SUSTAINABILITY DISCOURSE AND CAPITALIST VARIETY: A COMPARATIVE INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS

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Introduction

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility is closely tied to the rise of the public corporation as a central institution of Western capitalism. CSR promises to ameliorate the potential negative social impact of the pursuit of profit, by appealing to norms of stewardship, responsibility and charity (see, e.g., Freeman and Liedtka 1991; Jacoby 1998). The idea of CSR evolved in the specific historical context of 20th century North American market liberalism, and in the post war period became increasingly defined in relation to the rising legal doctrine and normative discourse of shareholder primacy. CSR retains the voluntaristic and contractarian premises of liberal market capitalism in that it proposes moral and normative rather than regulatory checks on corporate behavior. Notwithstanding its idiosyncratic origins, the idea of CSR has since the 1980s become part of an international discourse on the role of corporations in society that is promoted by global elites and other agents of world society, such as multinational corporations, NGOs like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), intergovernmental organizations such as the OECD and UN, and civil society and social movement groups (Lim and Tsutsui 2012; Smith 2001; Zhang and Luo forthcoming).

An important contemporary motivator and justification for corporate CSR efforts is the concept of sustainability that was theorized in the international development community. Sustainability justifies CSR in terms of self-interest rather than strictly on normative-moral grounds. Proponents of sustainability argue that contributing to social wellbeing and environmental preservation is necessary for the long term realization of economic goals (Brundtland and World Commission on Environment and Development 1987; United Nations Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Global Sustainability 2012). Sustainability as an ideological underpinning for CSR practices therefore goes beyond the moral discourse of traditional CSR to provide a

theorization for CSR that draws on scientific and instrumentally rational forms of authority (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997). Like CSR, sustainability is part of a global discourse, constructed and promoted in the public sphere by experts and international and non-governmental organizations, and endowed with claims of universality and a focus on 'transnational' problems and solutions.

However, despite these global cultural processes, understandings of sustainability at the level of practice are often still colored by the local conditions of national institutions and political economies (e.g., Campbell 2007). This view is shared by institutional scholars who see the expansion of global discourses more generally as involving local translation and interpretation rather than an unmitigated diffusion of ideas (see, e.g., Campbell 2001; Campbell 2002; Dobbin 1994; Sahlin and Wedlin 2008). The relevant differences among national political economies in capitalist societies has been elaborated most extensively by comparative institutional scholars that are often grouped together as the 'varieties of capitalism (VoC) school' (Boyer 1996; Hall and Soskice 2001; Orrú, Biggart, and Hamilton 1997; Streek 2010; Thelen 1999; Whitley 1999). The variety of capitalism school provides a counterpoint to the homogenizing view of globalization associated with the world society perspective (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997).

The main contribution of the VoC perspective has been to identify a limited plurality of capitalist systems and link observed differences to the socio-political organization of economies and national institutional matrices. National institutional systems are historically evolved configurations that involve varying roles of the state; distinctive organization of labor, capital and knowledge resources into industrial production systems; and a unique organization and

vibrancy of civil society actors. For example, Hall and Soskice (2001) distinguish liberal market systems mainly governed through the mechanisms of markets from coordinated market systems that are characterized by corporatist and group coordination with the participation of the state.

Such systematic institutional differences at the national level affect how the idea of sustainability is interpreted and translated, even if it is universally embraced. The plurality of capitalist forms not only entails systems of material production but also distinct policy and knowledge regimes that affect the construction of the central problems, solutions and actors involved in achieving sustainability (Benson and Saguy 2005; Campbell 2001; Campbell 2002; Katzenstein 1977; Vogel 1996). Much of this construal is carried out in the public sphere, for example through media discourse where varying interests and public opinion interact (Fiss and Hirsch 2005; Gamson 1992a; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; McCombs 1997; see also Walker, this volume).

In this chapter, we explore how sustainability is represented in the public discourse of six countries and link differences and similarities in discourse to the institutional diversity of national political economies. We analyze an extensive corpus of articles on sustainability that were published in 2011 in leading on news sources in six countries and compare it the 1987 United Nations report on "Our Common Future ." Our analysis includes an inductive taxonomy of issues, a descriptive comparison between countries, and an interpretation of similarities and differences in light of institutional differences. In doing so, we offer a more nuanced understanding of how cultural and political processes interact in the configuration of CSR at the local and global level.

Sustainability and Global CSR in the Varieties of Capitalism Perspective

While the ideas of CSR and sustainability are sometimes cast as critiques of market capitalism (Campbell 2006; Friedman 1970), they are arguably better understood as an integral (though perhaps dialectic) part of the prevalent economic ideology of capitalist societies. Both concepts directly address the question of (negative) 'externalities' created by private property based market systems. Externalities are defined by economists as costs of production, such as environmental pollution or social ills, which are not reflected in the prices of goods and services transacted in markets. These costs are instead borne by society. State regulation offers one way to either price negative externalities into market transactions (e.g., through expanded legal liability or direct prohibitions) or to tax market participants to fund the public provision of remedial services (e.g., as direct transfers or subsidies for the provisions of public goods, such as waste disposal and public safety). CSR, as a normative mandate for private enterprises, offers an alternative path, where corporations directly transfer resources towards providing public goods, rather than the transfer being mediated by governments.

