

Article

Institutionalization of Sustainable Development in Decision-Making and Everyday Life Practices: A Critical View on the Finnish Case

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Abstract: This article discusses how the globally-established political concept of sustainable development has become institutionalized in both decision-making and people’s everyday lives in Finland over the last twenty years by focusing on “the logic of appropriateness” and how the notion of sustainable development as a utopia opens possibilities for institutional change for the future. The logic of appropriateness provides a conceptual perspective for analyzing institutions and institutional change from a normative standpoint, with a focus on culturally-shared norms and rules. This conceptual perspective is used here to illustrate and argue that notions of sustainable development have not changed cultural understandings of appropriate norms and rules that responsible decision-makers or individual citizens identify in Finnish society. The significance of sustainable development, however, cannot and should not be dismissed. After twenty years, the notion of sustainable development still creates a radical foundation for social and institutional change. As a utopia, it has potential to nurture the vagueness of appropriate rules and identifications in decision-making and people’s everyday lives and to open unknown possibilities for institutional change and sustainable practices for a new future.

Keywords: sustainable development; institutional change; utopia; practice

1. Introduction

Sustainable development is a concept that is global and political in nature, and it appoints a responsibility and duty to all members of society to change behaviors and values, so that humans with their needs and desires do not overuse natural resources and destroy the diversity of life. Sustainable

development was concretized into an international political objective in the Rio Process managed by the UN. This is based on Agenda 21, a contract between almost all nations in the world, which was agreed upon in Rio 1992. It aimed to define sustainable development as the starting point and object of societal decision-making and actions [1]. Sustainable development is an idea of a better world than the current one; it is the direction of change and, as such, a utopian ideal towards a future society. The notion of sustainable development is a major social and political challenge. This article discusses this challenge, both at a conceptual and at a practical level.

To understand the meanings of sustainable development in social and political practices, this article employs a framework of new institutionalism. This approach is used to interpret how the notion of sustainable development has become institutionalized over the last twenty years in both decision-making and in people's everyday lives in Finnish society. As a starting point, I adopt the view of March and Olsen [2,3] that the constancy and change of institutions is based on "the logic of appropriateness". The logic of appropriateness provides a conceptual perspective for analyzing institutions and institutional change from a normative standpoint, with a focus on culturally-shared norms and rules. In this case, it enables an analysis of the logics of institutionalized rules and identities for decision-makers and individual citizens in relation to sustainable development. The article contributes to the discussion about the institutionalization of sustainable development by taking a critical view on contemporary practices and culturally-dominant logics that have an effect on the ways people think and act as promoters of future society.

The article is structured in the following way. In the first part of the article, I suggest that the concept of sustainable development has both concealed conflicting interpretations and opened possibilities for articulating new meanings and objectives for future society, globally and nationally. However, even though sustainable development has become an accepted and culturally-shared concept as the abstract name of a "good society" over twenty years, the traditional logics and rules of modern and market-based thinking are maintained. I base my argument on scientific studies about sustainable development and draw on a range of illustrative examples from Finnish society. Finland is a case of "best practice", as it has high potential in development towards sustainability on the basis of the Sustainable Society Index [4]. In the second part of the article, I discuss why sustainable development is still an important concept, even though it has mainly remained an abstract wish for a better future. As a critical concept and a societal utopia, since the Rio Process was initiated, sustainable development still offers an opportunity to bring about institutional change in accordance with its aims, both globally and locally.

2. Interpretations of Sustainable Development

In order to understand how the notion of sustainable development has become institutionalized over the last twenty years, both in decision-making and in people's everyday lives, it is important to note that the Rio Process and sustainable development challenge modern society on multiple fronts. The concept of sustainable development itself is also subject to diverse and even conflicting interpretations.

