

Green Faith?

The role of faith-based actors in the global sustainable development discourse

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The global environmental crisis is a crisis of modern society, which raises fundamental ethical questions on progress, global justice and the meaning of sustainable development. Against this background, normative contests and ethical questions in global sustainability governance move to the center of attention. Here, scholars have widely discussed the role of environmental NGOs, in general. Interestingly, faith-based actors (FBAs) have only attracted scant attention so far. Yet, they actively participate in international environmental and development negotiations as well as public debates on sustainable development. More importantly, religious belief systems may well provide visionary ideas on sustainability. This is especially the case, when it comes to alternative vision of a 'good life', i.e. one that may be less carbon- and resource intensive.

The present paper aims to identify the relevant norms and ideas in FBAs' communications and to contrast them with other existing ideas on sustainable development. On the basis of a content analysis of FBA's submissions in the context of the UN Summit Rio+20, the paper asks: How do FBAs frame sustainable development and what visions of the good life are contained in current articulations of FBAs with respect to sustainable development? In what way do FBAs ideas on sustainable development differ from other actors' ideas? With such an analysis, the paper creates a foundation for further inquiries into the influence of FBAs on sustainable development discourse and governance.

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“When governments, civil society and particularly religious communities work together, transformation can take place. Faiths and religions are an essential part of that equation. Indeed, the world’s faith communities occupy a unique position in discussions on the fate of our planet and the accelerating impacts of climate change.” (Ban Ki-Moon 2009)

Introduction²

Environmental pollution, climate change, desertification, and overfishing are among the biggest challenges of our time. The global character of the ecological crisis has led to a vast search for scientific, economic or technical solutions that could bring about the ‘great transformation’ towards more sustainability. For over 40 years, governments, scientists, international institutions and civil society have been generating knowledge in order to find political courses of action that might stop growing environmental destruction. Yet, the ecological crisis poses not only a scientific and political problem. It is also a moral-ethical challenge to global society and “must be understood as a crisis of meaning” (Litfin 2010, 117f). Al Gore even posits that in light of the magnitude of the global climate catastrophe, a “moral and spiritual revolution” is necessary (Gore 2006).

Secularization theory argues that religion has lost in importance in society through modernization processes (Berger 1969; Norris and Inglehart 2004). However, postulations such as Al Gore’s indicate that religion may indeed play an important role in political debates such as on the environmental crisis. This corresponds with Jürgen Habermas’ thesis that religions may provide a rich normative resource for secular society (Habermas 2001). Actually, it seems that religions have entered their “ecological phase” (Tucker 2003) and increasingly acknowledge their responsibility for the fate of the environment: For instance, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I. is also called the ‘green Patriarch’ due to his environmental engagement and in his inauguration speech the new Pope Francis I. continued Pope Benedict’s attention to environmental issues and called for the preservation of creation and environment.

When it comes to normative concerns, governance scholars tend to ascribe an important role to civil society, specifically non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Interestingly, while the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in global environmental governance has been widely recognized, religious environmentalism has only attracted scant attention of political science scholars so far. Yet, simply considering the number of religious adherents worldwide (the followers of the three largest religions – Christianity, Islam and Hinduism – alone make up two third of the global population; Gardner 2003, 154f), religious influence on environmental discourses is potentially significant. In fact, since the advent of transnational environmental problems, faith-based actors (FBAs) have engaged in the debate on the environment. Moreover, global environmental and social problems interact in a multitude of ways, and FBAs have always been active in global debates on development, of course. Indeed, in global sustainability governance, FBAs actively participate in international political negotiations as well as public debates. Their special normative foundation may enable them to set an influential ethical agenda (McElroy 2001, 56). This is especially the case in so far as sustainable development fundamentally is about the question of ‘the good life’. And it is here that the faiths clearly have something to contribute.

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One cannot assume that FBAs will necessarily have a positive influence on sustainable development discourse, of course, or promote ideas of ‘the good life’ that uniformly correspond to sustainable development understandings and objectives. After all, centuries of faiths in different religious belief systems have not prevented us from getting to this point of ecological crisis. To the contrary, religious arguments can be and have been used in pursuit of goals at odds with sustainable development objectives. Moreover, even if the norms and ideas presently promoted by FBAs in the global governance arena were visionary with respect to sustainable development, they may not be able to garner sufficient discursive power to obtain real influence, in the end. Yet, “[i]f the story implicit in modern secularism is ecologically unsustainable, there is an enormous need to move towards a new story” (Litfin 2003, 33) and faith based actors may be able to provide some of the ideas and visions important for such alternative stories.

Accordingly, scholarly attention to the ideas promoted by FBAs in global sustainability governance seems more than appropriate. Two steps are necessary to assess this influence. First, relevant norms and ideas that are reflected in FBA’s communications (and practices) need to be identified and contrasted with other existing ideas on sustainable development and the good life, in order to obtain an idea of the potential direction of this influence. Secondly, developments in sustainable development governance need to be explored against the background of FBAs’ communications to gather an understanding of the extent of their influence. The present paper takes on this task. Based on a content analysis of FBA’s submissions in the context of the UN Summit Rio+20, it identifies relevant norms and ideas and contrasts them to other existing ideas on sustainable development. Specifically, it asks: What visions of sustainable development and the good life are contained in current articulations of faith-based actors with respect to sustainable development? In what way do FBAs ideas on sustainable development differ from other actors’ ideas? With this analysis, the paper creates a first inroad to assessments of FBAs potential discursive influence in sustainability governance.

