates them on behalf of four major faultlines and on that basis he differentiates between an egalitarian, strong, bottom-up, and broad interpretation of SD (the 'radical' approach) and a weak, top-down and narrow interpretation, which disregards the issue of equality. Based on Chris Methmann (2010: 349), I argue that the reason for the ambivalent character of SD lies in the fact that it is an "all-embracing *empty signifier* [or *floating signifier*], which encompasses a range rather heterogeneous and contradictory policies" and which hence is "a label for greenwashing *par excellence*" (first emphasis and explanation added).

## 4.3 The Anthropocentric and the Ecocentric SD Discourse

Since the main argument of this thesis is that in the SD *order of discourse* there is a struggle taking place between an anthropocentric hegemonic SD discourse and an antagonistic counter-hegemonic SD discourse which pursues an ecocentric worldview, I will now present secondary literature which supports this argument. In the subsequent chapter I will then illustrate and test this argument empirically on the basis of the discourse in the realm of the Rio+20 Conference.

Collin Williams and Andrew Millington (2004) also adopt a dualistic typology, while they at the same time stress that it is in reality rather a spectrum of thinking, which is why they refer to 'weaker' and 'stronger' sustainable development (see also Baker 2006). In their typology they focus on the subject of the human-nature relationship. For the weaker SD approaches they find four common core tenets (Williams & Millington 2004: 101):

- a human-centred worldview is adopted;
- there is an emphasis on a growth-oriented approach to economic development;
- there is a relative lack of consideration given to the need for radical change in people's demands on the Earth;
- and there is a perpetuation of the view that nature is merely a collection of natural resources that can be subdued by the human race.

They argue that weaker SD "adopts an anthropocentric (human-centred) discourse on the relationship between people and nature" (Williams & Millington 2004: 100). This anthropocentrism compromises three ideas: that people are distinct from nature, that nature is a resource to be exploited by humans, and the view that humans have the right to dominate nature (Williams & Millington 2004: 100). Theorists of weaker SD approaches usually "see no need to change fundamentally what is meant by progress and economic development" (Williams & Millington 2004: 101). Instead what is strived for is an improvement of economic efficiency, which is often referred to as 'ecological modernization' (see Hajer 1996; Mol 1999; Mol & Sonnenfeld 2000). Moreover, they call for a redistribution of the costs and benefits of economic growth in a more equitable manner, what is usually called 'environmental justice' or 'just sustainability' (Williams & Millington 2004: 101). In contrast, Williams and Millington portray stronger SD approaches as focusing "upon changing the demands made on the Earth" (Williams & Millington 2004: 102). They refer here explicitly to Deep Ecologists supporting ecocentric values. A redefinition of 'wealth' as 'well-being' rather than the acquisition of material goods is here called for, too (Ibid.). For proponents of stronger SD in order to achieve the well-being of humans and non-humans, it is furthermore important to foster a decentralized way of life (Williams & Millington 2004: 102; see Douthwaite 1996; Ekins & Max-Neef 1992; Gass 1996; Goldsmith et al. 1995; Henderson 1999; Lipietz 1995; Mander & Goldsmith 1996; McBurney 1990; Morehouse 1997; Robertson 1985; Roseland 1998; Trainer 1996).

By now it should have become clear that one of the central differences between the two poles concerning SD is their respective view of the *sources* of *unsustainability*. The weak SD discourse focuses on inefficiencies within the current socio-economic order and the way we use natural resources. Hence, it is rather status-quo oriented and does neither address more profound changes in norms and values, nor in the socio-economic order, nor the political one. The strong SD discourse, on the other hand, identifies the sources of unsustainability in the

capitalist socio-economic order and the cultural norms and values that back this order. In consequence, this concept of SD strives for a more fundamental change. This reminds us of Jessop's statement referred to in chapter 1, which says that while crises always open a mirror for innovation, if this mirror is used for a fundamental change depends on the way the crisis is interpreted – as a crisis *within* the existing economic order or *of* that order (Jessop 2004: 13). Jan Bebbington (2000) very precisely sums up the central differences between the two poles in the discursive struggle. While "[t]he 'weak' sustainability position does not question the present mode of economic development and views sustainable development as being compatible with some modified version of 'business as usual' (…) the 'strong' sustainability position throws this assumption into doubt and seeks to redefine the ends which human populations (especially in the West) should seek" (Bebbington 2000: 21). In consequence, the hegemonic development pattern is put into question and it is suggested that "once basic needs are met, increased material consumption may not constitute 'development'" (Ibid.). Moreover, what also should be clear by now is that the implications of the two extremes of SD are highly ethical by nature. Delyse Springett states that "a more dialectical discourse of sustainable development might contribute to a theory of the 'good life' based on a new set of dominant values that takes account of the environment, equity and ethical issues" (Springett 2006: 51).

The differing interpretations of the sources of unsustainability, are accompanied by differing representations of the human-nature relationship. While the weak SD discourse comprises an anthropocentric worldview and argues that we only have to manage natural capital better in order to meet environmental challenges, the strong SD discourse calls for a changed conception of nature that acknowledges the interconnectedness of everything that exists and ascribes intrinsic value to nature. Bebbington sums up the main characteristics of the two SD discourses in a chart, which besides illustrates the fact that these two different representations of the human-nature relationship are *moments* in two *antagonistic chains of equivalence* respectively (see Figure 6).

| **Aspect** | **‚Strong' Sustainability** | **‚Weak' Sustainability** |
|---|---|---|
| Focus of the pursuit of sustainability and the impetus for change. | Fundamental examination of the relationship between humans and their environment and with each other. | Concerned to prevent an environmental catastrophe which would threaten human society. |
| View of nature-human interaction. | Humans and nature are not separate from each other and harmony between the two is sought. | The natural environment is a resource, humans need to better master the environment to solve present problems. |
| What do we wish to sustain? | Other species, not just the human species are to be maintained. | The human species is what we are seeking to sustain. |
| The gap between the present and a sustainable future. | Present situation is a long way from a sustainable one, it is so far away it is almost impossible to imagine what sustainability | Present situation is near to a sustainable one, over next 30-50 years it should be reached. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | looks like. The time span of change may take 150-200 years. | |
| Extent of change required. | Fundamental, structural change is likely to be required. | Sustainability is achievable with incremental adjustment of the current system. |
| Nature of the process of getting to a sustainable path. | Likely to require a participatory, transparent and democratic process. Technical fixes may generate more side effects than they solve. | Authoritative and coercive structures can be utilized (for example, market forces). Greater technological development will allow problems to be solved. |
| Relevance of eco-justice concerns – Who is to be sustained? | Intragenerational equity is an integral part of sustainability. Focus on third world conditions and aspirations cannot be avoided. | Intragenerational equity is a separate issue, sustainability focus is primarily on ecological issues, equity issues will follow from them. Primary focus is on sustaining Western populations. |
| Sustainable in what way? | The nature of economic growth may need to be redefined or abandoned as a dominant goal. This raises questions about how we currently measure and view development. | Sustainability of the Western civilization at, at least, the current level of economic development. There is a belief that economic development is actually essential for the pursuit of sustainability. |

Figure 6: Strong and weak sustainability. Source: Bebbington 2000: 20.

Bearing in mind the conceptualisation of the discursive struggle on SD outlined in chapter 2.2, the argument of this thesis can finally be summed up now. I argue that the concept of sustainable development is an essentially contested one. There is a *discursive struggle* within the SD *order of discourse* (which is in turn part of a broader *field of discursivity* of development) around the *floating signifier* SD. Each of the two antagonistic discourses consists of several *moments* in a specific *chain of equivalence.* In the weak SD discourse 'anthropocentrism' is a central *moment* in a *chain of equivalence* besides *moments* such as 'economic growth', 'environmental management', 'resource efficiency' or 'technological innovation'. In parallel, in the strong SD discourse 'ecocentrism' is a *nodal point* (and the core of a Green *ideology*) organizing a *chain of equivalence* besides other moments such as 'equity', 'spirituality', 'harmony' or a 'bottom-up approach' (for illustration see again Figure 1 in chapter 2.2). The strong, ecocentric *counter-discourse* thus *interpellates* 'us' as human beings differently from the taken-for-granted Western, modern-industrialist view: It conveys a holistic understanding of the Earth as a 'planet living' which stresses the interrelatedness between everything that exists and which stands in contrast to the dichotomizing view that separates humans from nature and that stresses the instrumental value natural resources provide for people.

Having demonstrated that the weak SD discourse is anthropocentric in character, while the strong SD discourse is rather ecocentric, I now will turn to the question in what kind of power relation these two SD discourses stand to each other. Maarten Hajer has observed already in the 1990s that concerning the environmental discourse it is justified to speak of 'discourse-

coalitions', rather than of an 'environmental movement', because the social force which promotes environmental protection is not bound together by shared interests or goals, "but much more on shared concepts and terms" (Hajer 1996: 247). He points out that environmental debates carry much more than only the question of environmental conservation, but implicitly also "ideas about the appropriate role and relationship of nature, technology and society that structure implicit future scenarios" (Ibid.). He argues that today's environmental politics is dominated by a discourse of 'ecological modernisation', which unites some ambivalent lines of development. For Hajer "the key question is about which social projects are furthered under the flag of environmental protection" (Ibid.). He asks the crucial question: "Does ecological modernisation produce a break with previous discourses on technology and nature, or is it precisely the extension of the established technology-led social project?" (Hajer 1996: 250).

This question is mostly answered by arguing that the weak SD conception represents the mainstream discourse while the strong SD discourse is a counter-discourse. A number of authors have stressed that the SD concept has been hijacked by hegemonic structures. Delyse Springett, for example, differentiates between two narratives in the contestation of SD: a 'managerialist' narrative (based on Sunderlin 1995) on the one hand that interprets SD as being about 'green business' and 'sustainable business' (what I call the weak SD discourse), and a 'radical' narrative of SD on the other hand, which, "frames the concept [of SD] as capable of emancipating more democratic and inclusive approaches to living with nature and with each other" (what I refer to as strong SD) (Springett 2006: 51; 50). Springett argues that this emancipatory narrative of SD "has been 'disciplined' and 'tamed' by the successful employment of the traditional power of management" (Springett 2006: 50). She refers to an "appropriation of the concept by hegemonic hierarchies" (Springett 2006: 51). In the same manner as this thesis, she refers to Gramsci's concept of *war of position* to characterize this ideological struggle and states that the concept of SD is "capable, on the one hand, of supporting, and, on the other, of contesting the dominant ideology" (Springett 2006: 52). Expressing a basic assumption on which this thesis rests, she states that "sustainable development is understood as a construct created to support the hegemony of that [the 'managerialist'] paradigm" (Springett 2006: 51). She points out that the 'managerialist' SD construction (or the weak SD discourse) promotes business-as-usual policies, but offers "little in the way of a vision of a sustainable future built upon ecological and social justice" (Ibid.).

What Springett calls the "appropriation of the [SD] concept by hegemonic hierarchies", Richard Welford (1997b) calls bluntly the "hijacking of environmentalism" by "business". He develops a 'color diagram' in which the colors represent ideologies: red for socialism, blue for a liberal market-economy, golden for an ideology associated with globalization, scale, private capital, economic growth and deregulation, and green for an alternative ideology which

emphasizes values associated with connectedness, spirituality, individuality, community, sufficiency and simplicity (Welford 1997b: 19-20; 36, see Figure 7). Welford sees the main ideological tension lying between the green and the golden points. At the green end we live in harmony with nature and with each other, while at the golden end growth, globalization, materialism and consumption is emphasized (Welford 1997b: 21). Within the square, removed from the extremes of the edges of the model, but closest to the green corner, is a triangle, which stands for 'the rainbow society' (Ibid.). It is a mixture of red, blue and green ideas and centers around peace and harmony (Welford 1997b: 22). Very similar as in the triangular field proposed by Connelly, on the three corners of that triangle three different types of environmentalism are located: close to the red corner eco-socialism, close to the blue corner eco-liberalism and close to the green corner eco-radicalism (Welford 1997b: 25).