The major challenge is the general aim of sustainable development to take societal issues, the economy and the environment simultaneously into account in societal practices and everyday life [5]. In a nutshell, sustainable development has been defined in the Rio Agenda as development that makes

it possible to meet the needs of current generations without endangering the possibilities of future generations to meet their own needs [1], following the definition of sustainable development suggested by the Brundtland Commission in 1987. Sustainable development brings together agendas of economic development, environmental protection and social issues, institutional scales from global to local and a time frame from the present to the future. This is based on concerns about the sufficiency of natural resources and the sustainability of human living conditions. In this way, sustainable development thinking challenges societies to create and adopt new integrated knowledge and new ways of thinking as the starting points for everyday life and decision-making.

So far, the exact meaning of sustainable development has remained debatable and unclear [6]. Instead of integrating them, diverse interpretations of sustainable development often underline economic, environmental or social issues [7]. Its vague meaning is marked with a unification of interests that has been regarded as conflicting, as economic concerns are integrated with objectives of economic growth. This kind of articulation was already apparent in Rio 1992. Agenda 21 promoted a development-based agenda for sustainable development and did not challenge the fundamental principles of the contemporary socio-economic order, grounded on economic growth and the unequal division of welfare globally [8]. The concept can be used for legitimating economic growth in a conventional sense added with an environmental flavor. As Baker and others [9] state, the lack of clarity has provided common ground for conflicting interests to develop concrete policies.

One of the consequences is that this kind of framing turns environmental protection into a technical or managerial issue outside political considerations [10]. “The green economy” approach, a major theme at Rio+20, followed the same path:

“In sum, moving towards a green economy must become a strategic economic policy agenda for achieving sustainable development. A green economy recognises that the goal of sustainable development is improving the quality of human life within the constraints of the environment, which include combating global climate change, energy insecurity, and ecological scarcity. However, a green economy cannot be focused exclusively on eliminating environmental problems and scarcity. It must also address the concerns of sustainable development with intergenerational equity and eradicating poverty.” [11] (p. 19).

New emphasis is given not only to economics, but also to markets as a major means to promote environmentally and socially sustainable development. However, this is only part of the story. As a political construct, the notion of sustainable development has also opened alternative discursive frames for a new global socio-economic order [6], new moral and ethical views of nature [8] and grassroots and hybrid innovations in technology [12] and in concrete solutions toward sustainable communities [5].

Accordingly, the Rio Process challenges traditional planning and decision-making processes [13]. Broad participation is the central principle in pursuing sustainable development [9,14]. The Rio Agenda 21 proposes a global process in which all societal actors should take part in pursuing sustainable development locally. Agenda 21 emphasizes in particular the opportunities of citizens and those with a weak social status, such as women and aboriginal peoples, to participate locally in the task of defining what sustainable development means, as well as to participate in the realization of sustainable development as they define it. In Agenda 21, the responsibility of different parties to ensure and arrange participation opportunities is assigned to local and national governments [15,16].

The Rio Declaration and especially Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 promote citizen participation and emphasize the position of citizens and civic organizations. Citizen participation is understood as the basic starting point and precondition for achieving sustainable development [17]. From a global point of view, sustainable development is possible only if citizens understand the necessity of pursuing it and committing to changing their lifestyle and habits for the sake of their own lives [18]. Citizen participation is also necessary in order to find locally suitable solutions to problems that are manifested on a global scale.

In a global sustainable development process, ordinary people with very different backgrounds are understood as being a central force to changing society. They are world-changers who think globally and act locally. In addition to individuals, different associations, organizations and companies should also commit to sustainable development. Sustainable development cannot be realized solely by governments or individual citizens it requires a reform of the activities of society as a whole and the commitment of all parties engaging with partnership models for pursuing sustainable development.

Studies show that sustainable development practices have inspired people, but they have not done a great deal to reform political or social practices or structures (for example, see [19–21]). In many respects, sustainable development has remained without concrete content. Its interpretations have adapted to the prevailing understanding of a good society rather than challenging the modern conception of what is desirable and good development.