This private allocation of resources as CSR is in many ways more compatible with (neo)liberal views of capitalism than the alternative, more extensive government regulation (see also Meyer, Pope and Isaacson, this volume)[1]. The idea of CSR reduces the role of the state and civil society associations as the sole providers of public goods, and specifies appropriate mechanisms for corporations to participate in the resolution of social and environmental issues. It becomes a matter of the normative responsibility of corporations to contribute to the public good, beyond their routine business operations. Seen as normative responsibilities rather than legal

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[1] We acknowledge that a belief in the strong-form efficient market hypothesis would deny the existence of substantial externalities and hence the need for CSR. The same radiacal view would of course also deny the need for government intervention.

requirements, the contribution and allocation of corporate resources to public causes is ultimately discretionary.

In contrast, in coordinated varieties of capitalism, corporations are more deeply embedded in the political economy of social welfare. Private enterprises cooperate and negotiate directly with governments and civil society organizations over the provision of public goods, or they rely on governments with a more expansive welfare role to reduce the consequences of negative externalities from production. In corporatist systems, the 'responsibility' of CSR behaviors is less discretionary but arguably also more narrow, as governments and cross-sectoral groups address issues that might otherwise become the subject of voluntary corporate action (see, e.g., Campbell 2007).

The idea of sustainability, as an underpinning of global CSR, can then also be expected to take on different flavors in different institutional and ideological regimes. Sustainability has since the 1980s often been defined according to the United Nations report on sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland and World Commission on Environment and Development 1987), and as requiring the reconciliation of environmental, social and economic demands to stay within the carrying capacity of these systems. The scope of the idea of sustainability is both global in scale (the systems in question are seen as interdependent or integrated across Earth) and universal in scope (the mandate for sustainability does not hinge on historical or local contingencies). It is not surprising that actors with similar global and universalistic outlooks, such as scientists and experts located in transnational fields and global civil society organizations have led much of the production of discourse on sustainability (e.g,

Lim and Tsutsui 2012; Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997; Meyer, Frank, Hironaka, Schofer, and Tuma 1997).

From very early on, the idea of sustainability was also adopted by corporations, economists and management scholars as a justification for corporate contributions towards the public good beyond the operation of the core business and the maximization of financial profit (Gladwin, Kennelly, and Krause 1995; Hart 1995). However, rather than casting CSR behavior as a re-distribution of resources from profits towards social goods, as traditional CSR proponents did, proponents of sustainability suggest that, given sufficiently long time horizons, CSR behaviors are in the interest of corporations' permanence. Moreover, economic, social and environmental goals can in principle be achieved through "win-win" solutions with few trade-offs. As a result of this attractive framing, corporate sustainability officers, departments and reports have over the last two decades proliferated, especially among multinational corporations that operate in national and transnational spheres (Bornschier and Chase-Dunn 1985; Guillén 2001a).

But the definition and emerging theory of sustainability has at the same time remained elusive and provided substantial interpretive leeway for how it may be implemented in practice (Ratner 2004). The ambiguity and breadth of the sustainability idea may well have contributed to its growing popularity. However, the ambiguous sustainability concept can also be expected to be interpreted, translated and elaborated quite differently, in accordance to national institutional systems. For example, in a Chinese context, sustainability may take on an affinity with the values of harmony and unity (and the Communist Party's recent promotion of a 'harmonious society' goal), while in the United States, it may become elaborated in connection with innovation and choice in a free market system. The implication may be different policy preferences, such as

government planning and active industrial policy versus cap and trade systems and technology investments. Just like the strategies adopted in different countries for governing the early railroad industry reflected prevailing ideas of governance of their political cultures (Dobbin 1994) or how principles of market deregulation were translated into practice in different ways in liberal and coordinated political economies (Vogel 1996), so the strategies of action for sustainability may reflect national contexts.

A key insight of the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) school, and where it diverges from the neo-institutionalist world society perspective, is the notion of translation. "Foreign" or "global" ideas, if imported at all, are filtered, transformed and appropriated to make sense within an institutional arrangement and corresponding cultural understandings (see Sahlin and Wedlin 2008, for a recent review). This contrasts with the processes of direct imitation or diffusion emphasized in neo-institutional research, where ideas cross national boundaries more or less unchanged (Lee and Strang 2006; Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2006; Weber, Davis, and Lounsbury 2009). Public discourse plays an important role in this translation process, but according to comparative institutional scholars, discourse is not a purely representational activity outside the political economy of countries but an integral cultural component; it reflects and influences the interests and actions of diverse agents in an institutional system (Campbell 2007). In this regard, the VoC conception of cultural and discursive processes as integral to systems of material production differs from approaches that locate national differences in abstract value dimensions (e.g., Inglehart and Baker 2000), or that see public discourse and institutional systems as more loosely related (e.g., Gamson 1992b; Schudson 1989).

Several typologies of capitalism have been proposed, ranging from a single axis from liberal to coordinated economies, to fine-grained differences that see distinct logics at the level of almost every country (Jackson and Deeg 2006). The basis for these typologies is normally groupings of similar institutional configurations that include historically evolved systems of finance, corporate governance, industrial relations and skill creation, the organization of work and innovation, and the role of the state (Jackson and Deeg 2006). While originally devised to point out institutional plurality within market capitalism, recent VoC research has been concerned not so much with refining static comparisons but with how such differences affect national responses to common changes (Streek 2010). More culturally oriented approaches explain such divergent paths in part with reference to widely held beliefs and knowledge regimes that drive the formulation of new policy and the development of authoritative knowledge (Campbell 2002; Campbell and Pedersen 2011).