The paper will proceed as follows: First, we will present the theoretical framework of our analysis, delineating the role of discursive power by non-state actors, the constructed nature of sustainable development, and the role of the good life in this context. Secondly, we present our methodological approach, describing why and how we use qualitative content analysis to analyze which documents. Thirdly, we present the empirical results of this analysis before the concluding discussion summarizes and interprets our results and identifies implications for science and policy.

Discursive Power, FBAs, and Sustainable Development

The governance approach attributes substantial political influence to non-state actors. Importantly, these actors do not just achieve political influence via state-actors, i.e. through lobbying and other forms of exerting influence on political decision makers and bureaucrats, from the perspective of this approach. Rather, non-state actors also shape politics and policy in a more direct way, for instance, via taking an active role in shaping public ideas and beliefs as well as setting, implementing and/or enforcing rules and regulations themselves.

Numerous studies applying a governance perspective have described and assessed the political roles of business (Levy and Newell 2005; Falkner 2009; Fuchs 2007; 2013) or of civil society (Florini 2000; Corell and Betsill 2001; Scholte 2004; Holzscheiter 2005; Crouch 2008). They have delineated the various facets of the political power of non-state actors in today’s globalized world and differentiated between actor specific and structural determinants as well as between material and ideational sources of this power (Fuchs and Glaab 2011). While demonstrating the massive political influence business actors, specifically transnational corporations (TNCs), have been able to obtain

on the basis of their material resources as well as increasing discursive power (Fuchs 2013), scholars have also pointed out that civil society actors potentially still have substantial influence on the basis of their political legitimacy. The latter, in turn, results from the perception that these actors pursue public rather than private interests, while politicians and economic actors often are assumed to pursue private gain in the form of power or financial profit. Accordingly, the scientific and political debates have also frequently tended to ascribe a positive contribution to sustainability governance to civil society actors.³ Such moral legitimacy could be attributed to FBAs, in particular, given their orientation towards transcendental belief-systems and focus on the most fundamental values and norms.

One could ask, of course, whether FBAs do play a political role just as other civil society actors in ‘secularized politics’. After all, secularization theory has made the comprehensive assumption that religion is less and less important in modern society (Berger 1969; Norris and Inglehart 2004). It assumes that religion is retreating into the private sphere and that the public-political and religious spaces are fundamentally separate. Hence, religion is not political and can only contribute within certain political and social settings to political debates. According to Litfin, the secular worldview reduces reality to matter and narrates the relationship between humanity and nature as dichotomous and supposedly independent of religious views and arguments (Litfin 2003, 30ff). Indeed, the supposed separation between religion and politics seems particularly relevant in global sustainability governance: first, because the globalized and transnational character of the environment is debated in supranational fora that are dominated by a cosmopolitan secular elite (Berger 1999, 11; cf. Bush 2007) and second, because science tends to play an important role in environmental debates, and natural scientists have the image of viewing religion as irrational and unhelpful in solving problems (Wilson 2012, 21).

However, a growing literature has questioned the assumed differentiation between religion and politics and the perception of politics as a secular space (Kubáľková 2000; Kratochwil 2005; Barbato and Kratochwil 2009). They challenge secularization theory with the claim that religion has not disappeared in politics. Rather, it becomes increasingly de-privatized (Casanova 1994). In this view, religion is part of the public sphere and questions dominant social and political forces, beliefs and values. Hence, scholars see the public political debates reflecting signs of the religious and showing an increasing mix of religious and secular arguments. According to them, the “politicization of religion” does not only play out in political mobilization of religious values in local contexts, but similarly through articulation in the global sphere (Minkenberg and Willems 2003). They argue that religious arguments are being made and accommodated in the public sphere and need to be analyzed as such (Audi 1993; Audi and Wolterstorff 1997). Indeed, we can notice many voices of faith-based institutions and actors in political debates in general, and in sustainability related debates in particular.

Accordingly, the potential contribution of FBAs to global governance in general, and global sustainability governance, in particular, deserves our attention. This is even more the case, since scholars ascribe increasing importance to discursive power, the potential strong suite of FBAs in times of globalized and mediatized, or even solely performed governance (Crouch 2008). Discursive power is the power to shape governance processes and outcomes via the shaping of relevant norms and ideas. It intervenes at the earliest stages of the political process, i.e. before the formation of

³ Such an a priori ascription of a positive influence of civil society actors on sustainable development is problematic, however (Frantz and Fuchs Forthcoming). Infrastructure development necessary for the German energy transition towards renewable energy sources, for instance, frequently faces local opposition, best explained with the well-known NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) effects. Moreover, with business and industry oriented non-governmental organizations (BINGOs) business actors increasingly take on the mask of civil society to benefit from the perceived legitimacy of the latter.

interests, as it shapes the construction of the identities of political actors, problems and solutions, as well as of what is considered political and what private as such. Accordingly, this form of power is highly comprehensive and pervasive, hardly visible and impossible to measure, at the same time.