3. Institutionalized Rules

After twenty years, there is no single answer to the question of how the concept of sustainable development and global process has transformed social and political practices and contributed to people's values or behaviors. Following the ways in which the concept of sustainable development has been interpreted in political decision-making and everyday life practices offers a critical lens toward the institutional change in this area. The perspective of "the logic of appropriateness" enables an interpretation of those institutionalized norms and rules followed by responsible decision-makers and individual citizens in relation to sustainable development and future society.

I utilize here the view proposed by March and Olsen [2,3], who claim that the constancy and change of institutions is based on the logic of appropriateness. Actors fulfil their obligations as members of collectives in specific situations by following cognitive and normative rules that they interpret as natural, right and legitimate. They take these rules as facts. The consequence is that most of the time, individuals as members of societies or organizations act according to institutionalized practices.

However, the vagueness of situational rules and identifications opens possibilities for institutional change. In that case, institutions have to embody and encourage new rules and identifications or actors should challenge the institutionalized logic of appropriateness with novel approaches. In a particular situation, there are always several rules to follow [22], and competing rules of appropriateness may be maintained over time [3]. The obligations of a prevailing identity in a particular situation, however, are the bedrock of an institution: "Some of those rules rather than others are attended to in a particular situation, and how identities and situations are interpreted" [22] (p. 22).

In light of this view, the focus here is on actors and their interpretations of rules. Rules show how meanings are constructed and how collective and individual identities are embodied in institutional

settings [3]. However, this is just one side of the story. Individuals and collectives are not able to follow all kinds of rules and identifications. Available individual or collective resources and capabilities construct the activities of responsible decision-makers and individuals. As March and Olsen [3] state, sometimes actors may know what should be done, but may not be able to follow established rules. Their resources and capabilities may be in conflict with the requirements of the institutionalized logic of appropriateness.

In the following section, I reflect on this issue by focusing on “the logic of appropriateness” that responsible decision-makers and lifestyle choosers construct in relation to sustainable development on the basis of previous studies and illustrative examples from Finnish society.

4. The Logic of Responsible Decision-Making

Sustainable development has been introduced to Finnish national and local policies through following the paths of the Rio process. After 1992, the concept has been incorporated into legislation in a variety of policy fields, and various integrated strategies for sustainable development have been planned and implemented. Both experts and political decision-makers have adopted the concept of sustainable development into their vocabularies. Several international comparative measures demonstrate that Finland is one of the leading countries in this area and that the general state of sustainable development in Finland is good [23].

The Evaluation of Finnish Strategy for Sustainable Development [23] concludes that in relation to national strategy, the state of sustainable development varies, as environmental, social and economic indicators demonstrate different developments in Finland. Environmental indicators show positive developments, but social and economic indicators do not. One important indicator, the level of carbon dioxide emissions, has varied from year to year, but has decreased from 2008. The Evaluation [23] explains this decline as a consequence of the economic downturn. For the most part, however, the Evaluation shows that sustainable development practices have not produced solutions, such as integration in the urban structure, changes in the production methods of energy or other utilities, the replacement of private driving with public transportation or changes in consumption and production to reduce the consumption of natural resources [23].

Moreover, strategies or plans for sustainable development have not created practices where Finnish society would be developed from a completely new point of view or starting point [13,16]. Ideas or practices of sustainable development have not been able to challenge development policies or to change the norms, rules and logics guiding them. The building blocks of modern society—economic and societal issues—are emphasized, while the environmental perspective is left aside in decision-making and future planning. The aims and ideas of sustainable development have not been able to change what is thought of as being the foundation of “responsible decision-making” or “the logic of appropriateness”, which responsible decision-makers follow in concrete policymaking situations [16,23]. Even though legislation and sustainable development strategies both at national and local levels have tried to raise or establish the viewpoint of sustainable development as being at the foundation of decision-making in various policy fields, the decision-maker cannot ignore rules emphasizing the economic preconditions and consequences of decisions. Nor can the decision-maker at least openly ignore the societal consequences of social development policies for employment or the fair distribution of resources.