For the purpose of this chapter, we draw primarily on the typology used by Campbell and Pederson (2011), which aligns political economies along two dimensions: liberal vs. coordinated market economies, which captures the extent to which economic activity is governed through "free" market transactions or embedded in associational, network and state structures; and central/closed vs. decentral/open political systems, which captures the extent to which knowledge production and policy discourse are centrally controlled. We examine one country each that corresponds to resulting four types of market capitalism (Campbell and Pedersen 2011): The United States represents a liberal decentralized system, the United Kingdom a liberal centralized system, Germany a coordinated decentralized and Japan a coordinated centralized market system. To these, we add two varieties of capitalism that are only in part market based and hence fall outside the above typology: State-directed mixed economies (China) and post-

colonial transition economies (Kenya). The purpose of this comparison set is not to be

exhaustive, but to examine if there are meaningful differences in how the idea of sustainability is

represented in the public spheres of these countries. Table 1 profiles these countries with some

stylized institutional facts.

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We examine the public understanding of sustainability through the lens of articles in leading

national newspapers in these six countries, using quantitative text analysis to identify dimensions

and differences of sustainability discourse. To provide a reference point to the global discourse

on sustainability that originated from transnational organizations and experts, we also compare

these discourses to the most central document produced by the United Nations, the 1987 report

on "Our common future" (Brundtland and World Commission on Environment and

Development 1987).

Data and Empirical Method

Our first empirical goal is to describe the representation of the concept of sustainability in media

discourse. The second goal is to identify similarities and differences across the six countries and

interpret these differences in light of the institutional differences identified by the varieties of

capitalism perspective.

Since we are interested in the understandings of sustainability in public discourse, we sampled

newspaper articles in each country. We selected two to three leading print news sources in each

country based on circulation and status. We deliberately focused on national, high status

newspapers that reach national elites as well as a large portion of the population. Public

understandings as represented in prominent newspapers permit insights into cultural understandings and the priorities of opinion leaders in a society (Baumgartner and Jones 1991; Quinn 2005; Sonnett 2009). We used available English versions of news sources to avoid translation issues. It should be noted that the sustainability discourse observable in these sources reflects not only differences in public understandings, but also in the configurations of civil societies and the public political sphere and attention to questions of sustainability among actors participating in public debates. For example, the public media sphere in China is strongly controlled by the Communist Party, while newspapers in the United Kingdom are often aligned with different political ideologies and parties.

We then retrieved all articles published in these sources during the calendar year 2010 that contained the search phrase "sustainab*" in the heading or full text of the article (* = wildcard character). We manually screened the retrieved articles to eliminate instances where the term sustainability was used in ways unrelated to ideas around the natural environment, broader societal goals and responsibilities, or sustainable development. Most eliminated articles used sustainability in either a purely financial/fiscal context or to describe the prospective success of a strategy. Some articles referenced sustainability more than once. The final sample contains 2372 articles, plus the UN report. Table 2 shows the news sources and the number of articles and mentions of phrase forms of sustainability.

TABLE 2 HERE

To count only concepts that were closely linked to sustainability in these articles, we extracted from each article all words occurring 10 words before and after the search phrase "sustainab*"

and used only that co-occurrence sub-corpus to develop a category scheme of associated concepts. Effectively, our analysis therefore represents a network-associational approach to identify cultural repertoires in meaning making, in that we focus on those ideas and concepts that are most proximately associated with the sustainability label (Breiger 2000; Mohr 1998; Smith 2007; Weber 2005). The conceptual associations captured by this method are agnostic to the nature of the relationship, i.e., concepts can occur in proximity to each other because they are seen as compatible, antagonistic or similar.

Using the co-occurrence subsample, we proceeded to develop a comprehensive set of categories that capture the conceptual repertoire associated with sustainability across all countries and the UN document. The process of category development proceeded inductively, iterating between a sample of the co-occurrence text corpus, the full-text documents and emerging classification frameworks. We seeded the analysis by extracting the 200 most frequent words and 50 most frequent two word phrases for each country from the co-occurrence corpus, after eliminating common words and lemmatizing the corpus (see Krippendorff 2012, for an overview of standard text analysis processing). We then grouped common words thematically and elaborated the emerging category scheme with reference to the full text of the articles.

The Content of Public Sustainability Discourse

Table 3 shows 5 broad facets, 30 concept categories used, and example terms of the resulting classification scheme. The facet dimensions describe the broad domains commonly used in sustainability discourse (environmental, social and economic concerns); the scope of impacts and action (from problems seen as global in nature to being seen as concerned with local action); the agents with power to cause and resolve problems (state, business, science and the people);

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problems connected with sustainability (primarily related to specific natural resources), and solutions (different management approaches to the boundaries between private and public).

TABLE 3 HERE

Table 3 shows that, when aggregated across all countries, there is significant breadth in how sustainability is conceptualized in public discourse. Sustainability is complex in its focus on social, economic, and environmental issues. However, the problems connected with it are predominantly within the environmental domain, pertaining mostly to natural resources. The solutions to these problems vary from private individual level changes, such as recycling and conservation, to large international changes, such as contracts. These concepts also highlight the often contradictory directions around sustainability – projects and investment in technology can be at conflict with conservation and protection. The breadth of the conceptual repertoires associated with sustainability in public discourses enables unique understandings of sustainability that would in turn prompt different strategies of action. These varied meanings can be conceptualized as different combinations of the repertoire of concepts within the facets of sustainability. Consider for example, the following two statements constructed from the same overall conceptual repertoire: "Governments address global climate change by setting targets for energy use" vs. "Businesses solve urban health issues by managing water resources."

Comparative Analysis of Public Sustainability Discourse

We use the VoC typology to explore if there are meaningful differences between the aggregate cultural register represented by table 3 and how the idea of sustainability is represented in the public spheres of the focal countries. This approach draws on Swidler's (2002: 2) insight that

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"Differences between [the] two national cultures are best seen as different emphases and selections from repertoires with many overlapping possibilities."