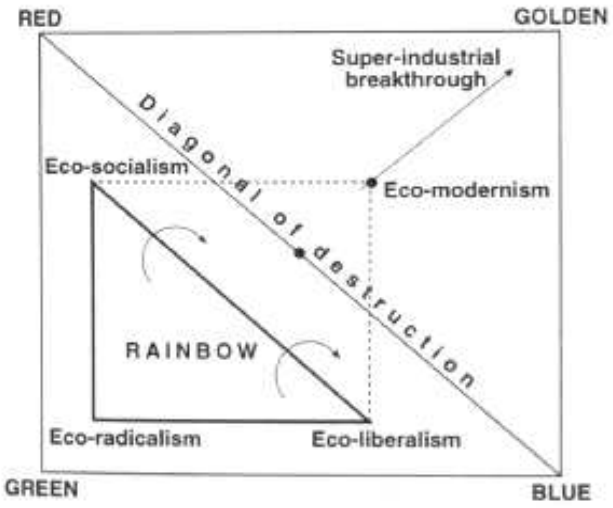


Figure 7: Hijacking environmentalism. Source: Welford 1997b: 31.

Welford now argues that environmentalism in its 'rainbow' coloring has been hijacked by the ideology of 'eco-modernism' promoted by industry and located closer to the golden corner (Welford 1997b). In contrast to the rainbow society, eco-modernism only adds an environmental component to the development paradigm but does not demand a radical change of the development path (Welford 1997b: 28). He puts it very radically by stating that "[t]his type of environmentalism (…) does not represent a green alternative but rather a justification of the continuation of modernist madness" (Welford 1997b: 36). It still rests on the "pillars of free trade, scientific and technological domination and the orthodoxy of continuous improvement and economic growth" and like this "justifies the power of private capital" (Welford 1997b: 29; 28). Thus Welford links eco-modernism to the issue of distribution of power and portrays eco-modernism as the answer of the corporate establishment to traditional notions of environmentalism and as a way to maintain the wealth of the rich in terms of both individuals

and countries (Welford 1997b: 29-30). It is surprising that Welford, who is that critical of the current form of capitalism, does not refer to Gramsci's concept of *passive revolution* to describe what he calls the 'hijacking of environmentalism'. Similar to Hajer (1996), Welford describes 'eco-efficiency' as the "the flagship tool" of eco-modernism (Welford 1997b: 28). He demands eco-modernism's replacement with a "consideration of issues such as ethics, equity, equality, empowerment, education and ecology" (Welford 1997b: 36).

Based on secondary literature, this section has shown that the *hegemonic, weak, anthropocentric SD discourse* strives for a *passive revolution*. A 'green mainstreaming', that is the incorporation of *moments* of the Green *ideology* into the *hegemonic discourse*, aims to prevent a *counter-hegemonic* transformation. I argue that it is equally important to uncover *hegemonic discourses* as well as to highlight *counter-discourses*. The concern of this thesis is to question taken-for-granted assumptions on the notion of development as well as to emphasize *counter-hegemonic* potentials.

Having presented the argument of this thesis theoretically, I will now turn to the empirical illustration and test of this argument. On the basis of the Rio+20 Conference, which is the latest major evidence of the SD discourse, I will trace anthropocentric and ecocentric *moments* in the chosen texts in order to determine whether the weak or the strong SD discourse prevails there.

# 5 Analysis of the SD Order of Discourse in the Realm of Rio+20

The empirical part of this thesis is first and foremost simply meant to be an illustration of my argument. To a lesser extent it is to test or to make plausible the made argument. Since the thesis is limited in terms of scope and time, it is necessary to strongly restrict its focus of analysis. I will base the following empirical survey on the theoretical framework outlined in chapter 2, namely Gramscian Theory and Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory. The latter provides very useful concepts to come to terms with a particular discourse, as in this case, the SD order of discourse. Discourse Theory's concepts are useful for addressing matters such as: "how each discourse constitutes knowledge and reality, identities and social relations; where discourses function unobtrusively side by side, and where there are open antagonisms; and which hegemonic interventions are striving to override the conflicts – in which ways and with which consequences" (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 51). These questions are highly relevant for

the analysis of this thesis since it aims to shed light on the way the different SD discourses represent 'reality' and in what kind of power relationship they stand to each other. In particular, I will investigate in what way *signifiers* are combined with other *signifiers* to form *chain of equivalences* (Phillips & Jørgensen 2002: 50 ff.).

The *war of positions* between the *hegemonic* weak, anthropocentric *discourse* and the strong, ecocentric *counter-hegemonic discourse* takes place on many levels: on the national, the regional, the local and the international level, within political and financial institutions, within and between political parties, NGOs, interest groups and corporations, in newspapers, radio, television, the internet and scientific debates. In this chapter I will focus on the international level – namely the United Nations. The United Nations have been central in the process of establishing an SD discourse. The seminal definition of SD was coined by the Brundtland Commission, which was established by the UN General Assembly. The Rio Summit in 1992 and Agenda 21 have become landmarks in the SD discourse; they help to legitimize policies and programmes and at the same time are targets of harsh criticism. Thus, the SD discourse within the United Nations - while it certainly also draws on national and transnational SD discourses outside of the UN – influences profoundly SD discourses outside the UN. There are several institutions within the UN system that deal with SD, *inter alia* the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Sustainable Development, which is now intended to be replaced by the High-Level Forum, as decided in the Rio+20 Outcome Document. Nevertheless, in this thesis the focus will be on the Rio+20 Conference, held on June 20-22, 2012. Its enormous dimension alone underscores its political significance: Rio+20 was the biggest UN conference ever held, with about 45,381 participants in total, representing national governments, international institutions and organizations, NGOs and media, and thousands of events held in the lead-up to and during the Conference (UNDPI 2012). It is certainty too early to assess the impact of Rio+20 on the wider SD discourse. Given that the immediate reactions to it and its Outcome Document have been rather negative and that thus there is a good chance it will go down in history as a big failure, there is a good probability that Rio+20 will fall short of the impact the Rio Conference in 1992 has reached. However, it is still of great importance for this thesis since it illustrates the current state of the international SD discourse. By taking a close look at Rio+20 we can discern the main topics currently discussed, the specific language used, the underlying worldview, and, by analyzing and comparing its Outcome Document with the Outcome Document of the Rio Conference in 1992 and the one of the Johannesburg Earth Summit in 2002, and with the proposals submitted before the Conference, conclusions can be drawn about the discursive change that has occurred between 1992 and 2012 and the distribution of power between the participating actors of the Conference. I will use the method of 'comparison', drawing on Phillips and Jørgensen (2002: 149), who see comparison as the

simplest way to get an impression of the nature of a text. In line with Discourse Theory, a text becomes what it is foremost through that what it is not. I will look for similarities and differences between the texts. Furthermore, I will focus on what is taken for granted and what is neglected in the texts.

In doing so, this thesis will focus exclusively on 'linguistic' discourses and will not take into consideration non-'linguistic' aspects. This is not to say that they are negligible, but that this is simply the focus of this thesis, and that its scope is extremely limited. It goes without saying that it would by far exceed the scope of this thesis to strive for a comprehensible analysis of all what has happened at the Rio+20 Conference. Countless statements have been made in written as well as in oral form, before, during and after the Conference, discussions have been conducted and non-linguistic expressions, such as gestures and art work, have been performed. By analyzing just a tiny fraction of the debate at the Conference, this thesis can only give an impression of the SD *order of discourse* in the realm of Rio+20. The sample of my analysis must inevitably be selective and my interpretation of them subjective to a certain extent. In order to assure the validity of my analysis, I will aspire to meet the three core rules outlined by Phillips and Jørgensen (2002: 173): First, I strive for a *solid* analysis since I will base my interpretation on several textual features instead of on only one feature. Secondly, I strive for a *comprehensive* analysis since I aim to answer the questions posed to the texts fully and to account for any textual features that conflict with my hypotheses. Thirdly, I will endeavor to present my analysis in a *transparent* way and will reproduce many extracts of the respective texts. In the following subchapter I will outline my choices made in the selection and my particular method of analysis.

### 5.1 Methodology of the Empirical Survey

The first three documents that I will analyse and compare with each other are the Outcome Documents of the three major UN Conferences on Sustainable Development, the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, adopted at the *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development* in Rio de Janeiro 1992, the *Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development*, adopted at the *World Summit on Sustainable Development* in Johannesburg in 2002, and the Outcome Document *The Future We Want*, adopted at the *United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development* in 2012 again in Rio de Janeiro. I suggest that a 20-year time period is long enough to enable an observable discursive change. I will compare the documents with regard to their concept of nature and its relationship to humans, their interpretation of the environmental crisis and its attributed causes and potential solutions, and their general ideological underpinning. These points of interest are directly derived from the central argument of this thesis, namely that a weak *discourse* of SD, which comprises an anthropocentric

view of nature as one central *moment* in its *chain of equivalence*, has *hegemonic* status in the SD *order of discourse*, which is to be checked here. The three documents give us a first impression of the SD *order of discourse* and if and how it has changed over the last 20 years. In my analysis of the documents I will look for some particular signal words:

| **Signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | **Signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** |
|---|---|
| Resources | Harmony |
| Economic/green/sustainable/sustained growth | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | Mother Earth |
| Manage/-ment | Intrinsic value |
| Technological/-y | Ethic/-al |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | Spiritual/-ity |
| Green Economy | Limit/-s |

I have derived these signal words from literature on SD which I have presented in the previous chapters. These terms have been used widely in the description of either of the two ideal SD positions. I assume that the academic authors, who have used these terms, have in turn picked them up from non-academic, political actors involved in the discursive struggle on SD. It goes without saying that it is important to interpret these signal words in the context and that the terms cannot be analyzed in isolation from each other. Instead I will pay attention to the appearance of the signal words as moments in a *chain of equivalence* forming a particular *discourse* of SD. In the process of analyzing the texts I will try to be open to detecting new signal words which I have not thought of yet. The catalogue of signal words shows that it was difficult to find signal words that indicate an anthropocentric worldview. 'Resource/s' is the only one I could find, which stands vis-à-vis the signal words 'harmony', 'interconnected/ness', 'Mother Earth', 'intrinsic value' and 'compassion' on the 'ecocentric' side. It has been a traditional eco-critical claim that within the anthropocentric worldview nature is seen mainly as our inanimate surrounding, which we can exploit for our own sake – in short, nature is seen as material, as 'resource'. First I considered to use 'environment' as a signal word for an anthropocentric worldview and 'nature' as a signal word for an ecocentric worldview, bearing in mind the discussion about these two terms outlined in chapter 3 (see e.g. Goatly 2001). However, I decided not to because it seems to me that both terms have become *naturalized* to such an extent that they are used rather without reflection and interchangeably. I doubt that the use of the term 'environment' as such already indicates an anthropocentric worldview. I argue that while there are rather distinct signal words for an ecocentric ethic such as 'Mother Earth', an anthropocentric ethic reveals itself rather indirectly. This is exactly because of the taken-for-granted view on nature and because the representation of the human-nature relationship is not

called in question. Thus, in my analysis I will search for further hints beyond the selected signal words that indicate an anthropocentric worldview, such as repeated references to the use of 'natural resources' for human's sake.

Moreover, since I argue that an anthropocentric worldview is one *moment* in a whole *chain of equivalence* constituting the *hegemonic* SD *discourse*, I will also search for the signal words 'economic/green/sustainable/sustained growth', 'efficient/-cy', 'manage/-ment', technological/-y' in order to capture the 'modern', 'managerialist', growth oriented and technology-friendly *discourse*. Finding appropriate signal words for the strong SD discourse raised diametral different difficulties. On the one hand it was easy to find signal words that indicate an ecocentric ethic, e.g. 'Mother Earth'. This comes as no surprise since the signifier 'nature', and here a specific Green conception of nature, constitutes the centre of the Green *ideological discourse* (Stavrakakis 1997). The ecocentric *discourse* has arisen from a long engagement with the dominant representation of the human-nature relationship and in consequence there are several signifiers that revolve around this issue. In contrast, when it comes to unifying *ideological* principles, it turns out that the Green *ideology* comes into being first and foremost as a rejection of the dominant structures of industrial society. Abstract conceptual terms such as 'industrialism' as the constructed enemy reveal "the lack of a unifying ideological principle in Green ideological discourse itself" (Stavrakakis 1997: 274). In consequence, it was difficult to find proper signal words for this discourse. Thus, the only one I added to my catalogue in this respect is 'limit/-s'.