Often, the goal of societal solutions is to promote both of these factors, and the economic discourse and welfare discourse are at least opposite sides of the same coin [24]. In this way, the logic of the economic and societal aspects are intertwined.

Twenty years after the Rio Declaration and after internationally recognized success in promoting sustainable development in Finland, it is still appropriate for decision-makers to marginalize environmental viewpoints by appealing to economic or societal issues. For example, decision-makers may consult environmental protection associations about energy policy solutions, but their opinions are rarely taken into account, whilst the Ministry of Environment has limited agency in energy policy making despite being in charge of international climate negotiations [25]. In Ruostetsaari's [25] (p. 282) study on Finnish energy policy making, one member of the energy elite explains this fact with circumstantial factors. Finland has a highly intensive energy and heavy industry business structure, which affords political influence to those who have an interest in cheap electricity and energy.

The most common rule is not to oppose ideas of sustainable development, but to use silence and ignorance in relation to environmental interests and concerns. The term "sustainability gap" (*kestävyyssvaje*) is another example of the logic of this rule. The sustainability gap is one of the key terms in contemporary public discussion in Finland. It connects with the European Commission's recommendations for improving economic performance and contributing to sustainable public finances [26]. It recalls the concept of sustainable development, whilst it actually focuses on the relation between social and economic issues:

"The Finnish Government issued a new structural policy programme last week. It has received positive feedback. The programme created an enthusiastic hustle and bustle in the decision-making circles. It is important that we take advantage of this enthusiasm for reform. Finland needs a structural makeover. Otherwise, we cannot control the problems caused by the sustainability gap. I am confident that we all are prepared to make difficult and somewhat unpleasant decisions in order to get the Finnish economy back on its feet.

(...)

At the moment, our economy's competitiveness is in poor shape. Finnish wellbeing depends on the vitality of our companies. Therefore, the structural policy programme concentrates on growth potential and employment. The Government has already decided on tax renewals to support entrepreneurship and investment." [27]

As this column, written by a Member of Parliament, illustrates, decision-making institutions and public discussion embody and encourage established rules and identifications. The logics of responsible decision-making emphasizes the economy, structural reforms, competition, growth and employment and constructs an idea about a sustainable future in these terms. This understanding brings together two agendas of sustainable development, namely economic development and social issues, with a future perspective. The sustainability of human living conditions results here from national economics and competitiveness. It seems that the adopted vocabulary of sustainable development or sustainability has been interpreted according to traditional norms and rules. Global factors and the agenda for environmental protection are not included. The sufficiency of natural resources is not a question to be considered. When forming this view of the sustainability gap, there is no room for observations of how humans and society overuse natural resources or of how the gap

between the demand and supply of renewable resources is growing every year [28]. Constructing the sustainability gap from this perspective would challenge the institutionalized logic of appropriateness with novel rules and identifications.

5. The Logic of Appropriate Lifestyles

The participation of citizens in a global process has mainly become concretized and institutionalized in local sustainable development practices [9,17]. These practices, for example, include designing local sustainable development policies in Local Agenda 21 processes, participating in environmental education, environmental bulletins and events for audiences, responding to queries, envisioning a sustainable urban environment, creating sustainable development networks and implementing different kinds of environmental projects [17].

In local sustainable development processes, especially in different kinds of educational and pedagogical projects, the aim has been to strengthen people's possibilities to choose and favor solutions in accordance with a sustainable lifestyle. They offer people information on the environmental impact of everyday life and solutions for decreasing harmful environmental effects. What is common to these projects is that they aim to educate people to carry environmental responsibility in their everyday lives [20]. Experts guide people, for example, to recycle waste and pay attention to energy consumption. Citizen groups are encouraged to take part in voluntary environmental work, such as taking care of their environment through different kinds of cleaning and clearing projects. These practices enable people to avoid feeling guilty, and they have emphasized the personal freedom of choice for individuals [29]. The focus has been on the change of individual lifestyles and consumption behaviors in accordance with information provided by experts [30].