The importance of discursive power becomes particularly clear, when we focus on sustainable development as political objective. The concept of sustainable development was placed on the international political agenda by the Brundtland Commission and its identification of the need to pursue intra- and intergenerational justice with a fostering of ecological and social objectives in conjunction with economic ones (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). While soon becoming extremely popular in political discourse, the concept has invited continuous discursive contests regarding its meaning. This is partly due to vagueness, a characteristic frequently associated with broad conceptual norms and likely necessary for their popularity. It is also due to the potential impact of the concept, or rather the challenges it entails for current patterns of societal and economic organization. In other words, when it comes to the pursuit of sustainable development a lot of actors potentially have a lot at stake.

Scholars have analyzed discursive contests regarding the construction of sustainable development in many ways. Hajer (1995) laid important groundwork here by analyzing the role of story lines and narratives in these discursive contests. Other scholars deconstructed the use of 'sustainable development' by various state and non-state actors and in various policy areas (Fuchs and Lorek 2005; Kalfagianni 2006; Graf 2013; Feist and Fuchs 2013). What is missing so far, however, is an analysis of the contribution of FBAs to the discursive construction of sustainable development. This is surprising as the integration of science and religion may give an integral ecological perspective and a better understanding of sustainability politics (Litfin 2003).

Indeed, a simple secular world view can be associated with many of the sources of the current ecological crisis:

Modernity's emblematic faith in technology, the doctrine of progress, the centrality of instrumental reason, the sanctity of individual freedom, the denial of the sacred – all of these have been suggested as sources of an environmentally destructive cultural tendency (ibid., 30).

Here, the potential contribution of religion to environmental governance becomes clear. It can bring ethical arguments back into the global sustainability discourse, thereby potentially enriching the secularization perspective. Moreover, religious views and arguments perhaps can help bridge the knowledge action gap and activate individual sustainable behavior (Gottlieb 2006; Wolf and Gjerris 2009; Peterson 2010). In pursuit of such objectives, we observe FBAs aiming to influence environmental negotiations and agendas, individually or in cooperation with environmental NGOs or states, resulting even in joint declarations.

The neglect of the role of FBAs in global sustainability governance is particularly surprising, moreover, as their normative objectives often would appear to go to the core of sustainable development as such: the pursuit of the good life. As pointed out above, the core of sustainable development is the idea of inter- and intragenerational justice. Its basis is the wish to allow all human beings now and in the future a life in dignity, which in turn requires the provision of a minimum in resources. This wish relates to millennia old and ongoing inquiries into the characteristics of a good life and the determinants of individual and societal capabilities for leading such a life (e.g. Aristotle and Irwin 2008; Nussbaum 2003). Not surprisingly, important representatives of different faiths have contributed their thoughts and ideas to the inquiries (Dalai Lama and Hopkins 2003).

A focus on ideas about the good life in different faiths' communications about sustainable development highlights that there is not one universal vision about the good life in particular or sustainable development in general, even (or especially) among the different faiths. In fact, some ideas promoted by some faiths, such as a focus on the afterlife instead of a sense of mission in this life or, at the extreme, the promise of rewards in the afterlife for killing people, would contradict with ideas of a good life held by members of another (or even the same) faith. The question to what extent universalistic statements about the nature and determinants of a good life can be made has been highly controversial, in general. Accordingly, our inquiry into references of FBAs to the good life and sustainable development is not motivated by the expectation to identify one coherent vision or position. Rather, we expect to find many different, sometimes corresponding or complementary and sometimes contradictory narratives, which in combination give a first idea of FBA's potential discursive influence on global sustainability governance in the context of such visions.

More fundamentally, we do not assume that FBAs always pursue objectives in accordance with sustainable development. There is ambivalence in religious traditions' relationship with the environment: on the one hand, they may contribute to an environmental ethic, on the other hand the "dark side of religious tradition" shows responsibility for the environmental crisis (Tucker 2003, 19). Therefore "blanket claims to environmental purity" have to be critically examined, as most religions have a mixed record with respect to ecological behavior (ibid., 25).⁴ Furthermore, FBAs may well support local interests in their fight against political strategies pursuing sustainability related objectives. However, such examples are more likely below the national level and therefore less probable in our case. Yet, more in general, environmental and social sustainability objectives sometimes are at odds with each other, and even different social or environmental objectives may sometimes conflict, so that the promotion of some sustainability related objectives by FBAs (and others) could work against other sustainability related objectives.

Still, in times of an ecological crisis that calls for a normative reorientation in the eyes of many observers, FBAs may present a source of inspiration. Accordingly, we are interested in gaining a better understanding of how they contribute to global sustainability governance via the discursive construction of sustainable development and references to the good life in concrete international political processes. In this paper, we therefore pursue a qualitative content analysis of their submissions in the context of the Rio+20 summit and compare it to submissions by other civil society actors as well as the Rio+20 outcome document. This analysis does not allow us to concretely measure the actual discursive power, i.e. achieved influence of FBAs. However, it provides us with a first idea of the potential direction of this influence and its normative foundations, as well as preliminary insights on its potential relevance for global sustainability governance.