In addition, I will look for expressions referring to the supposed causes of the current multiple crises (environmental, economic, financial, poverty, inequality), the present socio-economic order, and anthropocentric or ecocentric values. As previously outlined in detail, one of the major differences between the two *antagonistic discourses* of SD stems from different interpretations of the causes of the multiple crises, especially the environmental crisis. I will use the following terms as signal words that allude to these issues:

- Unsustainable/-ility
- Patterns of production and consumption
- (Environmental) crisis, crises
- Root/structural causes
- Hegemonic/-y, dominant/-ce
- Marginalised
- Alternative
- Anthropocentric, ecocentric
- Equitable/-y, just/-ice

I argue that the *hegemonic* SD *discourse* - by incorporating moments of the Green *ideology* -strives for a *passive revolution*. The embittered lamentations about a 'failure' of Rio+20

by many environmentalists could give the impression that this *passive revolution* is succeeding and that indeed the "commandments of sustainable development have successfully managed to co-opt, weaken and almost completely dismantle active environmental critiques of existing political and market systems" (Doyle 1998: 771), so that "nowadays it [SD] means nothing than 'business as usual'" (B. Schultz 2001: 110). Thus, I assume to find several *moments* of the Green *ideology* within *chains of equivalences* of the *hegemonic* weak SD *discourse* as evidence of the currently ongoing *passive revolution*. Thus, besides being interested in finding *chains of equivalence* constituting either a weak or a strong SD discourse, I am equally interested in finding evidence for a *passive revolution*. At the same time incorporations of *moments* of the weak SD *discourse* into the strong SD *discourse* would be interesting to find as they would be a sign for the *hegemonic* potential of the former.

Besides the analysis and comparison of the three Outcome Documents of the UN Conferences in 1992, 2002 and 2012, I will focus in particular on the Rio+20 Conference. My aim is to find evidence for my argument that there is a *war of positions* going on between two *antagonistic* SD *discourses*. I will examine several input documents which have been submitted to the UN in the run-up to the Conference as basis for the debate about the Zero Draft, which in turn served as a basis for the final Outcome Document. I will analyze and compare these documents in the same way as the three Outcome Documents before, using the same signal words. The UN published these input texts as 'Compilation Documents' on the website of the Rio+20 Conference. I chose a few documents from member states of the UN as well as from environmental non-governmental organizations, business organizations and international institutions:

| | |
|---|---|
| Member states: | USA, European Union and its member states, Bolivia |
| Environmental NGOs: | Earth Charter International,<br>Rights of Mother Earth,<br>CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development |
| Business organizations: | International Chamber of Commerce (ICC),<br>Business Action for Sustainable Development 2012 (BASD) |
| International institutions: | World Bank,<br>International Monetary Fund (IMF) |

I chose to take a closer look at the input documents of the USA, the European Union and its member states and Bolivia. I chose the US for obvious reasons. The US is generally perceived as one of the most powerful states in the world in military, economic and cultural respects and it has been a leading force in creating and sustaining the global economic and financial order we

still are facing today. Several of the countries belonging to the European Union, Germany in particular, are generally regarded as vanguards in climate protection, which is why the input document submitted by the 'European Union and its member states' could be of interest here. Bolivia, in contrast, represents (while not being *representative* for) a non-Western developing state. With Evo Morales it has an indigenous and socialist President, the preamble of its constitutions refers to the 'sacred Mother Earth' and it has adopted a *Law of the Rights of Mother Earth* in 2011. This law, which grants legal rights to nature, draws on indigenous concepts that view nature as a sacred home, the 'Pachamama' ('Mother Earth') on which we intimately depend and defines Mother Earth as "a living dynamic system made up of the undivided community of all living beings, who are all interconnected, interdependent and complementary, sharing a common destiny" (Buxton 2011). Bolivia pushes actively for the universal adoption and recognition of the *Rights of Mother Earth*. It hosted the first *People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth* in Cochabamba in 2010, where the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth* was crafted. Moreover, the Bolivian delegation took the lead in presenting the proposed resolution about establishing an *International Mother Earth Day* to the UN General Assembly in April 2009 (The Rights of Nature). A similar case is Ecuador, which is the first country that has recognized legal rights of nature in its constitution.

As representatives of environmental NGOs and civil movements I have chosen Earth Charter International, Rights of Mother Earth, and CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development. The criteria for choosing NGOs were a high probability of finding an explicit ecocentric discourse and texts suitable for an illustration of a *counter-hegemonic discourse*. The names of the first two NGOs already speak for themselves. Certainly, it is crucial to emphasize here that the NGOs chosen cannot be representative for all NGOs who participated in the Rio+20 Conference. A systematic quantitative survey taking all of them into account would constitute a valuable research project to enabling a comprehensive understanding of the nature and the scope of the *discursive struggle* between the *antagonistic* SD *discourses*. Moreover, it is very important to emphasize here that the choice of these organizations with the focus on ecocentric discourses could give the misleading impression that NGOs and civil movements are by nature the *antagonistic* force to the state and business and that there is a simple dichotomy between the state and business as agents of a weak SD *discourse* on the one hand, and NGOs and civil movements as agents of a strong SD *discourse* on the other hand. As we have seen with Gramsci and his concept of the *integral state*, and with Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory in chapter 2, this is a too simplistic view. Since *hegemony* functions just as much through the private sphere as through the public sphere, and *discourses* are always in flux and themselves organize identity instead of arising out of existent rigid identities, it falls too short to draw a line between the *hegemonic* state and *counter-hegemonic* civil society (Methmann 2011). I assume that by

analyzing the *discourses* of the different actors (states, NGOs, business organizations, international institutions), it will be possible to display the complex *discursive struggle* and mutual inextricability going on between these actors. Another reason why I chose these three organizations was that all of them are associations of a whole array of individual environmental NGOs and thus they represent many more organizations and much more people than three single organizations could.

The Earth Charter project started as a UN initiative, but turned into a global civil society initiative. The *Earth Charter* was launched as a people's charter in 2000 and has been endorsed by over 4,500 organizations, including many governments and international organizations (Earth Charter Initiative). Today the initiative has developed its institutional setting with a secretariat located in Costa Rica. The *Universal Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth* is also a people's charter, which was drafted during the *World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth* which was held in April 2010 in Bolivia. It was presented to the General Assembly during an Interactive Dialogue on April 20, 2011. Among its founding organizations are Fundación Pachamama and Pachamama Alliance, which promoted the incorporation of *Rights for Nature* into the Ecuadorian Constitution (Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature). The Global Alliance for Rights of Nature participated very actively in the Rio+20 Conference, for example, it co-hosted the side event *Rights of Nature as the Foundation for Sustainability*. CoNGO, finally, stands for 'The Conference of NGOs with Consultative relationship with the United Nations' and is an independent non-profit membership association of several hundred NGOs, which aims to facilitate the participation of NGOs in United Nations debates and decision-making. CoNGO members and the larger NGO community work together through committees, one of which is the Committee on Sustainable Development located in New York, to cooperate on substantive issues and to bring NGO expertise into the discussions in UN fora (CoNGO).

The two business-organisations International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and the temporary coalition of the Business Action for Sustainable Development (BASD) were also chosen because of their great scopes. The ICC calls itself 'The World Business Organization' and aims to promote international trade and investment. According to its Secretary General, the ICC "strives to ensure that the emerging new world (…) stays faithful to the precept that international trade and investment and the market economy system are key factors in raising and spreading wealth" (Carrier). The Business Action for Sustainable Development (BASD) was established to coordinate the participation of the private sector in the Rio+20 Conference. It was convened by the ICC, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), and the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) and a wide range of international industry associates have joined the coalition as partners, among them Air Transport Action Group (ATAG),

International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), Global Oil & Gas Industry Association (IPIECA), and the World Steel Association (BASD). Its declared aim is to "enhance its contribution to sustainable and inclusive markets" (Compilation Document - Rio+20 - Part V 2011: 253-55). Nick Mayhew argues that the corporate world is actively shaping environmentalism according to its own interest and is thereby hindering progress towards sustainable development (Mayhew 1997: 63). He shows that "corporate executives, via three key, world business organizations – the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD) and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) - have mobilized at a highly strategic level in response to the 'threat' of sustainable development" (Mayhew 1997: 66). They have been successful in neutralising this 'threat' by defining the concept of SD in a way consistent with business as usual (Mayhew 1997: 67-68). Mayhew's analysis is especially interesting because he not only focuses on linguistic *discourses* – on the 'rhetorical' way of redefining the notion of SD consistent with business interests – but also on the wide impact this *discourse* gains through "brute lobbying strength" (Mayhew 1997: 89). Members of the ICC, for example, travelled to Stockholm in the run-up to the 1992 Rio Summit to persuade the Swedish government to withdraw their suggested 21 clause calling for transnational corporations (TNCs) to internalize environmental costs in their accounting procedures and the chairman of the ICC's Working Party on Sustainable Development was part of the UK government delegation during Rio 1992 (Mayhew 1997: 71-72).

I chose the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as two international institutions to focus on because they are among the major international institutions regulating the international economic and financial order. By analysing *discourses* of these institutions (plus the World Trade Organization and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Chris Methmann (2010) shows that global climate protection – which is a central part of global environmental protection - is built on the discursive pillars of globalism, scientism, ethics of growth and efficiency, which make climate protection function as an *empty signifier*. He concludes that climate protection can be integrated without any obvious contradiction into the global hegemonic order and "international organisations can claim to be in favour of climate protection and stick to business as usual at the same time" (Methmann 2010: 345).

For the analysis of the documents I will follow four steps: First, I will carry out a quantitative survey and search for the chosen signal words in each document in order to get a first impression. Here it is important to bear in mind that each document has a different length and that therefore the distribution of the words cannot be compared directly between the different documents, but that the different text lengths have to be taken into account. However,

it is possible to compare the distribution of the words within a given document (e.g. this document uses this signal word five times more often than this other word). Secondly, I will read and interpret each document for itself and thirdly, I will compare the documents with the other documents of the same category. This means, I will compare the three Outcome Documents, the three governmental documents, the three input documents of the environmental organizations, the two documents of the business organizations, and the three documents of the international institutions respectively with each other. In a final step I will compare the different groups of actors with each other.

### 5.2 Outcome Documents of 1992, 2002 and 2012

In order to get a first impression, I first carried out a quantitative search for the signal words (see Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4; UNCED 1992; WSSD 2002; UNCSD 2012 in Appendix). This search showed at first sight that the Rio+20 Outcome Document used much more signal words from the weak SD *discourse* than the two previous Outcome Documents. In the two Documents from 1992 and 2002 merely the signal words 'resource/s', 'manage/ment' and 'technological/-y' appear a couple of times. Signal words from the strong SD *discourse* are almost non-existent, the 1992 Document uses the term "in harmony with nature" only one single time, the 2002 Document refers to "our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life and to our children" one time. *The Future We Want*, in contrast, uses all of the chosen anthropocentric signal words and all of them, except from 'modern /-ize /-ation', in a very high frequency (even if you take into account that this Document is much longer than the other two). Since 'a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication' was one of the two themes the Rio+20 Conference focused on besides 'the institutional framework for sustainable development', it is no surprise that the term 'green economy' has been used so often (23 times) in its Outcome Document. The fact that this term has not appeared at all in the two previous Outcome Documents shows us that this term must have become fashionable within the last 10 years. This fact in itself could be a hint for a reinforced economistic SD *discourse* since the term 'Green Economy' highlights the economic section of SD. In sharp contrast to the frequent usa of terms such as 'resource/s', 'manage/-ment' or 'efficient/-cy', the signal word 'harmony' is used only three times, and the terms 'Mother Earth' and 'intrinsic value' one time respectively. I argue that already the quantitative survey lends support to the hypothesis that the anthropocentric character of the SD discourse has reinforced in the last 20 years.