However, in Finland, the establishment of sustainable development as a pair of words recognized by nearly everyone has not meant integrating economic, social and environmental factors into a novel dominant lifestyle. An energy- and consumption-intensive culture has a strong foothold in social discourse and everyday life practices. Constructions of sustainable lifestyles have not, for example, implied that private driving has decreased, that disposable consumerism has been given up, that traveling locally has become more popular or that vegetarian-based local food has made a breakthrough [23]. In the same way as the responsible decision-makers, individual people living their everyday lives have not changed their lifestyles in accordance with sustainable development. The ideas, environmental education and local agenda processes of sustainable development have not been able to institutionalize rules or norms that would significantly affect people's lifestyle choices.

People's ordinary and normal lifestyle choices are largely connected to the environment in which they live and the possibilities to choose that this environment enables (see also [30]). The urban structure and infrastructure of the living environment create a concrete basis for individual lifestyle choices. Cultural practices, on the other hand, create ways of thinking that feel normal and guide choices.

Institutionalized living environments and cultural practices do not fully determine individual choices, as individuals can themselves decide how they arrange their everyday lives by choosing between possible options [3]. They can choose to not make use of specific opportunities or decide to support specific alternatives regarding transport and commuting, for example. Like political decisions, most lifestyle choices are also based on societal and economic viewpoints that feel natural and

obliging. Gainful employment, living, family life and leisure time are all defined according to societal and economic conditions. Environmental viewpoints rarely direct these central everyday choices. For instance, the choice between a private car and public transportation is usually made based on two selection criteria: the first being price and the second being travel time. In this way, the opportunities offered by the concrete environment become intertwined with cultural practices. Together, they maintain institutionalized rules for making lifestyle decisions by individual citizens.

There are nevertheless individuals or a group of Finns who make their lifestyle choices by specifically taking environmental viewpoints into account. For these people, appropriate lifestyle choices are primarily defined as environmental issues and a sense of responsibility for nature. They are not a homogeneous group, or at least they do not represent a homogeneous way of thinking. However, their lifestyle choices emphasizing the environment do give them a shared status, which deviates from mainstream society. This status is interesting in relation to sustainable development, because it is telling about the prevailing lifestyle choices in society and their cultural foundations. These kinds of lifestyle choices reflect the most difficult requirement that sustainable development proposes: abandonment [31]. From an outsider's point of view, emphasizing the environment is often interpreted to mean personal sacrifices or giving up normalized standards of wellbeing. Sacrifices in relation to sustainable development include accepting a reduction in levels of consumption and changes in lifestyle [9].

The generally used terms for these people, idealists or *viherpiipertäjät* (i.e., “greenies” or “eco-hippies”, with *piipertäjä* implying some trivial activity or hobby), reflect the marginal social status of those who follow rules based on environmental viewpoints. Even though, to some people, being a greenie or an eco-hippie may be a positive way to identify one's relationship with nature, when used by others, the term *viherpiipertäjä* emphasizes the perceived negative qualities in environmental thinking [32]. The Finnish urban dictionary, *Urbaani sanakirja*, for example, describes such a person as follows:

“A greenie is a person who acts and lives (or at least believes that s/he does) as naturally as possible. However, s/he is often ignorant of what is truly good for nature and what it is useless to fuss about. A greenie does not necessarily vote for the Greens, and not all of them are opposed to nuclear energy because it does not cause greenhouse gases. That woman is quite a greenie, she re-uses even teabags.” [33]

Viherpiiperrys describes a modest, socially powerless activity that is often based on ignorance. Because a greenie or eco-hippie (*viherpiipertäjä*) does not know or understand how society works or cannot separate significant activity from meaningless activity, she or he is well-meaning, but may cause more harm than benefit with her/his environmentally based actions. A *viherpiipertäjä*'s lifestyle choices do not therefore genuinely promote an emphasis on nature; they only believe they do.

