

‘Sustainable Development’ – local variants of a global discourse

Short description: The concept of ‘Sustainable Development’ (SD) has grown into a universal role model for shaping future developments on a global level as well as a guideline for concrete political action from the national down to the local level. SD is a highly illusive concept that, though having been introduced already a few decades ago, is still far from definitional closure. Following Brand (2015), the concept itself is widely accepted as a normative guiding principle, however, fundamental differences appear at the implementation level. “The debate on sustainable development thus can be analyzed as a controversially structured, politically contested *field of discourse*.”

In the scholarly literature, there are already quite a number of studies that have analyzed SD from a discourse-analytical perspective. Many of those studies are focused on the global arena, often targeted at flagship events or processes, like the seminal Brundtland commission, the UNCED conference in Rio 1992, the debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or the recent adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There are also several studies on the SD discourse in countries from the Global North (esp. Germany). However, there are still research gaps in at least two respects: First, there are only few studies on the discourse of SD (or related/competing concepts) in countries of the Global South. Second, there are few studies that take a historic perspective, i.e. that reconstruct discursive shifts over a more extended period of time.

Master theses in this field of research could, for example:

- develop discourse-analytical accounts of selected countries (of the Global North or Global South);
- provide comparisons of SD discourses between a (small) set of countries;
- reconstruct discursive shifts in selected countries over the last few decades;
- analyze and compare different discursive venues (e.g. framings of SD in public policy, civil society arenas, the media etc.);
- analyze interlinkages between national SD discourses and the global debate (e.g. with a focus on the question of how global concepts and debates influenced the national/local debate);
- analyze the interlinkages between the concept of SD and related and/or competing concepts (like “Green Economy”, “Green Growth”, “De-growth”, “Good Life” etc.) – on various political levels and/or in various political arenas.

Methods: discourse analytical methods

References:

- Brand, Karl-Werner (2015): Sustainable Development. In: Wright, James D. (ed.) International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences [2nd ed.]. Oxford: Elsevier. 812-816.
- Dryzek, John S. (1997): *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*. Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press.

Starting date: at any time

For how many students this topic is available: several

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