The Rio 1992 Document (UNCED 1992 in Appendix) has already been referred to in chapter 4. At the beginning the text immediately mentions "the integral and interdependent nature of the Earth, our home" and it is said that humans are "entitled to a healthy and

productive life in harmony with nature" (Principle 1). However, it is also made clear at the very beginning that "[h]uman beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development" (Principle 1) and that states have "the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and developmental policies" (Principle 2). Throughout the text an economistic approach towards environmental protection is evident; e.g. the text demands "a supportive and open international economic system that would lead to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries" (Principle 12) and the "internalization of environmental costs and the use of economic instruments" (Principle 16). On the other hand the text also refers to "a vital role in environmental management and development" that "indigenous people" have "because of their knowledge and traditional practices" (Principle 22). Moreover, the text states explicitly that "[s]tates should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies" (Principle 8).

The 2002 Johannesburg Outcome Document (WSSD 2002 in Appendix) did not bring any great changes. Here, too, it is evident that SD is about "managing the natural resource base for economic and social development" (Article 11). It does not refer to a 'harmony with nature', therefore it speaks about the "the greater community of life" (Article 6), and it also refers to "patterns of unsustainable development" (Article 3).

With the Rio+20 Document (UNCSD 2012 in Appendix) the anthropcentric, economistic and managerialist character of the SD discourse is intensified. There is no doubt that "people are at the centre of sustainable development" (Article 6) and that SD is about "protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development" (Article 4). 'Sustainability' means the "sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystems" (Article 30) for human's benefit. The linkage between economic growth and development is stronger than ever; the text explicitly states that the aim is "to achieve sustainable development through economic growth and diversification, social development and environmental protection" (Article 19). What the quantitative survey could not show is that the text mostly refers to "*sustained* and inclusive economic growth" (e.g. Article 6; my emphasis). It should be apparent for us by now, that this term has nothing to do with sustainability- sustained growth can never be sustainable. The text does not see any conflict between continued economic growth and sustainability; in paragraph 281, for example, the text says that "international trade is an engine for development and sustained economic growth" and it goes on reaffirming "the critical role that a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system, as well as meaningful trade liberalization, can play in stimulating economic growth and development worldwide, thereby *benefiting all countries at all stages of development*, as they advance towards sustainable development" (my emphasis).

On the other hand, the text refers several times (and therefore much more often than in the previous Outcome Documents) to "unsustainable patterns of production and consumption"

and states "that fundamental changes in the way societies consume and produce are indispensable for achieving global sustainable development" (Articlle 224). It recalls 'the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation on sustainable consumption and production' and it "adopts the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns, as contained in document A/CONF.216/5" (Article 224). However, at the same time it "highlight[s] that the programmes included in the 10-year framework are voluntary" (Article 226). Given the limitation of natural resources, I argue that the double emphasis on free trade and sustained economic growth as well as on sustainable consumption and production patterns is a contradiction in itself. The text also speaks about 'root causes'. In paragraph 106 it says, "We also emphasize the need to accord the highest priority to poverty eradication within the United Nations development agenda, addressing the root causes and challenges of poverty through integrated, coordinated and coherent strategies at all levels" and in paragraph 116 it says, "We stress the need to address the root causes of excessive food price volatility, including its structural causes". However, in both paragraphs it is obvious that the respective root causes are not named but treated as given.

Paragraphs 39 and 40 seem to be the paragraphs which were included to appease 'ecocentric' forces:

> 39. We recognize that planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home and that "Mother Earth" is a common expression in a number of countries and regions, and we note that some countries recognize the rights of nature in the context of the promotion of sustainable development. We are convinced that in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations, it is necessary to promote harmony with nature.
>
> 40. We call for holistic and integrated approaches to sustainable development that will guide humanity to live in harmony with nature and lead to efforts to restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem.

What is interesting is that the text does not say that the rights of nature are recognized but instead that "some countries recognize the rights of nature in the context of the promotion of sustainable development". While proponents of an ecocentric SD discourse should be able to agree to these paragraphs, they seem to be rather isolated and detached from the rest of the text and it is fair to say that the spirit of these two paragraphs is not reflected in the rest of the Document. However, the fact that these two paragraphs are included in the Outcome Document and that this represents a noticeable extension of ecocentric elements in comparison to the 1992 and 2002 Outcome Documents, which both refer to 'harmony with nature' and a 'community of life' only in one sentence, already demonstrates that a *discursive struggle* between 'anthropocentric' and 'ecocentric' forces must have been going on in the run-up to Rio+20.

Moreover, the Rio+20 Outcome Document refers much more frequently to ethical terms such as 'equitable/-y' or 'just/-ice' than the two previous Outcome Documents.

In summary, it can be noted that in all three Outcome Documents SD is about "managing the natural resource base for economic and social development". Paradoxically, it seems as if both the anthropocentric as well as the ecocentric character of the SD discourse has intensified in the last 20 years. *The Future We Want* refers much more frequently to signal words of the anthropocentric SD discourse as well as to those of the ecocentric SD discourse than the two former Outcome Documents. However, all in all there is a very strong predominance of the anthropocentric, economistic and managerialist character. The linkage between economic growth and development is stronger than ever and SD is overtly presented as striving for "sustained and inclusive economic growth". The concept of Green Economy is a new popular *nodal point*, which has not existed in the former two Outcome Documents. On the other hand, the Rio+20 Outcome Document refers much more frequently to ethical terms such as 'equitable/-y' or 'just/-ice' than the two previous Outcome Documents and it includes two paragraphs which explicitly refer to *moments* of an ecocentric *discourse*, namely it refers to 'harmony with nature'. However, since these two paragraphs are rather isolated and detached from the rest of the text and their spirit is not reflected in the rest of the document, I assume that these paragraphs were incorporated as a result of negotiations during the Conference. I take them as a sign of an attempt to achieve a *passive revolution.*

### 5.3 Input Documents of Rio+20

In the following I will turn to the contributions made in the run-up to Rio+20 by some governments, environmental organisations, business organisations and international institutions. First I will analyse the input documents by the USA, the European Union and its member states and Bolivia, then the ones submitted by the environmental organisations Earth Charter International, Rights of Mother Earth and CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development, afterwards those submitted by the business representatives International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and Business Action for Sustainable Development 2012 (BASD) and finally the two documents by the international institutions World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

*Input documents by the USA, European Union and its member states and Bolivia*

The quantitative survey for the signal words in the three state input documents (see Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8; Bolivia 2011; EU and its member states 2011; USA 2011 in Appendix) has led me to assume that the USA conducts an anthropocentric rather than an ecocentric SD discourse since it uses all of my anthropocentric signal words several times (between 5 and 17 times respectively) whereas no single ecocentric signal word appears in the whole US input document. The same applies to the European Union and its member states, who does not refer to any ecocentric signal words either – with the exception that its text refers to natural limits twice. Bolivia, in contrast, while it also uses signal words from the anthropocentric camp, uses ecocentric signal words several times (8 times 'harmony and 6 times 'Mother Earth'). The quantitative analysis of the frequency of the used signal words which refer to the multiple crises, the socio-economic order, and anthropocentric or ecocentric values, indicate a difference between the USA and the EU texts which the former surveys did not show. While the text of the USA does not refer to any of the chosen signal words one single time, the EU refers to the terms 'unsustainable/-ility' and 'patterns of production and consumption' several times. Moreover, while the USA does not refer at all to the ethical terms 'equitable/-y' or 'just/-ice', the EU uses them 14 times in total. While Bolivia uses these signal words in a similar frequency as the EU, what is outstanding is that it refers to the signal word '(environmental) crisis/crises' 8 times (EU only 2 times) and that it explicitly refers to the word 'anthropocentric'.

The qualitative interpretative analysis of the three documents reveals an even clearer picture. The SD discourse of the USA (2011 in Appendix) represented in this text is overly economistic and modernistic. At the very beginning the text makes clear that "Rio+20 must prioritize resource productivity and efficiency as ways to promote sustainable development" (469). In the text 'development' obviously is understood as 'economic growth' and 'sustainable development as 'sustained economic growth'. The text states for example that 'sustainable development offers a promise of long-term, inclusive, and enduring growth that builds on accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, coordination, and innovation" (469). Environmental protection is presented as just another way of promoting economic growth, as this sentence exemplary shows: "New sustainable energy and infrastructure developments, sustainable approaches to disaster preparedness and response, energy and resource efficiency, recycling, and agricultural and natural resources conservation are examples of areas that can provide jobs and economic growth while protecting the environment" (470). Both humans as well as non-human natural entities are seen predominantly as economic assets. The text states for example that "[t]he development of human capacity is essential to achieving broad-based economic growth" (470) and later in the text that "[t]he planet's natural ecosystems and biodiversity are

key assets for economic growth and human well-being" (470). Even more bluntly it states that "[e]very individual has the opportunity to be a contributing and valued member of the global marketplace" (471) and elsewhere that "[o]ur natural ecosystems also provide multiple economic goods worth many billions of dollars" (470). A commodification of 'nature' also expresses itself in terms such as 'natural capital', 'natural infrastructure' and 'environmental services'. Clearly SD is about the proper management of nature, thus it "is for national governments to systematically quantify, monitor, and assess our natural capital" (470). Several times the text refers to 'eco-innovation' – a term the EU uses as well -, which may have been another signal word for the 'anthropocentric' camp. The text constantly reaffirms a commitment to "innovative, open, and competitive markets" (e.g. 469). It seems that the way of 'greenwashing' business as usual-policies is to put the word 'green' in front of the business-as-usual-term: besides the famous 'Green Economy', they use 'green jobs', 'green technologies and services', 'green products'.

The text of the EU (EU and its member states 2011 in Appendix) resembles that of the USA, even though it seems to be less economistic. Its input document also connects SD foremost with the appropriate management of natural assets – as the frequent use of terms such as 'sustainable material management', 'resource management', 'water management', 'forest management', 'land management', 'sustainable management of the oceans, seas and coast', 'fisheries management', 'chemicals management', 'waste management' and 'risk management' show. Similar to the US text, the text of the EU connects SD with economic growth, for example its text says that "[t]he transition to a green economy has great potential to promote long-term sustainable growth, create decent jobs and hence eradicate poverty, focussing on inclusiveness and avoiding equity gaps" (10) and it emphasizes "the strong links between the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and ecosystems on the one hand and economic opportunities and poverty alleviation on the other" (16). Throughout the text there is no doubt that human beings are the centre of concern and that SD is about "people's right to live in a healthy environment" (10). However, in contrast to the US text, the EU text also states that "[u]nsustainable economic growth has increased the stress on the earth's limited natural resources and on the carrying capacity of ecosystems, with 60% of the world's natural resources already being used unsustainably or at their limit" (9) and that "[c]urrent unsustainable patterns of consumption and production put a heavy stress on ecosystems and on critical life-support systems, and impact on the quality of life and social well-being" (11). The text also refers to the current global crises, stating that "[t]he recent economic and financial crisis offers an opportunity for global collective rethinking to facilitate a transition to a green economy" (17). However, the causes of these crises are not named and no responsibilities are assigned.

Bolivia's input text (Bolivia 2011 in Appendix) differs sharply from the US and the EU texts. While it also uses some anthropocentric terms, it clearly represents all in all an ecocentric SD discourse. It openly questions the *hegemonic* development paradigm and problematizes the term 'development' itself, growthism, a blind belief in technology and modernism, economism and a commercialisation of nature, an anthropocentric view of nature, the capitalist system and the very concept of Green Economy. Criticism of growthism is already expressed in the very beginning. Here the text says (74):

> It is essential to recognize and affirm that growth has limits. The pursuit of unending development on a finite planet is unsustainable and impossible. The limit to development is defined by the regenerative capacity of the Earth's vital cycles. When growth begins to break that balance, as we see with global warming, we can no longer speak of it as development, but rather, the deterioration and destruction of our home.

Criticism of a blind belief in technology is evident in expressions such as "[n]ew technologies will not allow unending economic growth" (74) and "[n]ature cannot be subject to manipulation by new technologies without consequences in the future" (77). Criticism of economism and a commercialisation of nature is expressed clearly in sentences such as "The Rio+20 Conference should not create market mechanisms with regard to nature, biodiversity and the so called environmental services" (76) since "[t]he establishment of these market mechanisms will deepen the imbalance with nature because they are driven by the search for maximum profits and not harmony with nature" (76). Critically the text states that "[i]n the hands of capitalism, everything is converted into merchandise: water, earth genomes, ancestral cultures, justice, ethics and life" (76). Criticizing economistic thinking and vocabulary such as used by the US text, the text argues that "[i]t is wrong to attempt to fragment nature into "environmental services" with a monetary value for market exchange" (77) since "[t]he drive for profit, instead of reestablishing harmony within the system, will provoke even greater imbalances, concentrations of wealth, and speculative processes" (77). The concept of Green Economy is explicitly rejected since "the supposed objective of the Green Economy of disassociating economic growth from environmental deterioration is not viable" (76). And referring to the presently ongoing 'greenwashing', the text states that "[n]ot all that is labeled (sic) "green" is environmentally friendly" (77).