What we see as culturally more credible and normal is when people take nature's interests into account whenever they are connected to economic or societal objectives. In such cases, it does not cause any particular inconvenience, and it does not require sacrifices or giving up anything that is seen as important. There is also no fear of having to negotiate one's material living standard “for nothing”. The feeling of doing something for nothing is based on how economic and societal effects are

immediately seen in one's own life and living environment, whereas environmental effects are rarely concretely connected to individual lifestyle choices.

Instead of sustainable development, citizens strive to achieve and maintain the standard level of consumption that is deemed to be normal and appropriate in society. In Finland, the standard level of consumption means that individuals consume significantly more natural resources than that which the Earth produces [34]. Even the standard of living of those living on basic income support in Finland is ecologically unsustainable [35]. From the point of view of an individual person, however, the standard level of consumption does not mean excessive consumption, and the level of consumption enabled by basic income support certainly does not by any means seem excessive. Normal consumption receives culturally positive meanings, because it enables individuals to participate in and be a part of society [34]. To most people, it signifies wellbeing, not the overuse of natural resources. A different level of consumption signifies a separation from "the logic of appropriateness", that is from a shared lifestyle and shared norms of everyday life.

6. Contradictions of Sustainable Development

The political concept of sustainable development is a major challenge for society, which makes it difficult to adapt the idea to social and political practices structured with modern logics of appropriateness. This article illustrates this challenge both at a conceptual and practical level. As March and Olsen [3] discuss, a change in constitutive rules usually takes a long time and requires a strong majority. Fixed interpretative traditions and established authority in interpreting constitutive rules favor institutional continuity, rather than change. The consequence is that sustainable development is at the same time both at the center and on the margins of society.

The significance of sustainable development, however, cannot and should not be dismissed. For understanding possibilities for institutional change in the name of sustainable development, it is worth pondering the contradictions that the concept brings to the fore. The contradictory status of sustainable development shows that it is able to touch some of the essential characteristics of contemporary society. Furthermore, sustainable development provides a discursive resource that can extend to issues that cannot be spoken about in political terms (see [36]). The concept of sustainable development acts in many ways as an empty point in discussion or as a sign of societal silence (see also [37]). The concept makes it possible to leave socially difficult issues unsaid, such as the fact that normalized and culturally-shared views of a good society are based on a fairly selfish understanding of what is good when examining it from a global viewpoint or a viewpoint of the future. With sustainable development, it is possible to combine issues that are seemingly contradictory, such as the fact that Finnish society is structured with the overuse of natural resources, and that in order to secure a standard of wellbeing in times of economic crisis, economic growth is needed, which requires growing levels of domestic and international consumption.

These inherent contradictions do not make the concept of sustainable development useless, however. On the contrary, its potential for bringing about institutional change is based exactly on identifying these contradictions. The first step is to accept that the concept is fundamentally contradictory. It simultaneously contains the idea of change (development) and constancy (sustainability). As sustainable development is an important concept for societal politics, but at the same time empty

regarding its content, it can paradoxically be used to justify changeless change. In changeless change, political decisions in accordance with sustainable development primarily pursue the constancy of the present. In this situation, development means the maintenance, repetition and continuity of specific current practices. For actors, it means following established rules and logics.

As a political concept uniting inherent contradictions, sustainable development visualizes pain spots or social silence in society. It is worth asking what kinds of issues are associated with and pronounced in the name of sustainable development. It gives a name to ideas and practices of a “good society”, combining societal, environmental and economic elements, which often contain contradictory aims, objectives and goals. By grasping these silences, it is possible to know what kinds of views direct everyday life and political decision-making and whether there is an opportunity for institutional change. At the same time, interpretations of sustainable development identify views of a desirable society that remain socially marginalized. Sustainable development is constructed in the interaction between what is in the center and what is on the margins. By examining the ideas and practices of sustainable development regarding sustainability (constancy) and development (change), it is possible to critically examine what kinds of issues are in question when pursuing constancy or change, *i.e.*, what kind of sustainability or development is pursued [7].