We used two approaches for uncovering discursive differences across the focal countries: measuring a) the prominence of different concepts across the countries and b) the aggregate similarities between countries. To measure the prominence of different concepts within each country we analyzed the 400 most frequent terms in each country (after eliminating common terms and lemmatization) and determined which concept they represented. Most natural language corpuses follow a power law distribution (Zipf's Law), which means that the top 400 terms capture a large portion of the total corpus. Table 4 shows the occurrence matrix, at the concept level. If a specific sustainability concept was part of the public agenda, here defined as the 400 most frequent terms associated with sustainability in a country, then that concept is represented with a "1" in Table 4.

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Substantive similarities and differences

Immediately transparent is the relatively high consensus around a small set of sub-categories -- the environment, business and markets, government, people, global, energy, climate change, and reduce are closely associated with sustainability in most (though not all) countries. These ideas represent a global agenda and widely shared consensus about the centrality of these concepts to sustainability. What Table 4 suggests is that current sustainability discourse is to some extent dominated by energy and climate change concerns regardless of the country. Not surprisingly,

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this discursive agenda is also a central concern of organizations, NGOs, professional associations and scientists in the international and transnational domain that world society scholars identify as agents of global cultural processes (Frank 1997; Meyer et al. 1997). This discursive agenda is also much narrower than the set of concepts evoked in the original 1987 UN report, which supports the view that discourse in news media is more susceptible to agenda setting processes that narrow the focus of debate (McCombs 1997). Specifically, the UN report addressed a broader set of natural resources as issues, and included the local level as part sustainability concerns. These differences can be explained by the desire in international agencies to be comprehensive and accommodate a large array of stakeholders. "Our Common Futures" then simply supplies a comprehensive set of ideas from which more situated discourses can draw. On the other hand, the UN report is narrower in the solutions and responses it prominently considers. For example, the report lacks extensive consideration of technological advances, investments and private contracts. This difference is likely to reflect the participants in drafting the document, which were more likely politicians and scientists than business people.

However, beyond this "global core" of sustainability discourse, countries display significant variance in their discursive agendas. To understand the extent to which countries participate in broader international discourses on sustainability vs. more unique national varieties we examined two patterns: The expansiveness of national conceptions of sustainability beyond the central core, reflected in the total number of concepts associated with sustainability (the column totals in table 4); and their agreement with the statement in the UN report (the percent agreement between the UN and each country column in table 4). Expansiveness can be interpreted as connectedness to wider current agendas, while alignment with the UN report can be interpreted as continued adherence to canonical agendas of the transnational sphere.

The column totals in Table 4 indicate substantial variance in expansiveness. Public discourse is most narrow in the United Kingdom and the United States. Sustainability discourse in the UK focused heavily on the few globally shared ideas discussed above (9 of 30 possible concepts, all 9 of which are shared by at least 4 other countries), with the public discourse in the United States being only slightly extensive (12 of 30 concepts). The USA and UK public discourses did not in 2010 strongly associate with sustainability concepts such as: economic development; a national or local scope; problems beyond energy and climate change; or solutions around conservation, management, goals, contract, projects, or investment. By contrast, public discourse in Germany, Japan and China is more extensive and associates a more diverse repertoire of concepts with sustainability (between 60 and 70% of the aggregate total). This pattern suggests that both countries in our comparison with a market liberal capitalist system have a narrower conceptualization of sustainability than the countries with a coordinated or state directed system. From a VoC perspective, we can explain this pattern with the more robust and diverse participation in the public sphere by corporations, government, and civil society actors and the corresponding complexity of policy agendas. Notably, a primary difference between the market liberal and coordinated market economies is in the solutions that are associated with sustainability: In contrast to British and United States news articles, Japanese and German discourse frequently evokes conservation, goal setting and contractual agreements as solutions to sustainability questions, in line with negotiated coordination agreements that are common in the political economy of this variety of capitalism. Table 5 shows illustrative quotes from the corpus we analyzed. The quotes were generated as concordances, displaying a standard window of worlds (here: 10) around a key term or set of indicator words.

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Table 5 about here

In comparison to the canonical 1987 Brundtland report (UN), contemporary discourse across all countries is less consistently concerned with social issues; the local level; and a set of problems that includes biodiversity, land, air, and nuclear resources. On the other hand, climate change did not feature prominently in the report, yet is today seen as central to sustainability discussions. Climate change research was not as well developed in 1987 and possibly not a central concern in the report for that reason. Of the countries in our comparison set, Kenya's public sustainability agenda is most closely aligned with the Brundtland report (67% category agreement), followed by China (63%) and Japan (60%). The focus of US discourse on sustainability is least similar to the UN versions, a result of its relative narrowness and more idiosyncratic problem and solution categories (e.g., technology, plant resources). The high alignment of Kenyan and official Chinese media coverage of sustainability with the concepts used in the UN report may suggest that developing and post-colonial countries are more attentive to the authority of international organizations and discourses, while countries at the core of the world-system feel less constrained by and pay less attention to the international system and are perhaps more domestically focused (Wallerstein 1974/1980/1989). From a world society perspective, this is a surprising finding, since agendas and the global are assumed to be more closely aligned with the culturally dominant nations. The observed pattern may be interpreted as evidence that world society processes are best characterized as a diffusion from the core rather than a truly encompassing and stable international sphere. Alternatively, it could be interpreted as evidence for countries having equal exposure to global discourses but responding differently due to their power and position in the world polity.

The two market liberal countries are on average more distant from the United Nations document than the two coordinated market economies, though this effect is likely driven simply by the narrower agenda in liberal market economies compared to the comprehensive UN report.