Methodological Approach

With the concept of discursive power, we take a constructivist view on the world. From this perspective, meaning finds its expression in discourses that are mediated through language. Discursive constructions can be found in texts but also performances, or discursive practices. Therefore, we look for FBAs ideas of the good life in sustainable development communications. In order to compile the material for analysis, the list of organizations at the Rio+20 conference that formally submitted an input document for the compilation of a draft outcome document for the

⁴ See for instance, the article of Lynn White (1967), which sees the Judeo-Christian tradition responsible for today's environmental destruction or the debate on evangelical Christians in the United States, who tend to be sceptic about the existence of anthropogenic climate change (Carr et al. 2012).

conference was searched for those groups that could clearly be identified as religious, faith-based or spiritual in title or own mission-statement. Of a total of 677 submissions that were recorded, 73% (493) came from major groups that comprised non-governmental actors. Of these, those 17 documents that were submitted by faith-based actors were selected.⁵ This number may look small at first sight, yet, most of the FBA submissions do not represent the view of single organizations, but are joint submissions of a consortium of organizations which encompass all national subgroups of one global organization or even an alliance of groups of the same faith from different countries. Particularly Christian consortiums such as the World Council of Churches or the ACT Alliance (Alliance of Churches Together) represent far more than hundred national and local member organizations.⁶ As the second analytical step will entail a comparison of FBA submissions to those by other civil society a representative sample of 17 documents of non FBA civil society organizations was chosen, as well, covering global and local organizations from the global North and South that engage with the issues of human rights, the environment or development.

The compiled material was analyzed in a qualitative content analysis. The submissions address very different themes. For the purposes of this paper, we therefore concentrate on discussions on sustainable development and the purpose of the green economy in FBA's and other civil society organizations' submissions and on how their conceptions of sustainable development and justice provide certain narratives on the good life. Codes were developed from the material ('in-vivo'), which were organized into different thematic codes and linked to further sub-codes in the process of the analysis. .

Lastly, these submissions were compared with the conference outcome document 'The Future We Want' that was adopted by the General Assembly, as "[t]he most direct indication of NGO influence is indeed whether the final agreement reflects NGO goals" (Betsill and Corell 2001, 75). To that end, the thematic codes generated in the analysis of the submissions by FBAs and other civil society actors were applied to the Rio+20 outcome document.. This comparison, then, gives a first indication of the normative impetus of faith-based actors in the context of global sustainability governance, its potential difference to other civil society actors, and the ability of FBAs to exercise discursive power.

Faith-based Actors, Sustainable Development and the Rio+20 Summit

The UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) took place twenty years after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, the largest global gathering on sustainable development issues that had ever taken place. Rio+20 revived the debate on sustainable development and aimed at developing new binding frameworks to pursue that goal. It posed an important opportunity for civil society to take part in and exercise influence on the political debate on sustainability. Among the thousands of NGO participants, FBAs took part in the debate, too, through participation, organization of side-events and pre-conference meetings, or the submission of reports and recommendations. The Rio+20 conference focused on two major themes that it asked the submitting parties to address: it

⁵ Many more faith-based organizations issued statements in context of the negotiations in form of press releases, reports on their organization's websites or documented organized side-events at the venue. Yet, in our analysis only those articulations were of importance that were formally submitted within the policy process with the direct intention of influencing the outcome document of Rio+20. Furthermore, collaborations with other NGOs that were recorded under a secular mission statement or statements of religiously oriented states are not taken into account at this point.

⁶ A majority of eleven submissions were presented by Christian groups, only four were interfaith statements, and Buddhist and Baha'i faith groups were only represented in one statement. This difference in representation reflects the difference in tendency to formally organize and be involved in institutionalized political settings between the faiths. We have to keep in mind, therefore, that our results can only speak to the potential influence of such FBAs in such a specific political context.

aimed at establishing a concept of green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and at building an institutional framework for sustainable development that would facilitate the implementation of sustainability goals.

Ideas and arguments in FBA's submissions

At the Rio+20 conference, FBAs took up the given themes in their submissions. Important for the purpose of our inquiry, they also reflected on what the pursuit of a 'good life' means by engaging with different interpretations and practical considerations of the terms sustainable development and green economy. Particularly FBAs' engagement with sustainable development touches upon some major constitutive philosophical questions on the meaning of the good life. Specifically, FBAs emphasize a different conception of sustainable development than established at the Rio Conference of 1992. While the Rio approach integrates economic, environmental and social dimensions of development, most of the FBAs argue for the integration of another dimension, which encompasses "moral, ethical and spiritual principles" (Baha'I International Community 2011). The Holy See argues that it is crucial to take into account "the material well-being of society and the spiritual and ethical values which give meaning to material and technological progress" (Holy See 2011), while Earth Charter International (2011) focuses on the integration of "Pneuma (spirit)", Caritas Oceania (2011) on "ethical and spiritual questions", and the Soetendorp Institute (2011) and the Interfaith Consortium for Ecological Civilization (ICEC) (2011) emphasize "the spiritual dimension of sustainability". These perspectives support a holistic understanding of sustainable development that interrelates material and immaterial values – in the words of the Earth Charter Initiative –, "when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more" (Earth Charter International 2011).

Most FBA statements analyzed base their argument on specific justice principles. By decentering the debate from structural conditions of sustainable development towards individual conditions of development, the human becomes the center of reference. Therewith, they re-emphasize the first principle of the Rio Declaration of 1992, which stated that "human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development" (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) 1992). Likewise, most statements acknowledge that "sustainable development is first and foremost about people" (CIDSE 2011). The human as the point of reference in sustainable development, in turn, brings forth a widely shared understanding of justice which is based in rights-based approaches. This frames the discussion on sustainable development as a matter of human rights and therefore calls for an "integrated human rights framework" (World Council of Churches and Lutheran World Federation 2011).