For example, in Finland, energy solutions presented as sustainable development solutions usually aim to ensure cheap energy in the future. In the decision made in 2010 to allow the construction of a new nuclear plant in Finland, the central argument in favor of nuclear power presented nuclear energy as clean, without carbon dioxide emissions and as an energy form that will secure the future. Cheap energy showed the direction of development in the public discussion. After all, cheap energy signifies the constancy of both production and consumption. In everyday life, the changeless change promised by cheap energy means that individuals are able to sustain their current way of living as long as consumption is channeled through environmentally-friendly products. At the national level, this means sustaining national competitiveness in the global market. At both levels, development means energy- and cost-effective solutions. Changeless change does not challenge prevailing logics of appropriateness, that is, it does not promote new norms, rules or identities for the future society. It is also debatable whether it reforms social and economic practices, so that we would live without endangering the preconditions of living of future generations.

7. Institutionalizing a Utopia

As a societal utopia, sustainable development offers significance and a direction for institutional change and societal activity beyond these contradictions. Utopias are spaces for speculation, and utopian thinking has interest and critical capacity in transforming existing realities [10]. After twenty years, sustainable development still creates a radical foundation for constitutional change. The notion of sustainable development aims to define societal issues in a new way regarding what is fair, who is allowed to participate and in which ways [1]. These questions take a perspective on the future and look at how societal relations or ethical issues, for example, become part of a desirable future. Utopian constructions on sustainable development nurture the vagueness of appropriate rules and identifications and open unknown possibilities for institutional change.

Utopias inspire people by creating commonly-shared visions of a world that is better than the current one. As societal ideals, they question the starting points of actions in the present society. The values and actions of the future society are not constructed from the assumptions of these starting points, as the future is constructed on the basis of new practices and values [38]. Utopias and societal issues do not go together with what has been and what is strictly limited. They force us to embark on a journey of daydreaming, visioning and uncertainty, and they take us away from what is familiar and safe. They raise passions both on their behalf and against them, as well as hope for a different kind of future. Utopias are necessarily idealistic and lack the constructs and assumptions of reality [39]; because, “For new arrangements to materialize, new conceptions are needed—dreams, imaginaries, and experiments that are articulated and make the impossible seem possible” [10] (p. 2).

According to the view of the Brundtland Commission, sustainable development is not a stable and harmonic condition, but a political process directed towards a fair future. Utopias of sustainable development aim to change the present conditions. From the point of view of utopias, development signifies the visioning and creation of another kind of future and society, and sustainability means the temporal limitations and renewal of usable resources. This understanding of combining development and sustainability is a challenge to prevailing logics of the appropriateness of social and political practices.

The views of experts or agendas for a better world formulated in global decision forums are not, therefore, enough if they do not become meaningful in ordinary everyday life and decision-making processes. In order to concretize the ideas of sustainable development into practices, they need to be broadly accepted, and government, civil society and different fields of research need to collaborate [40]. The modern utopia, the welfare state, demonstrates how radical reforms come true if elite self-interest is combined with the mobilization of ordinary citizens and their movements [41]. In order to move people and create passions, the utopia of sustainable development needs to offer a view of how to change issues that are seen as unfair. It is difficult to imagine a political process directed towards a fair future where citizens would be mere bystanders. Governments and research can support the process by creating ideas about possible futures of sustainable development.

It is therefore noteworthy that people deem communality a significant force for change in the promotion of sustainable development [42]. Communities empower individuals by offering advice, encouragement, expertise and opportunities to contribute, as well as by offering an opportunity to share thoughts and actions with others [43]. In addition to detailed practical solutions, they offer an opportunity to create meaningful discussion spaces.

Communal discussion spaces enable the construction of utopias and commitment to them. Individual sustainable development practices or detailed behavior lists about how to act in accordance with sustainable development or how to eat in a climate-friendly way are useful for those who are committed to the idea of sustainable development, but who are lacking information. However, they do not commit those to whom sustainable development is meaningless. Lists of individual practices through which the world will be saved enable an everyday changeless change. A societal utopia that can be commonly shared and which commits people to sustainable development is broader than such lists. A broad vision of the future enables people to commit to societal activity [44]. A meaningful utopia for the future should be constructed from communally-shared issues that ignite feelings and passions. It should be directed towards changing the present into something new and different.