Mapping aggregate country similarities and differences

The relative distance of countries, and the question of whether countries with more similar varieties of capitalism cluster in their discursive focus can also be directly addressed, by statistically analyzing aggregate repertoire similarities. The overall overlap of two countries' concept repertoires can be seen as an expression of their distance in a high-dimensional vector space, where each category represents a dimension and difference between two countries' values on that dimension (here 0 or 1), their distance. A host of methods are available to reduce the dimensionality of this concept space, in our case from 30 to one or two (Manning and Schutze 1999; Mohr 1998). We used a simple measure of overall similarity between pairs of countries, the phi coefficient of Pearson correlations between our vectors of binary variables and converted these pair-wise distances into a country's relative position on a two dimensional plane using non-metric multidimensional scaling. We also used a hierarchical clustering algorithm for binary network data (UCINet 6.4) to map the countries into a tree diagram that represents local proximities. Figures 1 (multi-dimensional scaling) and 2 (cluster analysis) show the output of these analyses.

Figure 1 and 2 here

The figures largely confirm and clarify the descriptive patterns in table 4. The two market liberal countries, the UK and the USA, cluster in figure 2 and are most proximately positioned in figure 1. (Of course, the two countries share additional connections in addition to their economic systems). Kenya and the UN report form a similar pairing, which confirms the impression that as a developing country with a colonial history, the Kenyan public sphere interprets sustainability more strongly based on the ideas produced by transnational organizations and the development NGOs that are active in the country.

However, the results of these more reductionist analyses also suggest that similarities and differences cannot be reduced to one or two simple dimensions. If country differences could be reduced to the two dimensions of capitalist variety, market-liberal vs. coordinated and centralized vs. decentralized, we would expect the axes of the multi-dimensional scaling plot to reflect these dimensions. However, this is not the case. The centralization dimension in particular does not seem to affect the discourse produced. Centralization is not correlated with overall discursive proximity, and while one may reasonably expect that decentralized political economies produce a more extensive and diverse understanding of sustainability, our data does not support this expectation. Two of the more decentralized countries, the USA and Germany, respectively display the most narrow and the most extensive conceptual repertoire around sustainability.

Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of our empirical exploration was to examine how the organization of the political economies of different countries affects the local representation of the idea of sustainability, as an increasingly important understanding of CSR. We contrasted the comparative tradition of the

Varieties of Capitalism school with the world society perspective, extending the limited work in the VoC tradition that integrates material and cultural dimensions in accounting for change and convergence in political economies. We found evidence for both a core global repertoire of concepts around sustainability that is widely shared and anchored in global discursive fields, and extensive country-level variation in the extensiveness and content of the public meaning of sustainability. While some of this variance could be attributed to broad dimensions of capitalist variety, notably market-liberal vs. coordinated economies, much of it seems rooted in more idiosyncratic historical and contemporary domestic processes.

For example, there is no systematic pattern in sustainability discourse that could be attributed to the centralization – decentralization dimension identified by the VoC perspective. By contrast, one might speculate that the relative similarity of public discourse in Kenya and the United Kingdom is the result of the former colonial ties between these countries. Similarly, the relative similarity of public agendas in China with the USA and UK cannot easily be attributed to institutional similarities – China is a state-run system while the USA and UK are both market liberal systems and in the case of the US, also rather decentralized. In these cases, too, similarities may be due to (temporary) attention and aspiration dynamics.

If these explanations were in fact true, one theoretical implication is that standard and fairly static institutional parameters (as used by VoC scholars) are driving convergence and divergence less than historical and cultural connectedness and more short term processes of policy agenda setting. At stake is an answer to a more general question about the relationship between institutional systems and discourses that can be observed at a particular point in time. The direct

link, of institutions fueling the content of discourses, may be less important than the indirect influence, via influence over broader parameters, such breadth, volatility or heterogeneity.

The nuanced picture we found of country level differences and commonalities, and layers of global and national discourses, also supports recent efforts to reconcile the continued existence and sometimes growth of national institutional differences with simultaneous changes that enlarge global spheres and influences (Guillén 2001b; Streek 2010). While traditionally scholars in the VoC tradition saw national forms of capitalism as tightly integrated configurations or systems that are hence difficult to change in a piecemeal way, it may in fact be more fruitful to see national forms of capitalism as sustaining a (limited) repertoire of cultural tools to interpret, absorb and respond to new challenges and changes. The combinatorial flexibility of these capitalist elements then becomes an empirical question, with some elements more strongly institutionalized than others and at least some amount of loose coupling. And rather than conceiving of changes automatically as hybridization between two ideal types, with an implied incompatibility of the underlying logics (Aguilera and Jackson 2002; Pieterse 1995), incremental change can be studied as an expansion of national repertoires.

The differences and commonalities we found in national media discourses about sustainability also have implications for coordination and conflict between private and public actors in a still globalizing world. For example, governments trying to coordinate international responses to global issues such as climate change, security and development, are still strongly influenced by domestic public agendas. As a result, country differences in the representation of sustainability, for example in terms of appropriate problem agendas, solutions or actors responsible for solving

problems, may hinder policy coordination even in the face of selective consensus around a few common themes (Haas 1992; Katzenstein 1977).

At the corporate level, multi-national enterprises that embrace sustainability as a guiding principle for their CSR efforts, may struggle with credibly implementing and communicating their actions across diverse national contexts. The GRI sustainability reporting guidelines provide guidance to these corporations around sustainability disclosures. These guidelines are based in large part on the UN report and have a similar breadth and depth of focus to the UN report. For example, GRI requests disclosures around corporate strategy, economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, and a multi-faceted approach to social sustainability, including labor practices, human rights, society, and product responsibility. This patterns is perhaps not surprising given the GRI's status as an international non-profit consortium and its objective to make scientific recovery more.

