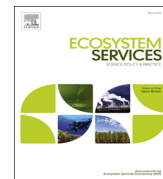




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Business and biodiversity: A frame analysis

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ABSTRACT

It is often stated that business has a key role to play in the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems. Various instruments are developed that enable businesses to assess their impact and dependence on ecosystem services. Actual use of these instruments remains limited. This paper uses discourse analysis to explain that this discrepancy can be explained by diverging frames on the role of business. Documents from governments and civil society are analysed to identify how the role of business is framed. This is compared to the business perspective as identified through interviews. Results show that there is some shared ground as different actors use common economic terminology in framing the problem and causes for action. However, there are significant differences of opinion when it comes to the role business and government should play in the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems.

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1. Introduction

Biodiversity loss is among the biggest environmental problems societies face as it impairs the long-term viability of the world's ecosystems (Hooper et al., 2012). The 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity sparked a range of international summits, agreements and national policies, but despite this biodiversity loss continues with detrimental effects on ecosystems (Ten Kate and Laird, 2000; Cardinale et al., 2012).

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment puts the concept of ecosystem services centre stage to understand relations between human activity and ecosystems (Ring et al., 2010). With the publication of TEEB – *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* (2010) – the economic consequences of ecosystem and biodiversity loss have gained greater attention. Arguments about the intrinsic value of biodiversity gave way to the economic reasoning that biodiversity and ecosystems are vital to economies.

TEEB showed that economics can provide a powerful 'language' to talk about ecosystems and biodiversity; it forges discourses between science, economics and governing structures (Ring et al., 2010). The publication of TEEB renewed interest in biodiversity protection. Concern about biodiversity loss has initiated public and private initiatives to reduce, compensate or halt biodiversity loss.

This study focusses on the role of business in the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems. In the Netherlands and abroad,

advocacy organisations published studies and guidelines that emphasised the importance of biodiversity protection for business. Examples include the WRI "Nature in performance" (2010), the World Business Council for Sustainable Development's "Corporate Ecosystem Review" (2008) and the Global Reporting Initiative (2011). Major consultancy firms published studies to argue that loss of biodiversity is a major challenge for business and that business can play a role in avoiding further losses (KPMG, 2011; PWC (2010)). The Dutch government commissioned a Taskforce "Biodiversity and Natural Resources" to examine how government, civil society and business can cooperate to halt biodiversity loss.

Despite all these studies and reports, research shows that business struggles to incorporate biodiversity protection into their daily operations (Harms and Overbeek, 2011; van den Burg and Overbeek, 2012; Ruckelshaus et al., in press). Only few businesses have policies, let alone take actions, to protect biodiversity. It is often argued that this can be explained by the complexity of the notion of biodiversity and its relevance for business.

The approach in this research was as follows: frame analysis was used to analyse why, how and what arguments different actors attribute to a role to business in the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems. Framing refers to "the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (Chong and Druckman, 2007, 104). We were interested in different conceptualizations of the role of business in the protection of biodiversity because a successful conceptualization (i.e. frame) functions as an interpretative lens that not only attributes roles to the various actors involved but also convinces them to take up this role. Framing is the process through which "actors propagate specific lenses and

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try to influence the interpretation of an issue by assigning specific meaning to that issue” (Buijs et al., 2011, 330). From this follows our research question:

- Can we explain the discrepancy between expectations and practice by a mismatch between societal and corporate frames on business and biodiversity protection?

In this article, we first (paragraph 2) discuss the principles of frame analysis and its application in environmental sciences. Paragraph 3 describes the methodology used to conduct frame analysis. Paragraph 4 presents the results from the quantitative analysis of governmental and civil society documents, followed in paragraph 5 by a qualitative analysis. In paragraph 6 we discuss corporate framing and analyse how this matches and differs from the government and civil society framing. Paragraph 7 provides conclusions.

2. Frame analysis

2.1. Theoretical background

Discourse analysis originates from the work of Goffman (1974) who illustrated that humans draw on frames to understand and respond to events. Everyday encounters and events are interpreted and evaluated against the backdrop of earlier experiences, knowledge and culture. This takes place on an individual level but also on the level of organisations and institutions.