Local sustainable development processes implemented through the Rio Process show that it is difficult to establish and maintain a change directed towards the future when the goal is to renew society as a whole [13,16,20]. Processes have emphasized consensus too much and avoided dealing with conflicts and contradictions. Instead of consensus, discussions should recognize what kinds of contradictory sustainable development goals are related to the values and actions of societies and individual people. With the help of utopias, it is possible to consider how these conflicts can be solved in the society of the future.

Discussion spaces that integrate different views as broadly as possible enable citizens to identify their different social positions in relation to economic and environmental issues. In addition to conflicts, social differences must be identified in order to change the world. In this way, sustainable development thinking creates new integrated knowledge for future everyday life and decision-making.

The utopia of sustainable development should combine the concern over nature and issues of solidarity and the fair distribution of resources [38]. The utopia of sustainable development, like other societal utopias, requires a vision of how society's resources will be distributed and of who will benefit and who will not, in addition to an abstract pursuit of the public good. The adoption of sustainable development as a starting point for future thinking is possible only if people interpret it as a way of ensuring the realization of social fairness. An additional challenge to citizen participation and the creation of discussion spaces is the fact that the utopia of sustainable development must grow outside the boundaries of communities and nations. Fairness and resource distribution extend beyond these boundaries, challenging the understanding of community and of who will receive the redistributed resources.

8. Conclusions

This article has contributed to the discussion about the institutionalization of sustainable development. I have approached how the notion of sustainable development has become institutionalized over the last twenty years into both decision-making and people's everyday lives in Finland. The logic of appropriateness has provided a conceptual perspective for analyzing institutionalization from a normative standpoint, with a focus on culturally-shared rules. It brings to the fore the understanding that logic(s) structuring practices matter and have consequences, because most of the time, members of societies act according to established rules.

Culturally-shared rules demonstrate how institutionalized meanings are constructed [3]. In global processes, the concept of sustainable development has both concealed conflicting interpretations and opened possibilities for articulating new meanings and objectives for future society. The consequence has been the vagueness in the concept, with interpretations facilitating both modern and market-based conceptions of development and more marginal alternatives to the dominant order. All of these diverse interpretations have played a role in shaping Finnish practices of sustainable development during the past twenty years.

The vagueness of the concept means that for decision-making and everyday life, the notion of sustainable development does not provide normative foundations for values or behavior. Practical solutions are questions of personal or situational choices, and interpretations of sustainable development are mostly practical compromises of some of its different aspects. I would argue that

interpretations of sustainability facilitate contemporary conceptions of development, as the normative ground does not provide new rules that could be regarded as taken, whilst development with connotations to economic growth and prosperity is a very strong signifier in modern society.

This is not to say that alternatives to the dominant order are not present in decision-making and everyday life. The marginal character of these alternatives demonstrates how strongly modern and market-led logics, rules and identities are institutionalized in Finnish society. The meaning of these alternative interpretations on sustainable development is constructed by excluding far-reaching environmental or globally-oriented thoughts, practices and actors from the sphere of what is normal. These alternatives demonstrate how some notions of sustainable development may be in contradiction with actions that are deemed to be normal and accepted in contemporary society. The adoption of alternative practices therefore requires that people denounce the lifestyle that is deemed marginal and that decision-makers engage with conflicting perspectives and hybrid forms of expertise.

Despite these critical remarks, the Rio Process still has the potential to contribute to the creation of a future society based on notions of sustainable development. As a broadly-shared idea and with the potential of constructing utopian thinking, sustainable development offers a feasible point of view for a process of political change directed towards the future. In this respect, the logic of appropriateness is a useful conceptualization and a sensitive tool for future analyses of sustainable development practices and of the possibilities and limits for institutional change according to international political objectives.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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