Overtime, this framework may guide multi-national corporations to adopt a broader sustainability agenda, aligned with the UN report and enshrined in standard operating procedure rather than active management, and hence less influenced by public discourses. It will be interesting to see if corporations move in this direction with their sustainability agendas and, if so, if that movement influences national public agendas. While emerging global reporting standards like GRI speak to the canon of issues promoted by the global elites involved in transnational discourses, corporate reputations and social evaluations by other stakeholders are still influenced by national public agendas (e.g., Banerjee 2000; Zhang and Luo forthcoming). Understanding this cultural heterogeneity and its embeddedness in the political economy of a country therefore remains important even with an expansion of the global public sphere.

TABLE 1: COUNTRY INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES*

Dimension	USA	UK	Germany	Japan	China	Kenya
VoC Category	Liberal - decentralized	Liberal - centralized	Coordinated – decentralized	Coordinated – centralized	State-directed mixed	Post-colonial
Population [M]	307.5	61.8	81.9	128.3	1,333.0	39.8
GNP/capita [1000 USD]	45.9	35.2	40.6	39.8	3.7	0.7
Human Development Index	0.89	0.85	0.90	0.88	0.66	0.46
Urbanization [% urban pop]	82.0	90.0	73.7	66.6	44.0	21.9
Energy use/capita [kg oil eq.]	7075	3195	3893	3713	1689	463
Political system	Federal two-party presidential, limited welfare	2-3 party parliamentary, medium welfare	Federal multi-party parliamentary, welfare state	Parliamentary, corporatist welfare state	Single party authoritarian, w large state sector	Multi-party presidential, weak state
Legal system	Common, strong rule of law	Common, strong rule of law	Civil, strong rule of law	Civil, strong rule of law	Civil based, weak rule of law	Common, weak rule of law
Economy	Service and innovation oriented	Service and finance oriented	Export and manufacturing oriented	Export and manufacturing oriented	Fast growth, manufacturing, construction led	Agriculture and tourism oriented
Finance and investment	Market centered	Market centered	Bank centered	Corp. centered	State centered	Market reforms
Labor and industrial relations	High skill w low wage sector, weak unions	High skill w low wage sector, craft unions	High skill and productivity, industry unions	High skill and productivity, company unions	Large unskilled labor pool, weak representation	Mostly low skill, underemployment, weak unions
Industrial production	Market based	Market based	Mix of corporatist and market	Corporatist system w some liberalization	Mixed model (planned w liberal elements)	Limited industrialization, heavy regulation
Civil society	Weak environmental movement, strong civic culture	Medium environmental movement, strong civic culture	Strong environmental movement, active civic culture	Some environmental activism, civic culture	Low civic culture, movements suppressed, high migration	Tribal ties key, high urban migration, weak movements

* 2009 data; sources: World Development Indicators, CIA Factbook

TABLE 2: DOCUMENT SAMPLE

Country	Newspaper Sample	Number of Articles	Number of hits (sustainab*)
China	China Daily, People's Daily	413	620
Germany	Deutsche Presseagentur, Der Spiegel	351	478
Great Britain	The Guardian, The Times, The Independent	591	986
Japan	The Daily Yomiuri, The Japan Times	96	145
Kenya	The Nation, The East African, Business Daily	101	160
United States	New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post	820	1231
United Nations	Our Common Futures (full report)	1	364

TABLE 3: CONCEPTS FREQUENTLY ASSOCIATED WITH SUSTAINABILITY

Facet	Concept	Examples
Domains	Natural environment	Greening, ecosystem, biological
	Economic development	Development, growth, economy
	Social	Population, health, hunger, food,
Agents	Business	Companies, the market, business
	Government	Government, agencies, officials, int'l organizations
	Science	Universities, scientists, education
	People	The public, the people, humanity
Scope	Global	World, international, global
	National	National, domestic, regional
	Local	Cities, neighborhood, backyard
Problems	Energy	Power, electricity, energy
	Climate change	Carbon, greenhouse gas, global warming, fossil fuel
	Water	Water, drought
	Population	Population growth, urbanization, refugees
	Waste	Recycling, waste disposal, landfill
	Plants	Forests, plant life
	Nuclear	Nuclear, atomic
	Air	Air pollution, smog, ozone
	Land	Land use, cultivation, soil depletion, erosion
	Biodiversity	Biodiversity, extinction
	Infrastructure	Buildings, construction, transport
Solutions	Reduce	Cut, reduce, eliminate
	Conserve	Conservation, preserve
	Protect	Protect, safe-guard
	Manage	Management, control, monitor
	Goals	Target, level, objectives
	Contracts	Treaty, pact, protocol, cooperation
	Projects	Program, project, initiative, campaign, scheme
	Investment	Invest, spend
	Technology	Innovation, technology

TABLE 4: OCCURRENCE MATRIX OF SUSTAINABILITY CONCEPTS ACROSS COUNTRIES

Concepts	Total	USA	UK	Japan	China	Kenya	Germany	UN
Natural environment	7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Economic development	5			1	1	1	1	1
Social	4		1			1	1	1
Business and markets	7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Government	6	1		1	1	1	1	1
Science	5	1		1	1		1	1
People	5	1	1	1	1			1
Global	7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
National	5			1	1	1	1	1
Local	1							1
Energy	7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Climate change	6	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Water	5		1		1	1	1	1
Population	3				1	1		1
Waste	3				1		1	1
Plants	3	1					1	1
Nuclear	2			1				1
Air	2				1			1
Land	2					1		1
Biodiversity	2			1				1
Infrastructure	1				1		1	
Reduce	6	1	1	1	1		1	1
Conserve	4			1		1	1	1
Protect	4	1		1	1		1	
Projects	4			1	1	1		1
Manage	3					1	1	1
Goals	2			1			1	
Contracts	2			1			1	
Investment	2				1		1	
Technology	1	1						
Total		**12**	**9**	**18**	**19**	**16**	**21**	**22**