In contrast to an overarching focus on the human dimension of development in FBAs' submissions, only few statements argue for an equal focus on nature's intrinsic rights. The United Methodist Church, for instance, argues for a planetary vision in which humans and earth are in a balanced and inclusive relationship as "earth rights are human rights" (United Methodist Church 2011) and Maryknoll Sisters maintain to broaden "human rights to include earth rights" (Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic 2011). Yet, in most submissions the focus is clearly human-centered and securing human rights stands out in dealings with the environment. This is also represented in denominations such as the "human family" (Holy See 2011; Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic 2011; Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values 2011) "one human family" (CIDSE 2011), "community of life" or "Earth community" (Earth Charter International 2011), which show the importance of a basic sense of belonging to a human family in ideas on the good life. Linking sustainability with justice issues such as human rights and particularly human development

simultaneously is used in the submissions to emphasize the right to development and puts the well-being, fate and dignity of the human at the center of their concern.⁷ Human well-being and social justice are core principles of a good life that set the bottom-line for any further political and economic action and are linked to options for the disadvantaged and their empowerment in the submissions.

This sense of belonging leads to arguments for a shared responsibility of human kind and the international community for taking action. Yet, the imperative to take responsibility derives from different forms of reasoning in different submissions: Some statements clearly present a religious reasoning by referring to a religious system of order and a religious conscience such as the principle of compassion, the “sacred duty to lead through example” (Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values 2011) or human stewardship to take care of God’s creation (Coalition of Faith-based Organizations). Yet, other statements’ argument for a shared responsibility is reasoned with a moral imperative based on a secular conviction to preserve human dignity and strive for justice and fairness in development that is based on moral-ethical imperatives without religious reference. Though providing different reasoning, almost all submissions place the human at the center of sustainable development discourses, as pointed out above. This enables focusing on other, related ethical issues of concern such as questions of justice and fairness, options for the disadvantaged and their empowerment, which all play an important role in the submissions. FBAs particularly want the issue of equity in sustainable development to be practically addressed by the international community.

However, the discussions on the green economy, which some FBAs questioned as such while others discuss its applicability from an ethical perspective, reflect the focus on justice and human well-being. The main suggestions on green economy found in the submissions are related to its social objectives and consequences for individuals based on the proposed rights-based approaches. FBAs particularly relate the green economy concept to issues of justice and fairness and make the establishment of a just and fair economy a major concern. Accordingly, “economic justice must be at the foundation of discussions of the economy” (United Methodist Church 2011), which “requires the elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty” (Baha’I International Community 2011) in a green economy. Particularly Christian organizations argue “that a green and just economy has to be measured according to the well-being of all and not just a few” (World Council of Churches) and that it needs to improve “human well-being and social equity” (APRODEV and ACT Alliance 2011). Therewith, most of the submissions proceed from the ethical point-of-view that an economy also has to pursue social objectives and cannot be seen as divorced from human wellbeing.

However, while clearly subscribing to the pursuit of a just economy, the economic system that rests on economic growth is not widely questioned as such. Yet, some groups, such as the Catholic alliance CIDSE, contest the concept as such and warn that “a focus on ‘Green Economy’ should not become a substitute for the objective of Sustainable Development” (CIDSE 2011). It questions its function as the main tool towards sustainable development and argues instead that “a true reflection on Sustainable Development should include a questioning of existing economic trends and shouldn’t be equated with the notion of sustainable growth” (ibid.). Other organizations similarly argue that the themes of green economy and sustainable development seem to lack coherence and warn against the replacement of one term with the other (Edmund Rice International 2011). In contrast, most organizations do not see economic growth as the problem, as “[t]he economy needs to generate benefits. The concern is about equity and shared benefits” (Coalition of Faith-based Organizations). Similarly the United Methodist Church sees economic

justice as the consideration of the well-being of the poor and vulnerable in any notion of economic growth (United Methodist Church 2011). Most of the organizations, therefore, look for ways how “pillars of sustainable development can be successfully integrated” in the green economy (World Vision International 2011), and make economic justice a principle of the economic system.

These different evaluations of economic growth and their related justice principles within the green economy are reflected in the suggested political interventions. Some FBAs suggest a shift towards “economic sufficiency” (Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values 2011), which is not based on the paradigm of economic growth. Instead, the concept takes a human-centered approach of the good life and sees individual and more systemic reductions as necessary tool. Other FBAs bring forth the more general objective of an “equitable and just global trade system” (Holy See 2011), which is supplemented with other more concrete instruments to make the economy more just such as through changes in international taxation systems (Christian Aid 2011) or the governance of multilateral financing mechanisms (APRODEV and ACT Alliance 2011). These instruments refer to mechanisms that are set within the limits of the present economic system and do not aim at radical but rather incremental change. This also manifests in demands to keep the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities that was adopted already in the 1992 declaration. This principle demands an equitable distribution of the costs of ecological sustainability among the developed and the developing world as well as the development of new indicators to measure national wealth and human development besides GDP (i.e. ‘GDP+’).

These discussions of the concept sustainable development and green economy give us a first idea of how the good life show up in the context of FBAs’ submissions. FBAs put the human at the center of development and the economy. Therewith, proceeding from the human ability to pursue a good life, a focal concern is providing humans with the necessary material and immaterial resources for that. Ensuring human rights is part of the condition of a good life and this also enables FBAs to reveal the moral limits of the economic system. While all FBAs see justice as necessary to ensure a good life, differences show in claims of economic justice by means of empowerment and deliberation or instrumental measures and redistribution. In sum, FBAs’ sustainable development communications reflect an understanding of the good life that centers on the material and spiritual development of the human, yet, they differ in ideas on its realization.