The anthropocentric view of nature as exploitable resources is specifically rejected: "Nature is not simply a sum of elements, it's not a source of resources that can be exploited, modified, altered, privatized, commercialized and transformed without any consequences" (75). The *hegemonic* anthropocentric view of nature is explicitly criticized by stating that "[i]t is essential to get beyond the anthropocentric vision" (75). The text interprets the term

'development' not as "permanent growth, but rather, [as] balance among humans and with nature" (74). It is made clear that "[t]he goal is the satisfaction of basic human needs in order to allow for the development of human capabilities and human happiness, strengthening community among human beings and with Mother Earth" (74). The term Mother Earth is explained as a way to "express this relationship of belonging to a system and respect for our home" (75). Recalling the Gaia Hypothesis, the text presents the Earth as "a living system and the source of life" (75) and as "an indivisible, interdependent and interrelated community comprised of human beings, nature, the atmosphere, hydrosphere, and geosphere" (75). In contrast to the usual mainstream phrase that humans are in the centre of SD, here it is deliberately emphasized that "[h]uman beings and nature are at the center [sic] of concerns for sustainable development" (75). Similarly, and in line with Bolivia's *Law of Mother Earth*, nature is entitled to rights like humans have natural rights: "Not only do human beings have a right to a healthy life, but so do the other components and species belonging to the system we call nature" (75). And later in the text we find the statement that "[h]umans and all living things have the right to water, but water also has rights" (75). Bolivia goes further than only making a rhetorical request and demands an "International Tribunal of Environmental and Climate Justice (…) to judge and sanction crimes against nature that transcend national borders, violating the rights of nature and affecting humanity" (76).

Concerning the presentation of today's global crises Bolivia's text points directly to the supposed causes and responsible actors. The text states that "[t]he emerging challenges of the 21st Century are the product of exaggerated ambition and accumulation of wealth concentrated in a few sectors, the exacerbation and combination of different contradictions that were present in the last century" (75) and even more precisely that "[t]he capitalist system is the principal cause of the imbalance because it puts the rules of the market and the accumulation of profit above the laws of nature" (75). It is argued that "developed countries [are] historically responsible for climate change" (75) and demanded that "[d]eveloped countries must change their unsustainable patterns of consumption, production, and waste" (75). Bolivia's text relates today's multiple crises to the hegemonic capitalist development paradigm and therefore rejects it. Thus, the text states that "[i]t is not sustainable or viable for all countries to follow the example of developed countries without causing the collapse of our Earth system" (75). The text calls to stop "imperialism and neo-colonialism" (76) and demands that "a pluralistic world should respect diversity" (76). It calls for "structural changes" and reject economist solutions but instead states that "[i]t is essential to restore and guarantee the existence, integrity, interrelation, interaction and regeneration of the Earth system as a whole and of all of its components in order to achieve a sustainable development that is capable of confronting the multiple crises facing humanity and the planet today" (75). This includes a new "ethics that value human beings for what they are, not what they have".

In summary, it can be stated that the USA and the EU and its member states represent the weak SD *discourse*, Bolivia, on the other hand represents the strong SD *discourse*. It is certainly justified to draw a connection between this circumstance and the fact that the USA and the member states of the EU belong to the Western, developed world, which benefits from the current socio-economic order in many ways, and Bolivia is a developing state from the global periphery.

*Input documents by Earth Charter International, Rights of Mother Earth, and CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development*

Now I will turn to the three input documents of the environmental organizations. The quantitative survey (see Figures 9, 10, 11 and 12; CoNGO Committee on Sustinable Development 2011; Earth Charter International 2011; Rights of Mother Earth 2011 in Appendix) has led me to assume that Rights of Mother Earth pursues the strongest anti-anthropocentric SD discourse since its input document does not use one single anthropocentric signal word. While Earth Charter International uses a few of the anthropocentric signal words a few times, CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development uses the signal words 'resource/-s', 'technological/-y' and 'green economy' most frequently and 'ecocentric' signal words least often. Furthermore, it seems that Earth Charter International puts the greatest emphasis on ethical and spiritual issues of SD, while these issues do not seem to play a great role in Rights of Mother Earth, and CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development deals with ethical issues, but not mentioning spiritual elements of SD. While the CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development prefers to refer to 'interconnected/-ness', Earth Charter International favours the term the 'community of life' and Rights of mother Earth refers to 'Mother Earth' even 33 times.

The text of Rights of Mother Earth (Rights of Mother Earth 2011 in Appendix) shows the strongest ecocentric orientation. It starts by stating that "we are all part of Mother Earth, an indivisible, living community of interrelated and interdependent beings with a common destiny" (1251) and it proclaims a *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth* and calls on the UN General Assembly to adopt it. Article 1 of this Universal Declaration makes the high degree of ecocentrism pursued by it clear. It says (1251):

1) Mother Earth is a living being.
2) Mother Earth is a unique, indivisible, self-regulating community of interrelated beings that sustains, contains and reproduces all beings.
3) Each being is defined by its relationships as an integral part of Mother Earth.

4) The inherent rights of Mother Earth are inalienable in that they arise from the same source as existence.
5) Mother Earth and all beings are entitled to all the inherent rights recognized in this Declaration without distinction of any kind, such as may be made between organic and inorganic beings, species, origin, use to human beings, or any other status.
6) Just as human beings have human rights, all other beings also have rights which are specific to their species or kind and appropriate for their role and function within the communities within which they exist.
7) The rights of each being are limited by the rights of other beings and any conflict between their rights must be resolved in a way that maintains the integrity, balance and health of Mother Earth.

In consequence, "[e]very human being is responsible for respecting and living in harmony with Mother Earth" (Article 3.1). It calls for the establishment of legal measures "for the defence, protection and conservation of the rights of Mother Earth" (Article 3.2.e). Concerning the causes of today's environmental crisis the text blames "the capitalist system and all forms of depredation, exploitation, abuse and contamination [which] have caused great destruction, degradation and disruption of Mother Earth, putting life as we know it today at risk through phenomena such as climate change" and it calls for "economic systems that are in harmony with Mother Earth and in accordance with the rights recognized in this Declaration" (Article 3.2.l).

The text of the Earth Charter International (Earth Charter International 2011 in Appendix) puts emphasis on the "need for a stronger global ethical framework", which would encompass "ethical and spiritual values" which are according to it of high importance "in making the transition to a sustainable way of life" (396). It refers to "all peoples, the greater community of life, and future generations" (396) and aims to establish a "mandate of trusteeship for global common goods" (396) on their behalf. The text explicitly refers to "the September 7 Declaration of the 64th Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference in Bonn [which] articulates a broadly supported civil society agenda for the Outcome Document" of Rio+20, which refers to the Earth *Charter* and states that it "can play a vital role in helping to inspire renewed political commitment expected for Rio + 20 and to guide the transition to a sustainable, just and peaceful society with respect and care for the entire community of life" (397). And even the European Economic and Social Committee recommended that 'the Summit [Rio+20] should recognize and support the Earth Charter as a means of inspiring commitment and action by individuals and organizations around the world" (397). Concerning this "new consciousness" the text refers to "values associated with human rights, cultural diversity, social and economic justice, a culture of peace, intergenerational responsibility, and respect and care for the greater community of life" (398) and refers to the "mystery of being, compassion, love, hope, and the joyful celebration of life" (398). The values had "been given expression in many intergovernmental and civil society declarations such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the World Charter for Nature,

the Rio Declaration, and the Earth Charter" (398). Furthermore, the text quotes the first four principles of the Earth Charter [which] provide one articulation of the necessary goals (398):

1) Respect Earth and life in all its diversity;
2) Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love;
3) Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful; and
4) Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

While the text shows many ecocentric *moments* – such as the statement "Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life" (398), it also adopts some of the *moments* of the weak SD discourse. It refers, for example, to "market mechanisms", "corporate environmental and social responsibility (CSR)", "sustainability reporting", "technologies", "eco-efficiency", "best green practices" and even "green economy". However, the texts stresses that it means "a green economy based on strong sustainability" (396). It refers to the three standard pillars of SD, but favours a different organisation of them, akin to Tregidga, Milne & Kearins (2011: 9). The text emphasizes that "[e]nvironment is not merely the resource base for human consumption" (397), but instead "it incorporates the greater community of life including human beings and the life-support systems on which we all depend" (397), which is why it should not be viewed as just one of the three factors to be considered. The social dimension on the other hand "represents a set of pre-requisites and goals for sustainable development rather than negotiable or merely optional considerations" (397). Furthermore, it adds a fourth pillar, which is understood as "a shared vision of ethical and spiritual values that inspires and guides cooperative action for change" (398). It sums up the conception of the four pillars of strong SD as "People, Planet, Profit and Pneuma (i.e. spirit) with the latter representing our possibility of awakening to a sense of wonder and interconnectedness with all life and of establishing, as the last Earth Charter principle (16f) states, & right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part" (398).

The text refers to the "limits imposed by the capacity of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities" (e.g. 397) several times and calls for "quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world" (398). It blames "wasteful overconsumption" and "support[s] the [Bonn] Declaration's call for replacement of the current inefficient, unsustainable and inequitable economic, monetary, financial and commercial models with policies" by "an economy that cares for and enables a flourishing Earth community inclusive of all people, the greater community of life, and future generations" (397).

The CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development (CoNGO Committee on Sustinable Development 2011 in Appendix) shows a mixture of anthropocentric and ecocentric *moments*, though it can be noted that there is a predominance of ecocentric *moments*. The text (355)

explicitly refers to the *Earth Charter* and to the October 2010 Report of the Secretary General *Harmony With Nature*, which made clear that,

> (…) the twenty-first century, through its consumption and production patterns, has severely affected Earth's carrying capacity, and how human behavior has been the result of a fundamental failure to recognize that human beings are an inseparable part of nature, and that we cannot damage it without severely damaging ourselves. …The philosophy of holism, embodied in the concept of sustainable development, rests on an understanding that all things are interconnected and that nothing occurs in isolation.

The text supports an "equitable and holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of all of life" (355). Furthermore, it blames "[t]he prevailing economic theory, grounded in limitless expansion and growth, [for being] (…) in contradiction with finite resources" (355).

Furthermore, it also calls for "a shift from an ethic of exploitation to an ethic of right relationship – an ethic based on the rights of humans and of Earth as essential for individuals, society and ecosystems to flourish" (356). However, it adopts the term of a 'green economy' and the concept of the three pillars of SD, though at the same time it contrasts the 'green economy' with a 'green capitalism' which is rejected. The text says, "We support a green economy that reflects an integration of the environmental, social and economic pillars of sustainable development; that places equity of access to green technology, jobs and practices for developing countries over green capitalism, which disproportionately benefits developed countries and transnational corporations" (356). At the same time it uses signal words from the anthropocentric SD camp, such as "innovative technology", "green technology" or "resource efficient". The mixture between moments of both antagonistic SD discourses reveals itself in sentences such as, "Why this failure [of Agenda 21] when the international community has the *technological expertise*, a clearer, *scientifically-based* understanding of *Earth as a living system of interdependent, interrelated components of which humans are a part*, and the financial resources to explore and implement more sustainable modes of development?" (355; my emphasis).

In summary, all of the three input documents of environmental NGOs rather represent the ecocentric SD *discourse.* While Mother Earth pursues the strongest anti-anthropocentric SD *discourse*, the CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development refers also to some *moments* of the anthropocentric SD *discourse*. Rights of Mother Earth calls for the establishment of legal measures for the defence, protection and conservation of the rights of Mother Earth. Earth Charter International puts the greatest emphasis on ethical and spiritual issues of SD and while it refers to the three standard pillars of SD, it favours an organisation of them that prioritizes environmental issues. The CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development explicitly blames the

prevailing economic theory, grounded in limitless expansion and growth, for being in contradiction with finite resources and it thus contrasts a 'Green Economy' with 'green capitalism'.