TABLE 5: ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES FROM THE ANALYZED NEWS SOURCES

Country	Text Illustrations		
United Nations	a profound effect upon the ability of all peoples to	*sustain*	human progress for generations to come
	Environmental protection is thus inherent in the concept of	*sustainable*	development as is a focus on the sources of environmental
	Hence the very logic of	*sustainable*	development implies an internal stimulus to Third World growth
	However a nation proceeds towards the goals of	*sustainable*	development and lower fertility levels, the two are intimately
	survival and well-being could depend on success in elevating	*sustainable*	development to a global ethic
	support activities that are economically and ecologically	*sustainable*	both in the short and longer terms.
	biological diversity and shall observe the principle of optimum	*sustainable*	yield in the use of living natural resources and ecosystems
United States	Q: Let's talk about sustainability. A:	*Sustainability*	isn't just a reference to new technology it's a rebirth
	home to a research institute focused on renewable energy and	*sustainability*	and eventually if all goes as planned to various clean-technology
	redeveloped into 28 rental apartments. Both projects are stressing	*sustainability*	by using solar power geothermal systems and recycled materials
	authorized to speak publicly on the issue. But from a	*sustainability*	perspective nuclear power makes little sense said
	The three pillars of the convention are conservation	*sustainable*	development and fair use of resources. But the argument
	plant life and legions of residents obsessed with local and	*sustainable*	food Even better it happens to be one of the
United Kingdom	need to reduce our consumption but for most people this	*sustainability*	revolution would surely have to be applied across the board
	today's postgraduates are increasingly likely to encounter	*sustainability-*	related courses during their MBA studies
	insurance companies but admits that many are offsetting their	*sustainable*	investments against large holdings in traditional companies
	rapidly increase carbon emissions and erode the environmental	*sustainability*	of biofuels In other words as the percentage of biofuel
	comfort food And yet as our interest in animal welfare	*sustainability*	and healthy eating has grown we've become increasingly
	demands of short-term shareholders and lead from the front on	*sustainability*	and climate change He told a session at Davos that
Germany	Millennium Development Goals MDGs improving the quality and	*sustainability*	of macroeconomic growth and helping to reduce carbon
	a long-term goal so that we could ensure the	*sustainability*	of fishing That would also enable future generations to eat
	is needed to deliver on EU policy goals of competitiveness	*sustainability*	and security of supply an accompanying statement said
	contribute to global warming. By promoting the conservation and	*sustainable*	management of forests we can not only mitigate climate impacts
	significantly lighter than conventional cars and in terms of	*sustainability*	will set a new standard across the entire value-added chain
	We will strengthen multilateral cooperation to promote external	*sustainability*	and pursue the full range of policies conducive to reducing
Japan	government bodies NGOs and businesses passed information on the	*sustainable*	use of forests protecting endangered species in Japan like the
	need to strengthen multilateral cooperation to promote external	*sustainability*	and pursue policies to reduce excessive imbalances
	Kyoto Report which focuses on efforts to secure strong	*sustainable*	and balanced growth in the region
	and supporting biodiversity is an important ingredient of	*sustainable*	economic development. A few SOS grants already have been
	information about each country's carbon dioxide emissions and self	*sustainability*	Minoru Senda a professor emeritus of the International Research
	the efforts being undertaken internationally establish a	*sustainable*	social security system capable of coping with the aging of
China	aid framework that pledges better efforts in meeting environmental	*sustainability*	social justice and boosting the country's standing in the
	We are committed to leadership in	*sustainability*	The aspiration is to harmonize economic ecologic and social
	Ernst Young has made investments in clean technology and	*sustainability*	services in India China the Middle East and Brazil

	developing economies have made growth and environmental	*sustainability*	should and can go hand-in-hand
	have been actively and continuously involved in local CSR or	*sustainability*	projects since the very beginning
	range of its green technologies and cooperative projects for China's	*sustainable*	Development. These include achieving world-class EHS
Kenya	pragmatic and makes land a valued resource in terms of	*sustainability*	productivity and efficient use of the said resource
	temperature and drought undermines people's ability to live	*sustainably*	on land they have farmed all their lives or to
	He said governments cannot talk of	*sustainable*	development when the magnitude of the population inadequately
	is unlikely that Kenya will meet the MDG on environmental	*sustainability*	water access to all by 2015 despite government's efforts to
	attractive to investors so that they can put money into	*sustainable*	charcoal production while promoting conservation and
	On renewable natural resources the bank will ensure the	*sustainability*	of agricultural infrastructure investments in the face of climate