Ideas and arguments in other civil society submissions

A large share of other civil society organizations, which in this context encompass environmental or development NGOs, business, youth organizations, farmers and indigenous peoples, submitted their ideas on sustainable development and the green economy in context of the Rio+20 conference. In most of these submissions, the discussion of the term sustainable development did not receive a lot of attention. The three-pillar conception of sustainable development as established by the Brundtland Commission and adopted by the Rio Conference in 1992 was largely accepted, as “everyone agrees that sustainability is an economical, environmental and social issue” (FAIRTRADE International 2011). The submissions of these other civil society actors did not attend to questioning or problematizing the conception in its economic, environmental and social dimensions as such. This reflects that the meaning of sustainable development as adopted in Rio was largely taken-for-granted among civil society actors. Therefore, submissions rather focused on adequate “implementation models and toolkits that can be rolled out to address the three pillars of sustainable development” (African Wildlife Foundation 2011) or proposed to further integrate the three dimensions rather than taking them as separate.

Only few organizations questioned this conceptualization, such as the ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability), according to which the three-pillar approach is “misleading”, as the economy is a “servicing system”, not “an end in itself” (ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability 2011). In a similar vein, an understanding of sustainable development beyond the three pillars, as the Nature Conservancy argues, includes an economy that “must serve the people and the planet” (The Nature Conservancy 2011). While these perspectives are concerned with the role of the human within the economic system, they do not refocus the sustainable development concept to the human dimensions to the extent as some FBAs. Instead, they aim at re-conceptualizing the role of the economy. The economy as “the mechanism between nature and humans [...] is dependent upon productive and functioning natural resources and ecosystem services, which it processes into products and services for people” (ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability 2011).

The analyzed submissions link sustainable development with the concept of the green economy. In fact, the two concepts are not only linked but they converge into one: the African Wildlife Association, for instance, integrates the two terms in the term “green economic development” (African Wildlife Foundation 2011). Nearly all civil society actors use sustainable development and the green economy interchangeable as if they were two words that describe the same concept. As such, the pursuit of sustainable development *is* green growth within the realm of green economy. Yet, despite the similarity of the two concepts in terms of use, different interpretations of what sustainable development means in the context of the green economy became visible in those civil society submissions. In particular, one can discern two main facets of the concept of a green economy, first, it is associated with a low use of resources and second, it is understood as an economy which is just. These themes were addressed with a different emphasis within the submissions of these civil society organizations.

According to ICLEI, the idea that stands behind the green economy is that there is a “structurally and qualitatively different type of economic growth which values the finite natural resources the economy relies upon” (ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability 2011). This idea is based on a general understanding that the economy is a system that needs to generate benefits i.e. growth and that the role of natural resources is fundamental for the functioning of the economic system. There is a common theme among the civil society submissions, which identify the finiteness of natural resources as the problem, yet, the structural conditions or reasons for this scarcity remain unquestioned. The acceptance of the finiteness of earth’s resources is reflected in visions of a green economy in term of “one planet living” (BioRegional Development Group 2011) or “just one-planet politics” (Finnish Association for Nature Conservation 2011). Based on this understanding, the term efficiency plays a major role, as the wording resource efficiency describes the green economy as such (BioRegional Development Group 2011). Accordingly, finite natural resources need to be managed effectively (The Nature Conservancy 2011) in context of the green economy, which involves “efficient production schemes, green microenterprises and green jobs, products and services” (Programme for South-South Cooperation between Benin 2011).

An efficient green economy also brings along a conceptualization of nature in terms of “natural capital” or “eco-system services”. In this context, some organizations speak about the necessity of “managing natural capital” (WWF International 2011; BioRegional Development Group 2011). This formulation treats nature as a resource that can and needs to be managed more efficiently and has to provide green growth opportunities (ICLEI 2011). According to this understanding, nature and the ecological system only have a place in the green economy when they add value. This point is supported by references to the term ecosystem services, which describe the provision of positive benefits to people through ecosystems. A green economy is seen to “maintain and restore ecosystem

services” (African Wildlife Foundation 2011) and to “use and develop technologies to use ecosystem services more efficiently” (World Business Council for Sustainable Development 2011). Only few organizations argue against this wide-spread understanding claiming that “natural resources are not trade or conservation commodities” (Solidaritas Perempuan 2011).

The aspect of justice in the green economy is also addressed as a major theme in the submissions of non-FBA civil society actors, yet, again, they diverge on the meaning of a just economy. On the one hand, some organizations see justice as a question of equity between countries and in particular the developed and the developing world, on the other hand some contributions emphasize human rights and the need for empowerment of the marginalized and poor in this context. Justice in terms of international equity covers in particular historical justice, according to which “developed countries must acknowledge their historical debt” (Finnish Association for Nature Conservation 2011), which can be met with financial pledges from the developed world as well as support in technological development. As such, the transfer of green growth technologies as well as low-carbon-emission technologies from the developed world (Programme for South-South Cooperation between Benin 2011; Asociación Ancash 2011) is seen to provide “fairer access to markets” which allows for “equitable benefit sharing” (African Wildlife Foundation 2011). According to this argument, “equitable resource use” and a “fair share of the world’s resources” (BioRegional Development Group 2011) are the main characteristics of a fair and green economy. In the same vein, it is argued that it rather needs more liberalization to make the economy more just and that “the green economy approach should [...] not be used as trade barriers against exports coming from developing countries” (Centro de Gestao e Estudos Estrategicos 2011).