*Input documents by International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), and Business Action for Sustainable Development 2012 (BASD)*

Similar to the input document by the USA, the input documents by the two business organizations International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), and Business Action for Sustainable Development 2012 (BASD) (ICC 2011; BASD 2011 in Appendix) do not use one single signal word of the ecocentric SD camp, though they use almost all of the signal words of the anthropocentric SD camp several times (the signal word 'green economy' by far the most frequent). Thus, already the quantitative survey (see Figures 13, 14 and 15 in Appendix) led to the assumption that these two texts represent the weak anthropocentric SD discourse.

The qualitative interpretation of the texts confirms this first impression. The two texts resemble each other very much and often overlap. Throughout the texts it is evident that they are supposed to represent business' interests. The ICC (ICC 2011 in Appendix) and the BASD text (BASD 2011 in Appendix) "underscore the private sectors vital role in efforts to promote sustainable development" (ICC 2011: 897) and that "[t]he private sector has a key role to play in helping achieve the goals of sustainable development, in particular poverty eradication" (BASD 2011: 253). They draw a picture of a very positive and pro-active role business is playing in respect to SD. They claim that "[s]ince 1992, business has been deeply and constructively engaged in the many United Nations and other international conferences that have identified the crucial components of a global partnership for sustainable development" (BASD 2011: 253) and that "[a] growing number of companies around the world have already put sustainability at the run-up to of their agenda, recognizing the growing relevance and urgency of global environmental, social and economic challenges" (BASD 2011: 253). Concerning the issue of a Green Economy the texts argue that "[t]he private sector has already taken concrete actions towards building a Green Economy, including by reducing environmental impacts across value chains to increasing energy and resource efficiency, investing in low-carbon and renewable energy and reducing waste" (ICC 2011: 898).

SD is clearly equated with economic growth, thus the texts define SD as aiming to "advance economic growth while enhancing environmental protection" (ICC 2011: 897). They affirm that "[e]conomic growth is and will be essential to provide the resources and social equity necessary to build capacity and finance actions in a transition towards a Green Economy" (ICC 2011: 898) and claim "that increasing prosperity, a major goal of the development process, is

contributed primarily by the activities of business and industry" (ICC 2011: 897). They understand the concept of the 'green economy' as one that "emphasizes the importance of sustainable growth and access to open, well-functioning, and efficient markets" (ICC 2011: 898). In this sense the *ICC Green Economy Task Force* has defined the term Green Economy as "an economy in which economic growth and environmental responsibility work together in a mutually reinforcing fashion while supporting progress on social development" (ICC 2011: 898; BASD). Moreover, they also refer to the three pillars of SD and state that "[a] Green Economy requires the three pillars (economic, social, and environmental) of sustainable development to work in a mutually reinforcing fashion while supporting progress on social development" (ICC 2011: 898). The Green Economy is foremost considered as another opportunity to make profit. Thus, the texts state that "[c]ompanies view sustainability issues from both, a risk management perspective, and the increasingly evident and appealing benefits and opportunities – particularly associated with green growth and poverty alleviation" (BASD 2011: 253) and that "[a] Green Economy actively drives innovation in private and public finance and investment into the direction of sustainable development" (ICC 2011: 898).

However, at the same time the texts also recognize "that the world's resources are finite and must be managed with scarcity in mind" (ICC 2011: 898) and demand that "[e]fforts by all actors should reconcile the need for short and medium term profit with longer term systemic change" (ICC 2011: 898). On the other hand, the texts do not refer to the multiple global crises and do not specify how this 'systemic change' should look like. What can be seen is that when there is a tension between a sustainability request and an economic goal, the latter rules out the former. For example, the ICC text (898) demands "[p]olicies aimed to create so called green jobs should not come at the cost of a net reduction of jobs across the overall economy". Moreover, the texts only demands "voluntary approaches" from business such as the *ICC Business Charter for Sustainable Development* or the *Global Compact* (ICC 2011: 900).

In general the texts promote a very technocratic approach towards SD and highlight that companies pursue sustainability measures, for example: "green products, processes, services, technologies, implement sustainable consumption and production (SCP) practices, green their supply chains, drive research and development (R&D) for green innovations and solutions, as well as integrate sustainability into business strategies" (ICC 2011: 897) or "incorporating environmental externalities in economic terms" (ICC 2011: 898). Moreover they refer to economistic terms such as "human and natural capital", "Resource Efficiency and Decoupling" or "operational green growth measures". Finally, the texts show that business aims to exert influence on governments by means of delivering 'expertise'. The ICC text (898), for example, describes that "[t]o provide guidance for governments on key lessons learned, the ICC Task Force on Green Economy undertook extensive analysis and consultation to determine what is required to further a transition towards a Green Economy".

In summary, the documents of the business organisations represent the weak SD *discourse* the to the strongest degree of all analysed texts so far. They do not contain one single ecocentric *moment*. SD is clearly equated with economic growth, thus the texts define SD as aiming to "advance economic growth while enhancing environmental protection". Economic growth is not only compatible with sustainability but even presented as a precondition for it since it provided the financing of sustainability measures.

*Input documents by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)*

Finally, I will now turn to the two international institutions whose contributions I aim to analyse, namely the World Bank and the IMF. The quantitative survey (see Figures 16, 17, and 18; IMF 2011; World Bank 2011 in Appendix) revealed that while both institutions hardly used any signal words of the ecocentric SD discourse in their input texts, the World Bank referred much more frequently to signal words of the anthropocentric SD discourse than the IMF, especially to the signal words 'efficient/-cy', 'economic/green growth' and 'resources'.

The input document of the World Bank (World Bank 2011 in Appendix) shows a mixed picture. On the one hand it explicitly supports the *UNSG's High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability* goal, which is "[t]o eradicate poverty and reduce inequality, make growth inclusive and *production and consumption more sustainable* while combating climate change and *respecting the range of other planetary boundaries*" (235; my emphasis) and recognizes that "[u]nequal patterns of consumption and control over resources among and within countries at all income levels contribute to divergent trajectories of opportunity and human well-being" (235) and that "an increasing population that is more prosperous has expanded global consumption" (234) which "has led to two interlinked challenges for sustaining progress: meeting the demands for improved lives for a larger, more prosperous and more urban global population, and addressing *environmental pressures* and governance challenges that could undermine the world's ability to meet these demands" (234; my emphasis). The latter statement indirectly links overconsumption with environmental problems.

However, the text underlines its commitment to economic growth throughout the text. At the same time it qualifies the specific type of economic growth that is envisaged. It says, for example, that, "We will maintain our focus on growth given its centrality to poverty reduction, but growth needs to be green and inclusive" (235) and goes on by stating that, "The world needs a form of growth that is socially and environmentally sustainable that takes resource limits and climate change into account" (235). While the text refers explicitly to developing countries by claiming that "GDP growth in developing countries will still be necessary to enhance living

standards, reduce poverty, and cope with growing populations" (235), it says nothing about the role of economic growth in developed countries. In general the text is rather economistic in nature. It views human beings foremost as economic assets; it states for example, that "[t]he improved health of people that stems from cleaner air, land and water benefits from and feeds back into this new growth path" (235). Moreover, the "role of the private sector in driving the green, inclusive growth agenda" (236) is emphasized and it claims that "[t]he private sector is the engine of innovative solutions and the main channel through which the benefits of growth are shared through incomes for rural and urban populations" (236). In addition, it is suggested that only economic growth can finance SD, thus the text says that "[t]he private sector is a repository of organizational and management expertise that can increase the effectiveness of service delivery, develop new business models and help finance the research and development necessary to transform growth paths" (236).

The anthropocentric view on nature is revealed in terms such as "natural resources", "water resources", "freshwater resources", "fish resources", "water management", or "natural infrastructure". Statements such as, "Bold action to improve governance of marine resources is needed to reverse the loss of habitats, restore fish stocks, and manage coastal environment so that it *provides socio-economic benefits* for communities and maintains countries' natural resource wealth" (237; my emphasis), show that nature is ascribed only instrumental instead of intrinsic value.

In respect to the issue of societal power imbalances the text calls for ensuring "that the poor and vulnerable are not further marginalized but are empowered" (236) and states that "[i]t is increasingly recognized that socially inclusive and resilient as well as environmentally sustainable patterns of growth require attention to good governance, voice and *representation for those who are marginalized from the economic and political mainstream*" (237; my emphasis). In what way this statement mirrors an attempted *passive revolution* cannot be figured out here, but would be an interesting subject for further research. The text concludes by stating that "Rio 1992 brought about a global shift in thinking – away from 'progress at all costs' toward 'inclusive growth'" (237) and by arguing that "[t]he World Bank Group itself has come a long way since 1992 – our thinking and actions have shifted enormously towards a focus on sustainable development" (237).

The input document of the IMF (IMF 2011 in Appendix) is rather short and does not reveal anything new, which is why I will address it only very briefly. The text characterizes SD as "a matter of managing structural transformation in a manner that is ecologically sustainable and compatible with advancing human development, and that its principles are applicable to all countries, whatever their stage of development" (57). In contrast to formerly analysed texts such as that of the USA, which linked SD very closely to development aid, the IMF text stresses that

"[t]he structural transformations necessary for sustainability in economic, social and environmental terms pose challenges to all countries, whatever their stage of development" (57). It affirms the IMF's commitment to Green Economy and wishes that "the UNCSD could foster greater political acceptance of the green economy by addressing explicitly the concerns expressed by some Member States—the fear that it could slow developing countries' growth trajectory, lead to green protectionism or otherwise adversely affect global and bilateral trade arrangements, or entail 'green conditionalities' as a by-product of financing arrangements" (57). Instead Rio+20 should "present the green economy concept as a series of concrete options and guiding principles for the transition to more sustainable forms of economic activity, and point to the already considerable experience that many countries have accumulated in implementing such policies *without undermining their growth potential*" (57; my emphasis). Very clearly SD and Green Economy are presented here as a development trajectory that does not conflict with economic growth. The text presents the actions undertaken by the IMF in respect to SD in the past several years and says that "the IMF has focused considerable attention on the areas of *carbon markets* and carbon taxation, energy subsidies, the *taxation of natural resources*, etc., as well as fiscal policies for correcting market externalities and creating appropriate incentives for the transition toward *more sustainable patterns of production and consumption*" (58; my emphasis). This listing of actions reflects a technocratic, economistic and anthropocentric approach to SD.

The input documents of the international institutions reveal a rather mixed picture again in comparison to the texts of the business organisations. While all in all they represent a weak SD *discourse* and an anthropocentric view of nature, the World Bank recognizes also planetary boundaries and qualifies the requested economic growth as a form of growth that is socially and environmentally sustainable and that takes resource limits and climate change into account. Moreover, its text calls for an enhanced political representation of those who are marginalized from the economic and political mainstream. I suggest that this statement could reflect an attempt for a *passive revolution* that aims to appease excluded social groups.

*Summary of the results of the analysis of the input documents*

In conclusion, the empirical analysis of the input documents of the several actors participating at Rio+20 has confirmed the hypotheses of this thesis. In the realm of Rio+20 there has been a *war of positions* between forces that are rather interested in advancing the status quo and those forces that strive for a fundamental change of the existent socio-economic order. This *war of positions* is structured around the *floating signifier* SD, which both camps struggle to define in

line with their respective *ideology* – a neo-liberal, growth oriented, technocratic *ideology* on the one hand and a Green *ideology* on the other hand. Forces that pursue the former *ideology* represent a rather weak SD *discourse*, while forces that pursue the latter *ideology* represent a rather, strong SD *discourse*. The weak SD *discourse* interprets SD as compatible with the current socio-economic order and with economic growth. Nature is valued only instrumentally insofar it provides benefits for humans. Thus an anthropocentric worldview is one *moment* in the *chain of equivalence* of this discourse. The strong SD *discourse* interprets SD as a vision for a fundamental different development path than that which prevails right now. It challenges the growthism of the neo-liberal *ideology* and emphasizes the limits of Earth's carrying capacities. Furthermore, it underlines the interconnectedness of everything that exists on Earth and ascribes intrinsic value to nature. Thus, an ecocentric worldview constitutes one *moment* in the *chain of equivalence* of this strong SD *discourse*. Hence, the *discursive* struggle on SD is not only about the right form of environmental protection, but instead about more fundamental questions about the future ethical framework and the right socio-economic order for societies.