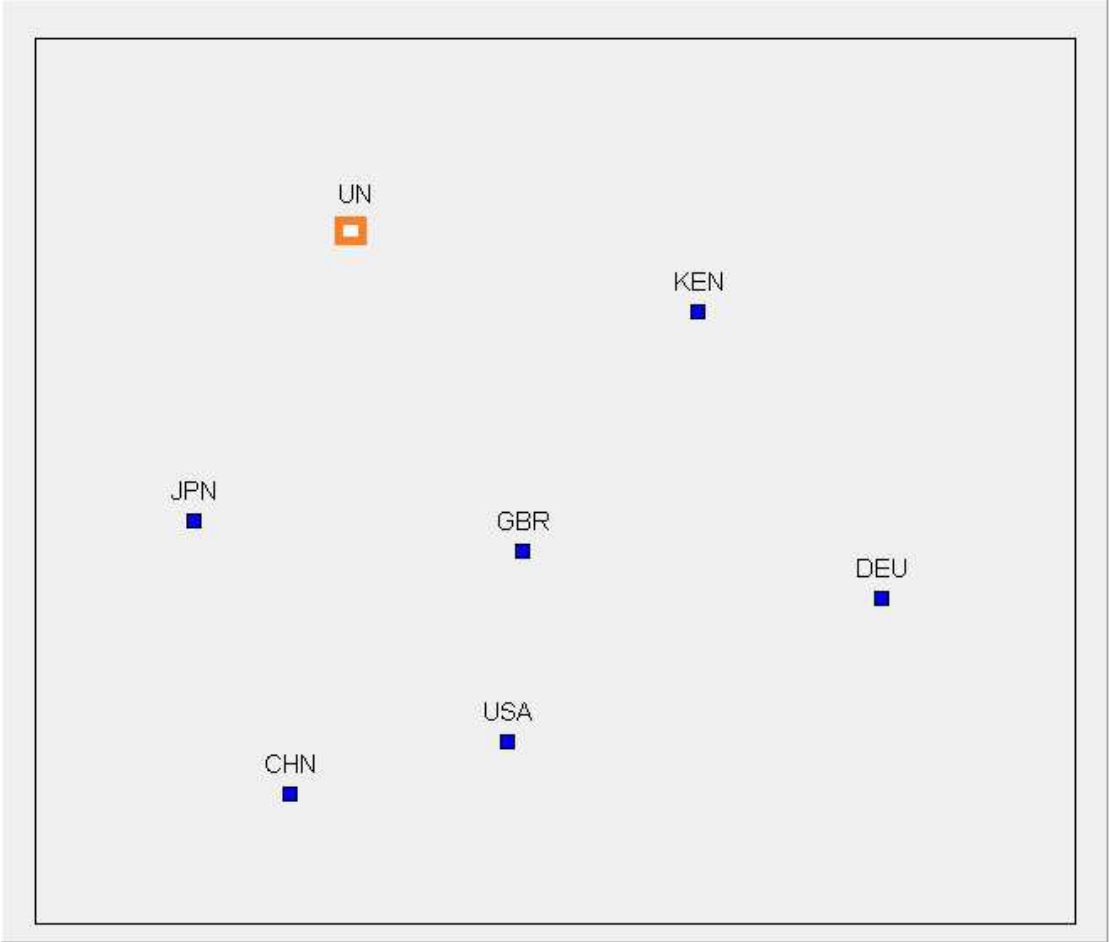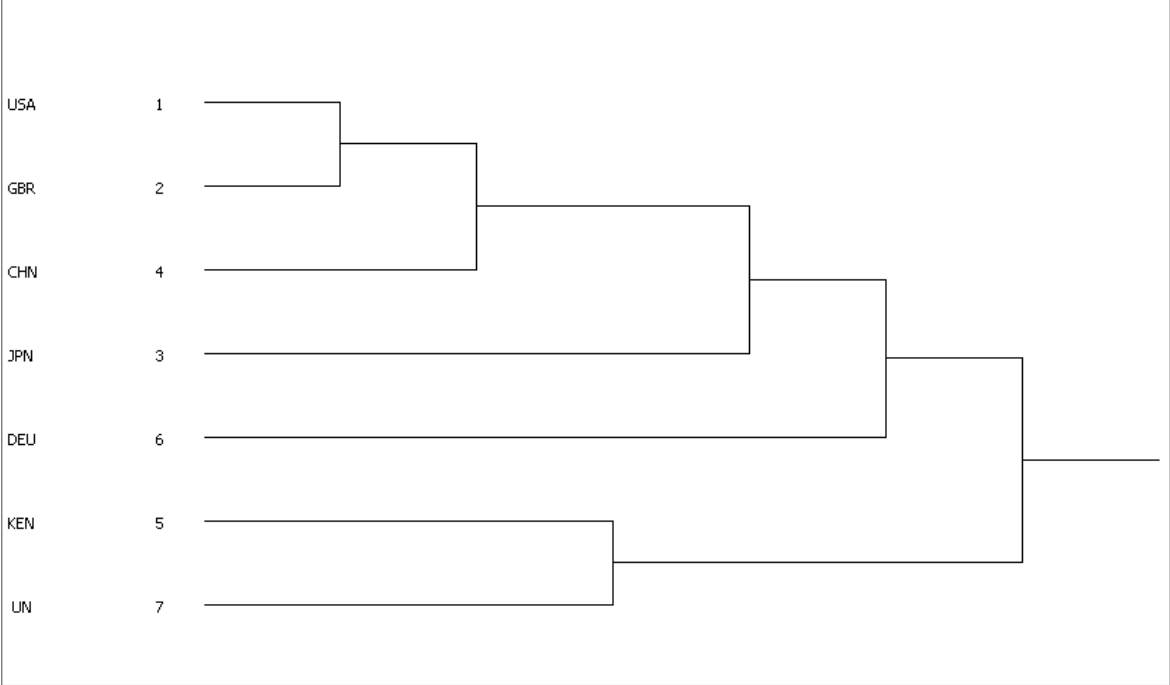FIGURE 1: NON-METRIC MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCALING OF COUNTRY DISTANCES

FIGURE 2: TREE DIAGRAM OF COUNTRY CLUSTERING

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