However, the concept of justice in the green economy is also set in relation to and used in acknowledgement of human rights (Social Watch 2011; Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants 2011) and the opportunity for social development (Programme for South-South Cooperation between Benin 2011). As such, the economic system has to take care of “human well-being and social equity” (African Wildlife Foundation 2011) and the “well-being of the weakest” (Finnish Association for Nature Conservation 2011). In order to strengthen human rights and achieve more social equity, most organizations suggest to empower those that are marginalized within the current economic system by enabling them to gain better and fairer access to markets (cf. FAIRTRADE International 2011). As such, it is the responsibility of a green economy to correct market failures (Swedish International Centre of Education for Sustainable Development 2011). Therewith, justice within the green economy is to be exercised in financial and technological transfers between the developed and developing world as well as in empowerment that shows in the ability to take part in economic life.

The different emphases on various aspects of sustainable development in the green economy are also reflected in policy advice, which civil society actors bring forth. As such, more global suggestions to pursue ecological and social justice, intergenerational justice, as well as rights to natural resources for future generations are formulated. At the same time, more concrete reference to established principles such as the polluter pays, the CBDR or historical responsibilities as well as new ways to measure progress beyond GDP or accounting that considers environmental costs aim at establishing more justice among the developed and the developing world.

The analysis of these submission shows that there is not one coherent narrative of the good life, but various ideas which reflect different understandings of the concept of the green economy, which range from efficient management of natural resources to qualitatively different growth in terms of justice and human development. Accordingly, a good life is a life that allows access to the economic system and this narrative presents participation within the green economy as a way to achieve the goal of a more just and fair world. In sum, the sustainable development communications

of these civil society actors reflect an understanding of the good life that is nearly equivalent to the pursuit of a green economy.

Representation of ideas and arguments in the outcome document

The outcome document of Rio+20, *The Future We Want*, is a 53-page document that summarizes the conference's vision and political commitment to action to ensure sustainable development (and that has been criticized by politicians and activists alike as "weak and lacking vision" Ivanova 2013, 1). A reaffirmation of the principles of the 1992 document and other international agreements takes up most of its space. It reflects some of the concerns and claims of civil society and FBAs particularly in its more general visionary part. It calls for "holistic and integrated approaches to sustainable development" (B.40) and argues that people are at the center of sustainable development. Therewith it reasons "to strive for a world that is just, equitable and inclusive, [...] and to promote sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development and environmental protection" (United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development 2012, I.6). A rights-based approach is reflected in "respect for all human rights, including the right to development and the right to an adequate standard of living" (I.8.). Furthermore, the theme of equity is acknowledged in reaffirming the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (II.15.). These issues are also reflected in the section on green economy that is seen as driving empowerment, respect for all human rights and equitable economic growth.

Although the outcome document represents some of the themes that were addressed by FBAs, yet, it only reaffirms the main principles of sustainable development already agreed upon in 1992. Actually, many major issues such as an ethical perspective and reframing of the green economy debate were not taken up. For instance, the entire document does not use the words spirit or religion. This may well not seem surprising. However, even the words moral or ethics are not used, which could have indicated a move towards a more holistic approach to sustainable development. Furthermore, while acknowledging "broader measures of progress to complement GDP" or "the rights of nature", the wording at this point is indefinite and only 'recognizes' or 'notes' without taking any concrete measures. The green economy is depicted as a source of empowerment and to a certain degree as just economic growth, yet, it is not connected to any vision in terms of a transformation of global capitalism (see also Bernstein 2013, 13f). In light of differing state interests, where the acknowledgment of the principle of justice may have consequences for environmental and financial engagement of industrialized states, some observers found the inscription of equity in the affirmation of the 'common but differentiated responsibilities' principle already a success. Yet, no specific justice principles or mechanisms were adopted. The story of the good life that is narrated within the document is therewith one of sustainable and inclusive growth.

From a civil society and FBA perspective, only the bottom-line claims were adopted without making any substantial progress on implementing a rights-based approach to sustainable development and a fair economic system. Therewith, "the Rio+20 outcome document masked real normative contestation" (ibid., 14)

The analysis indicates that the discursive influence of FBAs on the outcome document seems marginal. While reflecting some of the main approaches that FBAs and other civil society actors see as necessary to ensure every human's ability to pursue the good life, they are mainly a re-affirmation of the 1992 principles. Thus, it is difficult to assess in which way their inclusion can be traced back to the influence of FBAs or to the influence of other stakeholders. Furthermore, more progressive ideas on the good life that were directed at reimagining the economic system and broadening our general understanding of sustainable development were not taken up. However, the analysis shows

that there are articulations of the religious represented within discourses on sustainable development in the international arena and it provides us with a first idea of the potential direction of its normative foundations.