Frame analysis is one of the research strategies under discourse analysis, with a particular focus on analysing how issues are defined and problematized. Discourses are defined as “a specific ensemble of idea, concepts, and categorisations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices through which meaning is given to physical and social realities” (Hajer, 1995, 44). Through the work of Foucault, it became clearer that discourses and frames are not neutral entities. Foucault stressed that it is important to recognise the competition between discourses on societal issues to understand societal change: “different systems of meaning, or discourses, compete for influence in society and, consequently, structural changes in society can be conceptualised as shifts in the relative influence of different discourses” (Sharp and Richardson, 2001, 196).

Goffman's work led to the development of frame analysis methodologies: “Frame analysis has been developed in sociology and policy analysis as a way of depicting and engaging the array of arguments and counter arguments that surround complex social issues” (Creed et al., 2002, 35). It is “a technique for approaching a text by attending to its diverse idea elements with the following question: what holds these elements together?” (Creed, et al., 2002, 37).

There is a power-dimension to frames. When opinions differ, each actor will try to present a convincing frame, a description of the problem, grounds for action and solutions, to convince other actors to choose their side. One might associate this easily with heated debates in parliament, on television or in a bar but in many cases frames do not directly compete. As actors give their opinions in newspapers, on websites, through studies or policy documents, they present their frame to convince others to go along in their definitions and descriptions. The analysis of this struggle illustrates how organisations and institutions think about their role and the role of others, and the distribution of power. Creed et al. (2002) summarise this as follows: “seeing which frames were advocated by whom and which ultimately dominated pushes deeper understanding about power, politics, and interests”.

The result of the struggle between frames can be the alignment of different frames. This takes place when the various involved actors develop a shared frame, meaning there is agreement on, for example, the description of the problem, causes and the action to be taken. It is argued that frame alignment is necessary if other actors are to participate in the solution to the problems (Snow et al., 1986).

2.2. Frame analysis in environmental and sustainability research

Discourse and frame analyses are used in environmental and sustainability sciences. Among the most well-known studies is Hajer's (1995) “The Politics of Environmental Discourse” describes how ecological modernisation theory emerged as a new frame in environmental politics. Global warming is also a popular subject for discourse analysis, focussing on the contested nature of climate change (Livesey, 2002) or the role of media (Olausson, 2009). Others have investigated, for example, framing of nature (Dingler, 2005), Corporate Social Responsibility (Dahlsrud, 2008) or partnerships for collaboration between business, governments and NGOs (Mert, 2009).

These studies have a common focus on the role of frames and discourses in societal processes of change. They address the struggle between different frames in relation to agency; i.e., the capacity of actors to exert power. Frame analysis allows one to see “how a diversity of actors actively try to influence the definition of the problem” (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005, 177).

The recent discussion on TEEB illustrates that frames are actively used. TEEB was a conscious effort to develop a new discourse on biodiversity protection, drawing upon the persuasive power of economic reasoning in contemporary societies (Sukhdev, 2009). Proponents state that this economic frame on ecosystems and biodiversity succeeded in forging discourses between science, economics and governance structures (Ring et al., 2010). Others criticise TEEB for its failure to acknowledge the multiple dimensions of human well-being and the complex nature of ecosystems.

3. Methodology in this study

The frame analysis performed here consists of two main steps: (1) analysis of relevant text documents about the role of business in protecting ecosystems and biodiversity to identify frames of government and civil society and (2) an analysis of the framing by businesses.

Step 1 In selecting documents relevant for the analysis, we initially took two documents, checking references to find other reports mentioned and discussed in the European context. The two initial documents were (1) the report of the Taskforce Biodiversity and Natural Resources, issued in December 2011 by the Dutch government and (2) the report TEEB for Dutch Businesses, a spin-off of the TEEB for Business study with special emphasis on business sectors important for the Dutch economy.

From this analysis 11 documents were selected for further analysis based on the following criteria:

- Documents needed to be discussed in the European and/or Dutch context, for example in interviews in earlier research projects (Harms and Overbeek, 2011; van den Burg and Overbeek, 2012).
- Documents needed to have an explicit focus on the role of business in the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems.

The selected documents were classified into two categories: government and civil society. This exercise itself

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