Most of the actors focused on in this analysis pursue a rather weak and anthropocentric SD discourse (USA, EU, ICC, BASD, World Bank, and IMF), while only the three environmental NGOs (Earth Charter International, Rights of Mother Earth, and CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development) and one state (Bolivia) pursue a rather strong and ecocentric SD discourse. Given that the USA, the EU and its member states, the World Bank, the IMF and TNCs are powerful actors in backing the current global economic order, and that Bolivia, which is a developing country, and the environmental organizations are representing much less financial power and are challenging the current global economic order, it is justifiable to state that the *war of positions* occurs between a *hegemonic* and a *counter-hegemonic* discourse. Another evidence for the occurrence of a *war of positions* is the fact that *moments* of both *discourses* are included in the respective other *discourse*. However, it is evident that *moments* of the *discourse* constituting the neo-liberal *ideology* are included much more frequently in the *discourses* of the c*ounter-hegemonic* forces than it is the other way round. This for sure is a strong indication for an ongoing *passive revolution*. Compared with the Outcome Document of Rio+20, it can be stated that the hegemonic forces have prevailed in bringing forward a weak, anthropocentric SD *discourse*. *The Future We Want* comprises many more *moments* of the weak SD discourse and refers to the ecocentric worldview only in two paragraphs, which are quite detached from the rest of the document. This fact also supports the argument that a *passive revolution* is going on which incorporates ecocentric ideas into a weak SD discourse and reconciles them with the hegemonic neo-liberal, growth-oriented *ideology*.

# 6 Conclusions

This thesis has dealt with the current state of affairs of the SD *order of discourse* in respect to the anthropocentric or rather ecocentric character of the *antagonistic SD discourses* which are struggling about the meaning of SD and thereby about our future socio-economic development pattern and its underlying values.

At the time of the Rio+20 Conference, the follow-up Conference of the epoch-making *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development* in Rio de Janeiro from 1992, the state of the world and humanity is still devastating. Nina Netzer (2012: 3) sums it up as follows:

> [A] growth model based on finite, carbon-intensive resources has led to surging energy prices, dwindling resources, and severe damage to the environment and climate in many countries. In addition to the environmental crisis, during the last few years the world has experienced a financial and economic crisis as well as a structural crisis in equity and justice, including growing inequalities within and between countries as well as an increase in poverty and hunger. The number of people starving was higher in 2012 than it was in 1992, and at approximately one billion, has reached a record high although global food production can adequately cover their needs. Even though the number of people living in extreme poverty declined in the past decades, it still amounts to approximately 1.4 billion. Already today, the world population consumes more resources than can be regrown or renewed and continued population growth will exacerbate this situation (…).

If we want to change this path of destruction, exploitation and deprivation we will have to change radically the globalizing Western development paradigm which had become *hegemonic* in nature. We cannot continue to produce and consume goods the way we used to do in the past. The concept of 'sustainable development' has made the promise to reconcile economic, social and environmental matters of 'development' and lead to a way of human development that allows everyone to flourish without harming the ecosystem. However, in this thesis I have argued that the mainstream interpretation of SD does not promote this needed radical change. *Weak SD* aims merely to improve the current socio-economic order and calls for a better management of natural resources. Since it does not seriously challenge the *hegemonic development paradigm*, it does not have a *counter-hegemonic* potential, that is, it does not constitute a 'Sustainability Revolution' (Edwards 2005). However, this SD interpretation is not unchallenged. Since SD is about highly normative questions over the future socio-economic development pattern, it must be a socially *contested concept*. The *counter-hegemonic* SD interpretation is a *strong, ecocentric SD* discourse that aims to change the current socio-economic order fundamentally and calls for a radical change of the human-nature relationship.

Thus, the *human-nature relationship*, which is represented in antithetic ways in the two conflicting SD discourses, plays a crucial role in the *discursive struggle* over SD. I argue that even if *anthropocentrism* is not the only important part constituting the *hegemonic* development paradigm, it is a very essential one because it is directly linked to the values we pursue and affects our environmental behaviour. If we view humans as separate and superior from nature, then we value it only as long as we can exploit it for our own benefit and act accordingly. In contrast, if we view humans as part of nature and recognize the interconnectedness of everything that exists, then 'environmental protection' is just one part of living 'in harmony with nature' and pursued 'self-interest'. This argument has been backed up by empirical findings, which demonstrate that the distinction between anthropocentric and ecocentric values can better predict "when environmental attitudes will be translated into behaviors to support conservation" (Gagnon Thompson & Barton 1994: 150; see also Stern et al. 1993; Dunlap & Van Liere 1978; Dunlap et al. 2000) and which found a positive relationship between ratings of the interconnectedness of self and nature and biospheric environmental concerns (Schultz, P. Wesley 2001: 336). Thus, I argue that if an ecocentric conception of SD became *hegemonic*, the root causes of the environmental crisis would be tackled. However, until now the hegemonic, weak, anthropocentric SD discourse has been prevailing over the counter-hegemonic, strong, ecocentric SD discourse and even attempts to incorporate it in order to absorb its counter-hegemonic potential (in Gramscian terms a *passive revolution* is taking place).

As it can be seen here, I refer to concepts by Gramsci in order to highlight the aspect of *power relations* concerning the struggle over the meaning of SD and therefore over the right development trajectory and socio-economic order for the future of our societies. In addition, I refer to concepts by Laclau and Mouffe, and Stavrakakis in order to underline the *discursive* nature of this struggle. The ontological tension between the rather 'Materialists' Gramsci and Fairclough on the one hand and the Post-structuralists Laclau, Mouffe and Stavrakakis on the other hand, is no issue for this thesis since it focuses solely on the 'linguistic' aspects of the SD order of discourse.

I have illustrated and tested the argument outlined above empirically on the basis of documents reflecting the debate in the realm of the Rio+20 Conference which took place June 20-22, 2012 in Rio de Janeiro. I considered both the *hegemonic* discourse as well as the *counter-hegemonic discourse* on SD. I analysed and compared the Rio+20 Outcome Document with the Outcome Document of the Rio Conference in 1992 and the one of the Johannesburg Earth Summit in 2002, with the aim to be able to draw conclusions about the discursive change that has occurred between 1992 and 2012. As a result, it can be noted that all three Outcome Documents are rather anthropocentric in character and define SD as being about "managing the natural resource base for economic and social development". Paradoxically, it seems as if both

the anthropocentric as well as the ecocentric character of the SD discourse had intensified in the last 20 years. *The Future We Want* refers much more frequently to signal words of the anthropocentric SD discourse as well as to those of the ecocentric SD discourse than the two former Outcome Documents. However, all in all there is a very strong predominance of the anthropocentric, economistic and managerialist character. The linkage between economic growth and development is stronger than ever and SD is overtly presented as striving for "sustained and inclusive economic growth". The concept of Green Economy is a new popular *nodal point*, which has not existed in the former two Outcome Documents. On the other hand, the Rio+20 Outcome Document refers much more frequently to ethical terms such as 'equitable/-y' or 'just/-ice' than the two previous Outcome Documents and it includes two paragraphs which explicitly refer to *moments* of an ecocentric *discourse*. However, these two paragraphs are rather isolated and detached from the rest of the text and their spirit is not reflected in the rest of the document.

Beside the analysis and comparison of the three Outcome Documents, I focused in particular on the Rio+20 Conference. I examined several input documents which have been submitted to the UN in the run-up to of the Conference as basis for the debate about the Zero Draft, which again served as a basis for the final Outcome Document. I chose the texts submitted by the USA, the European Union and its member states, and Bolivia as representatives of state actors. As representatives of environmental non-governmental organizations I chose Earth Charter International, Rights of Mother Earth, and the CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development; as representatives of the business world I chose the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and Business Action for Sustainable Development 2012 (BASD); and lastly I chose the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as representatives of major international institutions.

The analysis of the input documents of these actors has confirmed the hypotheses of this thesis. In the realm of Rio+20 there has been a *war of positions* between forces that are rather interested in advancing the status quo and those forces that strive for a fundamental change of the existent socio-economic order. This *war of positions* is structured around the *floating signifier* SD, which both camps struggle to define in line with their respective *ideology* – a neo-liberal, growth oriented, technocratic *ideology* on the one hand and a Green *ideology* on the other hand. Forces that pursue the former *ideology* represent a rather weak SD *discourse*, while forces that pursue the latter *ideology* represent a rather, strong SD *discourse*. The weak SD *discourse* interprets SD as compatible with the current socio-economic order and with economic growth. Nature is valued only instrumentally insofar it provides benefits for humans. Thus an anthropocentric worldview is one *moment* in the *chain of equivalence* of this discourse. The strong SD *discourse* interprets SD as a vision for a fundamental different development path than that which prevails right now. It challenges the growthism of the neo-liberal *ideology* and

emphasizes the limits of Earth's carrying capacities. Furthermore, it underlines the interconnectedness of everything that exists on Earth and ascribes intrinsic value to nature. Thus, an ecocentric worldview constitutes one *moment* in the *chain of equivalence* of this strong SD *discourse*.

Most of the actors focused on in this analysis pursue a rather weak and anthropocentric SD discourse (USA, EU, ICC, BASD, World Bank, and IMF), while only the three environmental NGOs (Earth Charter International, Rights of Mother Earth, and CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development) and one state (Bolivia) pursue a rather strong and ecocentric SD discourse. Another evidence for the occurrence of a *war of positions* is the fact that *moments* of both *discourses* are included in the respective other *discourse*. However, it is evident that *moments* of the *discourse* constituting the neo-liberal *ideology* are included much more frequently in the *discourses* of the c*ounter-hegemonic* forces than it is the other way round. This for sure is a strong indication for an ongoing *passive revolution*. Compared with the Outcome Document of Rio+20, it can be stated that the hegemonic forces have prevailed in bringing forward a weak, anthropocentric SD *discourse*. As already outlined above, *The Future We Want* compromises many more *moments* of the weak SD discourse and refers to the ecocentric worldview only in two paragraphs, which are quite detached from the rest of the document. This fact also supports the argument that a *passive revolution* is going on which incorporates ecocentric ideas into a weak SD discourse and reconciles them with the hegemonic neo-liberal, growth-oriented *ideology*.

This empirical survey has been very limited in scope and depth and has to be understood first and foremost as an illustration of the argument of the thesis. For future research it would certainly be illuminating to conduct a wider analysis which for example includes all actors involved in the Rio+20 Conference or at least all actors in one actor category in order to be able to make profound statements about the role specific actors or actor groups play within the discursive struggle over SD. Furthermore, in order to be able to find out more about the distribution of power between the different actors participating in the SD *order of discourse*, it would be useful to analyse in detail transcripts of the negotiations during the Conference (in case there are some existent and available). What could additionally bring interesting insights about the SD order of discourse would be interviews with political actors from diverse positions who have been involved in the discursive struggle over SD for some time. It is certainly true that we are facing a *war of positions* and it will remain interesting to follow it and to conduct time studies about its evolution.

In conclusion, what can be stated is that we cannot yet identify exactly how the development model of the future should look like so that it is truly *sustainable* in a holistic sense.

Inevitably it will have to be the result of social struggles, negotiations and trial-and-error processes. However, what can be assumed with sufficient certainty is that a truly sustainable development cannot look like the development vision the weak SD discourse promotes. Ecocentrics argue that one essential element for bringing the 'sustainability' vision into being is to strengthen ethical and spiritual concerns within the socio-economic framework and to acknowledge that we are all part of nature and interconnected with each other. Instead of complaining about our shortcomings in the past or being afraid and lethargic in the face of apocalyptic future scenarios, we should tackle the future with hope, love, compassion and commitment. As it is said in the Earth Charter: "Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life" (Earth Charter Commission 2000). Such a transition is certainly not easy to achieve, but neither is it impossible, it only "takes courage and creativity to begin to design that future" (Welford 1997: 37).