Discussion

Civil society increasingly takes part in global sustainability governance and so do FBAs. In this paper, we looked at how FBAs contribute to global sustainability governance by providing ideas on sustainable development that reflect distinct visions of the good life. We were particularly interested in how they discursively construct sustainable development and with what discursive power. A content-analysis of the submission of FBAs and other civil society actors to Rio+20 and the outcome document allowed us to gain first insights on these issues. We found that the ideas promoted by FBAs do indeed differ from ideas promoted by other civil society organizations (see Table I). At the same time, however, we could not detect an influence of FBA's ideas on the outcome document (see Table II and Figure I).

FBAs	Other CSOs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • argue for inclusion of an immaterial dimension in the concept sustainable development • the human as central focus → human and development rights, community • religious and moral arguments for justice • economic justice as a foundation of the economy • just trade and tax systems • (limited) questioning of growth and the green economy • (limited) promotion of sufficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • traditional definition of sustainable development as economic, ecological, and social is rarely questioned • moral arguments for justice → human and development rights • instruments: functional instruments for fostering justice (transfer of technology, financial subsidies, liberalization), some focus on justice norms (PPP) • green economy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • = reductions in resource use to be achieved via efficiency measures • in individual statements: green economy = just economy • in individual submissions: need qualitatively different growth

Table 1: Comparison of Submissions by FBAs and other CSOs

In their submissions to Rio+20, a majority of FBAs promoted a holistic notion of sustainable development and showed an ethically grounded rights-based perspective by bringing the human into the center of the sustainable development and green economy debate. They used religious arguments, although not exclusively or uniformly. The good life was reflected in ideas on equity and human well-being that instructed demands for a just economy including also just trade and tax systems. Moreover, some FBAs submissions questioned the pursuit of growth as well as the green economy concept and promoted the notion of sufficiency.

In contrast, submissions by other civil society actors did not question the traditional three pillar concept of sustainable development and also made the human less of the center of such a concept. Not surprisingly, they promoted moral rather than religious arguments. Some of them did emphasize the theme of justice as important for a green economy. In contrast to FBA submissions

though, they stayed within the limits of the economic system by emphasizing green growth and the economy as a service system and only rarely questioned the concept of growth.⁸

Outcome Document:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • traditional definition of sustainable development: three pillars • no use of “spirit”, “religion”, “moral” oder “ethics” • a just and inclusive world as an objective • human and development rights • “common but differentiated responsibilities” • No specific justice norms or instruments to pursue justice • Green economy: source of empowerment and just economic growth • “sustainable and inclusive growth”

Table 2: Ideas in the Outcome Document “The Future We Want”

Though some of the themes of the FBAs’ and CSOs’ submissions are reflected in the outcome document, many more progressive ideas on a just green economy or other ethical assumptions suggested by FBAs do not show up. In many respects, the Rio+20 document reaffirms old principles. It does not suggest specific justice norms or any reasons one would question the concept of a green economy or growth. It does not even mention the words moral or ethical.

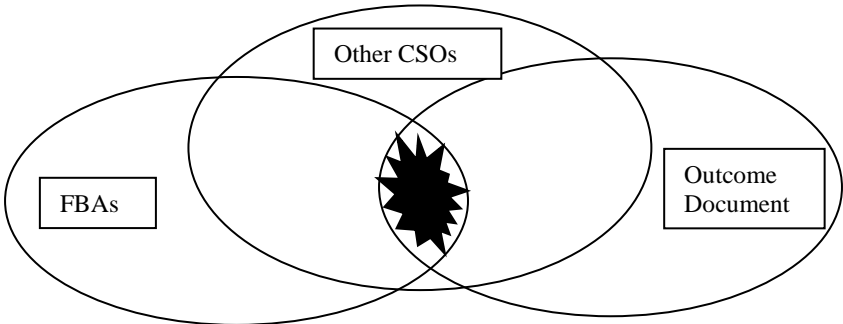


Figure 1: No Influence of FBAs?

Our analysis, then, shows that FBAs stress the ethical challenges of the ecological crisis and provide a normative discourse that is based on religious practices and differs from other civil society actors in that it (sometimes) dares to think outside the box of established ideas on global sustainability governance. However, our analysis cannot show that FBAs actually have influence, at this point. The ideas promoted by them that were not part of the submissions of other civil society actors as well did not make it into the outcome document.

Our results do not necessarily imply that FBAs do not have any influence at all. Such influence could take place in other ways than those our analysis would have allowed us to detect, i.e. in communications outside formal submissions, in communication via different ideas than the ones we focused on, or in pulling negotiations in the direction of FBA’s ideas but not all the way, for example. To be able to detect whether such influence exists, however, a different research design is necessary than this preliminary study allowed. Accordingly, we currently accompany the negotiation process in international climate governance from the COP meeting in Warsaw in 2013 to the one in Paris in 2015 with both contents analyses of relevant documents and interviews with representatives

⁸ When discussing these results with non-FBA CSO representatives in the last couple of months, several of them were surprised, as they felt more non-FBA CSOs had voiced skepticism with respect to growth and the green economy in the context of Rio+20. We will need to check whether a different sampling strategy of non-FBA groups would substantially change our findings in this respect.

of FBAs and other groups.⁹ FBAs appear to think that they can obtain some influence in international negotiations. Otherwise their investment of considerable time and energy (also by the individual representatives) would not make sense, at least from a rationalist perspective. It remains to be seen, whether such influence can indeed be documented.

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⁹ <http://www.uni-muenster.de/Fuchs/en/forschung/projekte/religioeseakteure.html>

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