

2012

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Noga, J. "An Analysis of the Rio + 20 Discourse Using an Ability Expectation Lens". 7th Annual Students' Union Undergraduate Research Symposium, November 29, 2012. University of Calgary, Calgary, AB.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1880/49335>

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We acknowledge the support of the Wolf-Pack

An Analysis of the Rio +20 Discourse Using an Ability Expectation Lens

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Introduction

- The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20) aimed to create solutions to current global environmental issues
- The Rio +20 discourse is the discussion amongst academic and non-academic parties regarding the conference
- Ableism: the sentiment that certain abilities are perceived as essential; within a discourse certain abilities can be portrayed as necessary while others are discussed in less critical, or even in negative terms

Purpose

- Identify abilities portrayed as essential in the Rio +20 discourse
- Analyze ability expectation impact
- Reveal
 - discrimination and marginalization of certain groups
 - Implications for achieving sustainable development

Methods

- Data collection from November 2011– August 2012;
- Academic documents from EBSCO–All; JSTOR; SCOPUS; Web of Science; Web of Knowledge; Geos and Google Scholar; non-academic sources from Canadian Newsstand online database, Google and IISD.ca newsfeeds;
- Articles chosen using Knowledge Share ver. 2.1.3 (KSv2), developed by Dean Yergens (<http://people.ucalgary.ca/~dyergens/ksv2.htm>);
- 250 relevant articles found;
- Using Adobe Acrobat, a code hit count was generated;
- Atlas.ti 6.27 was used for in-depth coding and thematic analysis

Results:

Stakeholders visible: Business & Industry, Children & Youth, Farmers, Indigenous People/group/, community/population, Local Authorities, NGOs, Scientific & Technological Community, Women, Workers & Trade Unions

Stakeholders not visible: disabled people, those living under colonial rule, first nations, those living in a dictatorship

The following abilities are portrayed as essential in the Rio +20 discourse





Ability	Example	Implication
Accessibility	Access to basic human needs	Inclusion of all groups and stakeholders in sustainable development
The ability to hold someone or something accountable	“transparency and accountability”	Transparent actions Corporate and government responsibility
The ability to work together	 <small>http://www.dreamstime.com/stock-photograph-teamwork-still-image-image12231352-124188486-534</small>	Holistic development <u>Not discussed:</u> various stakeholder groups
The ability to produce and consume	“changing patterns of production and consumption so that they are less environmentally damaging and less carbon-intensive.” (1)	Mitigate overconsumption <u>Not discussed:</u> who is currently producing unsustainably, who is not receiving enough
The ability to learn and be educated	Sharing lessons learned Learning new skills Education on sustainable development	Those with skills related to sustainable development will be in high demand <u>Not discussed:</u> access to education
The ability to work/be employed	 <small>http://www.clipartof.com/clipart/leoblanchette/illustration/sketches-design-mascot-man-running-late-for-work-over-a-crack-both-a-stock-39023.html#download-options</small>	Working is critical <u>Not discussed:</u> contributions outside the labour force Discrimination of the unemployed
The ability to control and lead	Desire for improved management of sustainable development  <small>http://comerecommended.com/blog/2012/06/06/3-unique-leadership-styles-and-when-to-use-them/</small>	Restructuring of governments Leaders who are educated and financially stable
The ability to provide monetary support	“The key to this is financing” (2)	If financing can be achieved, sustainable development will be enhanced
The ability to create and innovate	 <small>http://www.istockphoto.com</small>	New technology and methods increases ability for holistic sustainable development

Table 1. Hit Count of Codes (documents; hits)

	Knowledge Share (101 docs)	Google Scholar (72 docs)	Google (41 docs)	Canadian Newsstand (44 docs)	New York Times (16 docs)
Account	Account 46; 146	36; 233	15; 72	41; 44	15; 51
Access	Access 50; 91	40; 274	17; 70	1; 1	7; 7
“Create and Innovate”	Create 46; 183	39; 209	12; 43	6; 9	7; 11
	Innovate 0	3; 11	0	0	0
“Consumerism”	Invent 12; 22	12; 18	0	2; 2	0
	Consum* 40; 320	27; 393	13; 100	7; 18	2; 4
“Work Together”	Produc* 28; 333	56; 866	18; 116	16; 25	12; 33
	Collaborat* 29; 77	21; 51	9; 16	0	1; 1
“Control”	Cooperat* 41; 254	21; 162	13; 53	3; 3	3; 4
	Dialogue 19; 60	20; 69	12; 27	1; 1	1; 1
	Communi cat* 27; 96	18; 51	6; 15	2; 2	0
“Monetary Support”	Control 29; 115	23; 136	6; 11	5; 5	5; 5
	Manage 36; 221	52; 505	28; 108	9; 13	4; 15
	Govern 32; 987	61; 1673	21; 260	35; 79	11; 44
“Leadership”	Fund 41; 254	40; 466	12; 57	3; 5	5; 6
	Finance 21; 46	22; 245	13; 37	3; 3	3; 3
“Education”	Leader* 44; 146	34; 137	25; 46	24; 58	9; 3
	Educate 3; 9	2; 10	2; 2	0	0
“Employment”	Learn 30; 122	29; 86	22; 46	2; 2	2; 2
	Employ* 13; 68	21; 187	7; 13	1; 1	2; 2
	Job 20; 42	16; 156	12; 41	7; 18	1; 1
	Labour 11; 23	14; 105	17; 23	1; 1	0

Conclusion

- Currently, discourse excludes various stakeholders;
- Various abilities are visible within the Rio+20 discourse
- The ability to control and lead are seen as essential, yet not every group is envisioned to control and lead. Indeed societal realities make it nearly impossible for many stakeholder groups to lead and control; this may lead to marginalization of these groups
- The ability to work and be educated are portrayed as essential. This may lead to discrimination of those without the ability to learn or work
- The discussion excludes details which may lead to less efficient sustainable development:
- Knowing who is continuing to act unsustainably will help when holding groups and individuals accountable
- Education is critical for sustainable development, therefore improved access is crucial
- Financing and innovations are discussed as essential for sustainable development; these tools may enhance the efficiency of development

References
 (1) McMeekin A, Rothman H. Innovation, consumption and environmental sustainability. Technology Analysis & Strategic Management. 2012;24(4):327–30.
 (2) Jacobs M. Climate policy: deadline 2015. Nature. 2012;481(7380):137–8.