# APPENDIX

## Documents Reviewed


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Sustainable Development (UNCSD): Input from the Staff of the International Monetary Fund, November 1, 2011', in United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development *Compilation Document Part IV. United Nations & IGOs – Submissions* (2012), 57-58, http://www.uncsd2012.org/comp_un.html (July 24, 2012).

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United States of America (2011) 'Sustainable Development for the Next Twenty Years: United States View on Rio+20: Submission to the United Nations on November 1, 2011: Our Vision', in United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development *Compilation Document Part II. Member States – Submissions*, 468-71, http://www.uncsd2012.org/comp_memberstates.html (July 24, 2012).

World Bank (2011) 'The Road to Rio+20 and Beyond: World Bank Group', in United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development *Compilation Document Part IV. United Nations & IGOs – Submissions* (2012), 234-41, http://www.uncsd2012.org/comp_un.html (July 24, 2012).

World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (WSSD) (2002) *Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development*, http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/WSSD_POI_PD/English/POI_PD.htm (July 24, 2012).

## Quantitative Surveys

**Figure 1: Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in 1992:**

| **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | | **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource/s | =3 | Harmony | =1 |
| Economic/green/sustainable/ sustained growth | 1; 0; 0; 0=1 | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life | =0 |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | =0 | Mother Earth | =0 |
| Manage/-ment | =3 | Intrinsic value | =0 |
| Technological/-y | =4 | Ethic/-al | =0 |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | =0 | Spiritual/-ity | =0 |
| Green economy | =0 | Limit/-s | 1 (-1="limits of national jurisdiction" )=0 |

**Figure 2: Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development in 2002:**

| **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | | **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource/s | =5 | Harmony | =0 |
| Economic/green/sustainable/ sustained growth | =0 | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life | 0; 1=1 |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | =0 | Mother Earth | =0 |
| Manage/-ment | =0 | Intrinsic value | =0 |
| Technological/-y | =2 | Ethic/-al | =0 |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | 1; 0=1 | Spiritual/-ity | =0 |
| Green economy | =0 | Limit/-s | =0 |

**Figure 3: The Future We Want in 2012:**

| **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | | **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource/s | =71 | Harmony | 4 (-1="in harmony with the Convention" )=3 |
| Economic/green/sustainable/ sustained growth | 20;0;0;0= 20 | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life | =0 |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | 28; 0=28 | Mother Earth | =1 |
| Manage/-ment | =59 | Intrinsic value | =1 |
| Technological/-y | =61 | Ethic/-al | =0 |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | 6;0=6 | Spiritual/-ity | =0 |
| Green economy | =23 | Limit/-s | =0 |

**Figure 4: Frequency of signal words referring to the multiple crises, the socio-economic order, and anthropocentric or ecocentric values in the three Outcome Documents:**

| | Rio 1992 Outcome Document | Johannesburg 2002 Outcome Document | Rio+20 Outcome Document |
|---|---|---|---|
| Unsustainable/-ility | =1 | =1 | =2 |
| Patterns of production and consumption | =1 | =1 | =8 |
| (Environmental) crisis, crises | =0 | =0 | 1; 2=3 |
| Root/structural causes | =0 | =0 | =2 |
| Hegemonic/-y, dominant/-ce | =0 | =0 | =0 |
| Marginalised | =0 | =0 | =0 |
| Alternative | =0 | =0 | 2 (-2="alternative routes"; "safer alternatives to hazardous chemicals")=0 |
| Anthropocentric, ecocentric, biocentric | =0 | =0 | =0 |
| Equitable/-y, just/-ice | 2; 0= 2 | 2; 0=2 | 23; 9=32 |

**Figure 5: USA:**

| **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | | **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource/s | =17 | Harmony | =0 |
| Economic/green/sustainable/ sustained growth | 7; 0; 0; 0=7 | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life | =0 |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | 11; 0=11 | Mother Earth | =0 |
| Manage/-ment | =13 | Intrinsic value | =0 |
| Technological/-y | =13 | Ethic/-al | =0 |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | 1; 4=5 | Spiritual/-ity | =0 |
| Green economy | =7 | Limit/-s | =0 |

**Figure 6: European Union and its member states:**

| **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | | **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource/s | =42 | Harmony | =0 |
| Economic/green/sustainable/ sustained growth | 2; 2; 1; 0=5 | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life | =0 |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | 28; 0=28 | Mother Earth | =0 |
| Manage/-ment | =42 | Intrinsic value | =0 |
| Technological/-y | =12 | Ethic/-al | =0 |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | 3; 0=3 | Spiritual/-ity | =0 |
| Green economy | =37 | Limit/-s | 1 (+1="earth's limited natural resources")= 2 |

**Figure 7: Bolivia:**

| **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | | **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource/s | =12 | Harmony | =8 |
| Economic/green/sustainable/ sustained growth | 2; 0; 0; 0=2 | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life | =0 |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | 1; 0=1 | Mother Earth | =6 |
| Manage/-ment | =4 | Intrinsic value | =0 |
| Technological/-y | =11 | Ethic/-al | =2 |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | =0 | Spiritual/-ity | =0 |
| Green economy | =10 | Limit/-s | =5 |

**Figure 8: Frequency of signal words referring to the multiple crises, the socio-economic order, and anthropocentric or ecocentric values in the three state input documents:**

| | USA | EU and its member states | Bolivia |
|---|---|---|---|
| Unsustainable/-ility | =0 | =3 | =2 |
| Patterns of production and consumption | =0 | =6 | 1(+2="overconsumption", "system of consumption, waste and luxury") =3 |
| (Environmental) crisis, crises | =0 | 2 (-1="in periods of crisis"); 1=2 | 6; 2=8 |
| Root/structural causes | =0 | =0 | =0 |
| Hegemonic/-y, dominant/-ce | =0 | =0 | =0 |
| Marginalised | =0 | =2 | =1 |
| Alternative | 1 (-1="alternative proposals")=0 | 1 (-1="alternative water supply")=0 | =1 |
| Anthropocentric, ecocentric, biocentric | =0 | =0 | 1; 0; 0=1 |
| Equitable/-y, just/-ice | 0; 1 (-1="not just")=0 | 5; 9=14 | 5; 7=12 |

**Figure 9: Earth Charter International:**

| **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | | **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource/s | =4 | Harmony | =0 |
| Economic/green/sustainable/ sustained growth | =0 | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life | 1; 10=11 |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | 2; 1=2 | Mother Earth | =0 |
| Manage/-ment | =1 | Intrinsic value | =0 |
| Technological/-y | =2 | Ethic/-al | =9 |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | =0 | Spiritual/-ity | =8 |
| Green economy | =5 | Limit/-s | =1 |

**Figure 10: Rights of Mother Earth:**

| **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | | **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource/s | =0 | Harmony | =3 |
| Economic/green/sustainable/ sustained growth | =0 | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life | =0 |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | =0 | Mother Earth | =33 |
| Manage/-ment | =0 | Intrinsic value | =0 |
| Technological/-y | =0 | Ethic/-al | =0 |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | =0 | Spiritual/-ity | =0 |
| Green economy | =0 | Limit/-s | =0 |

**Figure 11: CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development:**

| **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | | **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource/s | =6 | Harmony | =1 |
| Economic/green/sustainable/ sustained growth | = 0 | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life | 3; 1= 4 |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | 1; 0=1 | Mother Earth | =0 |
| Manage/-ment | =0 | Intrinsic value | =0 |
| Technological/-y | =5 | Ethic/-al | =4 |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | =0 | Spiritual/-ity | =0 |
| Green economy | =7 | Limit/-s | =1 |

**Figure 12: Frequency of signal words referring to the multiple crises, the socio-economic order, and anthropocentric or ecocentric values in the three environmental organization's input documents:**

| | Earth Charter International | Rights of Mother Earth | CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development |
|---|---|---|---|
| Unsustainable/-ility | =2 | =0 | =1 |
| Patterns of production and consumption | 3 (+1= "overconsumption")=4 | =0 | =2 |
| (Environmental) crisis, crises | =0 | =0 | =0 |
| Root/structural causes | =0 | =0 | =1 |
| Hegemonic/-y, dominant/-ce | =0 | =0 | =0 |
| Marginalised | =0 | =0 | =0 |
| Alternative | =2 | =0 | =0 |
| Anthropocentric, ecocentric, biocentric | =0 | =0 | =0 |
| Equitable/-y, just/-ice | 8; 19=27 | 0; 1 (-1="just as")=0 | 6; 5=11 |

**Figure 13: International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)**

| **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | | **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource/s | =7 | Harmony | =0 |
| Economic/green/sustainable/ sustained growth | 3; 3; 1; 0=7 | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life | =0 |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | 5; 0=5 | Mother Earth | =0 |
| Manage/-ment | =0 | Intrinsic value | =0 |
| Technological/-y | =3 | Ethic/-al | =0 |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | =0 | Spiritual/-ity | =0 |
| Green economy | =43 | Limit/-s | =0 |

**Figure 14: Business Action for Sustainable Development 2012 (BASD)**

| **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | | **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource/s | =4 | Harmony | =0 |
| Economic/green/sustainable/ sustained growth | 1; 2; 0; 0=3 | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life | =0 |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | 2; 0=2 | Mother Earth | =0 |
| Manage/-ment | =5 | Intrinsic value | =0 |
| Technological/-y | =4 | Ethic/-al | =0 |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | =0 | Spiritual/-ity | =0 |
| Green economy | =19 | Limit/-s | =0 |

**Figure 15: Frequency of signal words referring to the multiple crises, the socio-economic order, and anthropocentric or ecocentric values in the three environmental organization's input documents:**

| | **BASD** | **ICC** |
|---|---|---|
| Unsustainable/-ility | =0 | =0 |
| Patterns of production and consumption | =1 | =1 |
| (Environmental) crisis, crises | =0 | =0 |
| Root/structural causes | =0 | =0 |
| Hegemonic/-y, dominant/-ce | =0 | =0 |
| Marginalised | =0 | =0 |
| Alternative | =0 | =0 |
| Anthropocentric, ecocentric, biocentric | =0 | =0 |
| Equitable/-y, just/-ice | =0 | 1; 0=1 |

**Figure 16:World Bank**

| **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | | **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource/s | =26 | Harmony | =0 |
| Economic/green/sustainable/ sustained growth | 5; 15; 0; 0=20 | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life | 1 (-1="interconnected patterns of development"); 0=0 |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | 21; 0=21 | Mother Earth | =0 |
| Manage/-ment | =28 | Intrinsic value | =0 |
| Technological/-y | =8 | Ethic/-al | =0 |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | 4; 0=4 | Spiritual/-ity | =0 |
| Green economy | =4 | Limit/-s | 2 (-1=used as a verb)=1 |

**Figure 17: International Monetary Fund (IMF)**

| **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'weak' SD position** | | **Frequency of signal words which indicate a 'strong' SD position** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource/s | =6 | Harmony | =0 |
| Economic/green/sustainable/ sustained growth | =0 | Interconnected/-ness, Community of life | =0 |
| Efficient/-cy, eco-efficient/-cy | =0 | Mother Earth | =0 |
| Manage/-ment | =0 | Intrinsic value | =0 |
| Technological/-y | =1 | Ethic/-al | =0 |
| Modern/-ize/-ation | =0 | Spiritual/-ity | =0 |
| Green economy | =4 | Limit/-s | 1 (-1=used as a verb)=0 |

**Figure 18: Frequency of signal words referring to the multiple crises, the socio-economic order, and anthropocentric or ecocentric values in the two international institution's input documents:**

| | **World Bank** | **IMF** |
|---|---|---|
| Unsustainable/-ility | =1 | =0 |
| Patterns of production and consumption | =1 | =1 |
| (Environmental) crisis, crises | 1; 5=6 | =1 |
| Root/structural causes | =0 | =0 |
| Hegemonic/-y, dominant/-ce | =0 | =0 |
| Marginalised | =2 | =0 |
| Alternative | =1 | =0 |
| Anthropocentric, ecocentric, biocentric | =0 | =0 |
| Equitable/-y, just/-ice | 8; 2 (-2 " adverbs)=8 | 1; 1 (-1= used as adverb)=1 |

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